

Breaking Hagiographical Silence on Sufi Women in Medieval South Asia

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Abstract

Majority of the academic writings on sufis and Sufism have been restricted to hagiographical accounts of the male Sufis. A careful insight into these writings suggest that often moral standards or virtues are denoted through male and female blocks. Nonetheless sufi writings are confined to the achievements and merits of male sufis and their female counterparts remain an addendum to the original scripts. Therefore, information about sufi women and their contributions are either portrayed as peripheral quotes in the detailed stories of male sufis or described in terms of embodying male piety or female depravity. Hence, in both cases, the presence of sufi women as a distinct group is undermined and it establishes an assumed silence on the presence as well as contributions of sufi women in Sufi literature/ sufi world. However, the silence on women participation in Sufism in the Middle East, is broken with the discovery of a medieval text, Dhikr al-niswa al-muta'bbidat al-sufiyyat composed by Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 1021) in the tenth century and was edited and translated from Arabic to English by Rkia Cornell in 1999. Any similar kind of manuscript has not been discovered in medieval South Asia so far which could break the 'assumed silence' on the presence of sufi women in medieval South Asia. In this regard, present study is an attempt to provide sufi women of South Asia a pivotal place in the historical knowledge as well as to re-establish their long-lost status in the ever-growing fabric of Sufism around the world. In the present study, silence on sufi women in South Asian context is dealt with carefully studying the historiographical as well as sufi literature of medieval times. These sources establish silence on the roles played by sufi women in medieval South Asian society whereas this article considers various genres of sufi literature to break the silence on the existence of sufi women. It also sheds light on biographical accounts of various sufi women from medieval South Asia as their names are hardly known to the world. This article attempts to breaks the silence on sufi women by providing names as well as biographical accounts for more than fifteen sufi women from the early tenth century to the start of fifteenth century.

Keywords

Sufi women, Sufism, Medieval South Asia, Hagiographical Silence, Malfuz, Tadhkirah, Sufi Literature.

Introduction

From the very beginning of this world, both men and women have been struggling with the forces of right and wrong. Along with trying their ways out to reconnect to the Divine. The struggle has equally served the purpose for both the genders to revisit their connection with the source of Being.¹ Apparently, everything seems to have a dual nature but in the eyes of the Beloved, men and women have the same admiration except for those who dive in the ocean of unity with God. Nevertheless, Sufism has always held a real appeal for women as it encourages more female involvement than any other branch of religion.² This involvement has been considered at two levels; the first where women participate in their human form (including all the activities where they are known to be less in capacity than their male counterparts³ and the second aspect where women have been imagined and looked upon as ideals of virtue and Divine compassion.⁴ The sufi women in the early phase of Islam have so beautifully merged these two aspects of their faith that they have become symbols of Divine Beauty and servitude. The early sufi women are said to have numerous mystical characteristics such as abstinence (zuhd), servitude (ubudiyya) and personal acts of piety like night supplications and rounds of fasting.⁵ Later sufi women adopted the path set by the sufi women, which not only gave them a sound direction but also gave them gift of barakah (blessings) and karamat (miracles).⁶ A satisfying number of sources are present which provide information about the sufi women living their lives in the second half of the seventh century. These sources may not supply a detailed study on many sufi women but at least they bring their names to the mainstream sufi studies, thus challenging the ‘silencing’ theme and thereby changing the complete discourse. The biographies of the sufis and the scholars of Islam such as *Tadhkirah al-awliya*⁷ (Memoirs of the Sufis) and *Nafahat al-uns*⁸ (The Lives of the Sufis) have provided significant information about the sufi women. An excellent work discovered recently has change the course of learning Sufism is *Dhikr al-niswa al-mutabidat* by Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 1021). This work includes accounts on almost eighty sufi women, providing a fresh

¹ Camile Adams Helminiski, *Women of Sufism: A Hidden Treasure* (Boston & London: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2003), 15.

² Jean Louis Michon and Roger Gaetani, *Sufism: Love and Wisdom* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006), 131.

³ Al-Quran, 2:288.

⁴ Jamal J. Elias, “Women and Feminine in Islamic Mysticism,” *The Muslim World*, Vol.78, No.3-4 (1988), 209.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Farid al-Din Attar, *Tadhkirat al-Awliya*, English trans., A.J. Arberry (Ames: Omphaloskepsis, 2000). This excellent work composed by Faridudin Attar, a thirteen century mystical poet and theologian.

⁸ Nur al-Din Abd al-Rahman Jami, *Nafahat al-uns*, translated by Sayyid Ahmad Ali Chishti Nizami (Lahore: Shabbir Brothers, 2002). Nur ad-Din Abd al-Rahman Jami (d. 1492), a Persian poet and a scholar of mystical literature gives accounts of a number of sufi women including Shawana, Hafsa bint Sirin, Rabia al-Adawaiyya, Ghufayra al-Aabida, Fatima of Nishapur, Umm Ali, and the list goes on.

study on pious and virtuous ladies living their lives before and after Rabia al-Adawiyya.⁹ The same wave of sufi women entered in India when the said region got illuminated with the light of Islam. Therefore, it is pertinent to investigate the role and presence of sufi women in the predominantly patriarchal setup of medieval South Asia. The cultural restrictions of the said region also shaped the modes of contextualizing things. However, Sufism and its teaching found its audience as soon as the teachings of Islam got disseminated in India. The Chishti Silsilah became popularized in no time and a lot of people became familiar with the ideals of Sufism.¹⁰ Therefore, the sufi women of this earlier phase had associations with Chishti as well as Suhrawardi Silsilahs.

The present paper is divided into two sections: first section suggests ‘breaking’ of the assumed silence on sufi women in medieval South Asia by contemplating this ‘silence’ with cultural norms it attempts to break the silence on sufi women with the help of a number of tadhkirah sources that provide evidence of their presence in South Asia in the mentioned era. The second section provides brief life sketches of these sufi women, through whom we may break the silence.

Understanding the ‘Breaking Silence’ on Sufi Women

Like any other phenomenon in history, there must be some reasons behind ‘silencing’ female presence in Sufism. Also, there must be some reasons behind keeping only little information on them in sufi literature. Both of the said queries find a similar answer, i.e., cultural constrains. In Indian context these cultural constrains can be understood with reference to the patriarchal setup of the society in which, traditionally, female members of a family are associated with the honour or respect of their male counterparts. Therefore, in many parts of medieval Indian society, it was considered derogatory to call a lady by her first name. Thus, they were generally called by the names of men associated with them either by blood or marriage, i.e., as someone’s daughter, sister, wife, daughter-in-law, mother-in-law or grandmother. This tradition has made women generally deprived of an individual identity. Therefore, historiographical as well as sufi writings in India reflect the cultural norms, where a woman was either mentioned anonymously or by the name of the male member of her family. nevertheless, few of the sufi tadhkirah writers mention several sufi women by their first name, in order to revere their piety and spiritual accomplishments. Among these works, *Siyar al-awliya*, *Siyar al-arifin*, *Safinat al-awliya*, *Sakinat al-awliya*, *Hadiqat al-awliya*, *akhbar al-akhyar*, *gulzar-i abrar* and others provide information about the lives of sufi women of India. Although information is not enough as these sources dedicate a page or two to the sufi women which is like a raindrop in comparison with the space given to their male counterparts. However, this is enough in order to get a fair idea about sufi women of medieval South Asia as it is said that in order to end the darkest hour, a ray of light would be enough. In this

⁹ Here, the name of Rabia Basri has been used as a parameter because numerous amounts of works have been written on her life and her saying on the sufi Path but hardly any other sufi woman has been known so frequently to people that it is the common perception that there is no other women sufi except her. But the above mentioned sources prove that Rabia was not the only sufi in Islam.

¹⁰ Bruce B. Lawrence *Notes from a Distant Flute: Sufi Literature in Pre-Mughal India* (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1978), 20.

way, these sources serve as a ray of light in shunning the darkness, held around them by the ‘veiling’ or ‘silencing’ tradition of Indian culture.

Understanding ‘mention’ of sufi women in Sufi Literature

The tadhkiah sources do not only say much about people, their culture and religion, but also provide a vivid picture of intellectual milieu of a society.¹¹ In India, the hagiographical content was produced in multitude to an extent that it surpassed of what was being generated in Iran and Central Asian region despite having Persian as first language in majority of the states. Therefore, an idea about rich ‘insider’s viewpoint’ can be taken from sufi literature as these writings are either composed by the sufi Shaykh himself or by one of his trusted disciples. Although these accounts mainly provide information on the lives of male sufis yet, some of them indicate presence of sufi women either by giving a short note on their lives or by a passing reference.

Malfuzat –a collection of discussions and teachings of sufi masters collected and organized by their disciples presents a male-dominated picture of South Asian Sufism as only a few provide mentions of sufi women. Among these are: *Asrar al-awliya*¹²- is a collection of the discussions of Khwaja Farid al-Din Masud Ganj-i-Shakar as compiled by his eminent disciple and son-in law, Badr al-Din Ishaq (d. 1271). It consists of twenty-two chapters in which Khwaja addresses the subject matter of Sufism in a detailed manner. It mentions Bibi Qarsum, mother of Baba Farid. This source is valuable as it provides details about Bibi Qarsum’s life. *Khair al-majalis*¹³ is a collection of discussions and gatherings of Shaykh Nasir al-Din Chiragh Dehalvi (d. 1356). compiled/composed by Hamid Qalandar (d. 1366). It provides mentions of a sufi woman of Delhi, Bibi Fatima. *Fawaid al-fu’ad*¹⁴ is a collection of the majalis of Shaykh Nizam al-Din Awliya as collected and presented by his disciple, Khwaja Amir Hassan Ala’ Sijzi (d. 1337). *Fawaid al-fu’ad* has been considered as a classic literary work of its time as it provides information not only for spiritual or religious front only, but also educates its readers about the cultures of earlier times. The Shaykh suggests his disciples to mention pious and virtuous women first while making supplications as they are less in number. He also mentions the sayings of Baba Farid regarding

¹¹ Adeela Ghazanfar, “Silencing of Women in Chishti Hagiographical Tradition in South Asia: A Study of *Siyar al-awliya*,” *Journal of Asian Civilizations*, Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations (TIAC), Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Vol.40, No.1(July 2017), 145.

¹² Badr al-Din Ishaq, *Asrar al-awliya: Malfuzat of Khwaja Farid al-Din Masud Ganj-i-Shakar*, Urdu trans. Shakil Mustafa Sabri (Lahore: Shabir Brothers, 1999).

¹³ Hamid Qalandar, *Khair al-majalis: Malfuzat of Shaykh Nasir al-Din Chiragh Dehalvi*, Urdu trans. K.A. Nizami (Aligarh: Aligarh Muslim University, 1959).

¹⁴ Amir Hassan Ala Sijzi, *Fawaid al-fu’ad: Malfuzat of Khwaja Nizam al-Din Awliya*, Urdu trans. Khwaja HassanThani Nizami (Delhi: Urdu Academy, 1990). For a detailed commentary on *Fawaid al-fu’ad*, see Muhammad Aslam, *Malfuzati Adab ki Tarikhi Ahammiyat* (Lahore: Idara-i-Tahqiqat-i-Pakistan, 1995),17-47.

Bibi Fatima of Andarpat.¹⁵ *Durr-i-nizami*¹⁶ is the compilation of lectures of Shaykh Nizam al-Din Awliya. It is composed by one of his disciples, Ali Mahmud bin Jandar. The *malzuf* starts with a short biography of Shaykh Nizam al-Din Awliya in which Ali Mahmud bin Jandar discusses various phases of the Shaykh's life and mentions the role of his mother, Saiyyida Zuleikha¹⁷ in making him walk straight on the path of Knowing the Beloved.

Tadhkirah writings hagiography refers to a biographical anthology of various sufis. In addition to remembering/commemorating the life events of the sufis, *tadhkirahs* literature can also be designated as a conscious effort in order to recollect cultural as well as intellectual nuances of a particular time frame.¹⁸ *Siyar al-Awliya Dar Ahwal Wa Malfuzat-i-Mashayikh-i-Chisht*¹⁹, composed in 1350 by one of the disciples of Shaykh Nizam al-Din Awliya, Amir Khurd.²⁰ Among the mentioned ladies are: Bibi Qarsum (mother of Baba Farid), Bibi Zuleikha (mother of Khwaja Nizam al-Din Awliya), Bibi Raasti (wife of Shaykh Sadr al-Din Arif and mother of Shaykh Rukn al-Din Abul Fath), Bibi Masturah (daughter of Baba Farid), Bibi Sharfia (daughter of Baba Farid), Bibi Fatima (daughter of Baba Farid) and Bibi Fatima Sām. *Siyar al-arifin*²¹ is another hagiographical account which discloses life events of many eminent sufis. It is composed by Hamid Jamali in 1530.²² Apart from narrating anecdotes from their early lives, Jamali puts light on the invaluable services rendered by the mothers of many sufis such as it discusses the role played by the mothers of Khwaja Bakhtiyar Kaki, Baba Farid, Khwaja Nizam al-Din Awliya, Shaykh Yahya Manerī, and Shaykh Nasir al-Din Chirāgh Dehalvī yet mentions Bibi Asmat (wife of Khwaja Mu'in al-Din), and mentions Bibi Raasti, Bibi Jamal Khatun and Bibi Fatima Sam with proper name. *Akhbar al-akhyār*²³ by Shaykh Abdul Haq Muhaddith Dehalvi²⁴ starts with a

¹⁵ Ibid., 184, 538-540.

¹⁶ Ali Mahmud bin Jandar, *Durr-i-nizami: Malfuzat of Shaykh Nizam al-Din Awliya*, Urdu trans. Saiyyid Muhammad Yasin Ali Nizami (Lahore: Ghulam Mustafa Press, 2012).

¹⁷ Ibid., 5, 7-8.

¹⁸ Ghazanfar, "Silencing of Women in Chishti Hagiographical Tradition in South Asia", 141.

¹⁹ Amir Khurd, *Siyar al-awliya Dar Ahwal Wa Malfuzat-i-Mashayikh—i-Chisht*, Urdu tr. Ejaz al-Haqq Quddusi (Lahore: Urdu Science Board, 2004).

²⁰ Saiyyid Muhammad Mubarak Alawi Kirmani (d. 1368-69) commonly known as Amir Khurd was born in Delhi and later initiated under Shaykh Nizam al-Din Awliya.

²¹ Hamid bin Fazalullah Jamali, *Siyar al-arifin*, Urdu tr., Muhammad Ayub Qadri (Lahore: Markazi Urdu Board, 1976).

²² Hamid bin Fazal Allah Jamal al-Din Jamali Kanboh (d. 1536) was an Indian *tadhkirah* writer, poet and belonged to Suhrawardi *silsilah* from Delhi. He is best known for his multi-lineage biographical accounts of the sufis i.e. *Siyar al-arifin*. For more see, John Renard, *The A to Z of Sufism* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press Inc., 2009), 128.

²³ Shaykh Abdul Haq Muhaddith Dehalvi, *Akhbar al-Akhyar* Urdu tr., Maulana Subhan Mahmud and Maulana Muhammad Fazil (Lahore: Muhammad Akbar Attari Qadri, 2004).

²⁴ Shaykh Abdul Haq Muhaddith Dehalvi (d. 1642), a Sufi and contemporary of Mujaddad Alif Thani was born in Delhi during the reign of Sher Shah Suri (r. 1538-1545) and got his early training in Quran recitation from his father and thereby studied esoteric and exoteric subjects till the age of 18. He later moved to Makkah in order to avoid Emperor Akbar's incentives for getting involved in his renovated religion, *Din-i-Ilahi*. He got initiated by Saiyyid Musa Gilani, a renowned master of Qadri *Silsilah*.

comprehensive outline of Shaykh Abdul Qadir Jilani's²⁵ life and many Chishti sufis yet the concluding section provides stories about many sufi women such as Bibi Sara, Bibi Fatima Sām, Bibi Zuleikha, Bibi Awliyā and give details about the mother of Baba Farid without mentioning her name. Hadiqat al-Awliya²⁶ (The Garden of the Friends of Allah) by Mufti Ghulam Sarwar Lahori is another important hagiographical work as it provides life histories of sufis from various sufi silsilahs. Moreover, it enlists many majzub (intoxicated), sufi women and a number of spiritual leaders of Punjab.

Following are some renowned Sufi women of India during pre-Mughal times.

1. Bibiyan Pak Daman or the chaste ladies refers to a sacred place in Lahore. There are multiple legends attached to the identity of the six ladies buried inside the shrine. Out of these, the most popular and the strongest claim goes with the belief that Bibi Ruqaiyya bint Ali (R.A.) is buried in one of the six graves inside the compound.²⁷ The story identifies Bibi Ruqaiyya as Bibi Haj whereas the other five ladies as Bibi Hur, Bibi Nur, Bibi Taj, Bibi Gawhar, Bibi Shahbaz are considered as the daughters of Hazrat Ali's brother, Hazrat Aqil bin Abu Talib. The names of these ladies are of Persian origin as with the spread of Islam in many parts of the world including Persia, many royal ladies came into the marriage with Ali and his family members.²⁸ These ladies came to India on the orders of Hazrat Imam Hussain (R.A.) one night before the deadly episode of Karbala in 680-81 AD and they reached Lahore where they started their mission of preaching and spreading God's message to the locals²⁹. The Hindu ruler sent his son in order to vacate the place but these ladies refused to move out. The prince asked for companionship and upon that, Bibi Taj looked at him with a certain impression that he could not maintain his conscience and fell on the ground. On returning to his senses, he felt grieved for his behaviour and showed his willingness for accepting Islam. For a couple of years, the ladies continued their mission peacefully until the locals started questioning their presence in the area and this resulted into an attack on the ladies' place. When the ladies learnt that the attack would disgrace their sanctity; they prayed to God and the ground shielding them by taking them into its protection but a piece of their clothing left outside the hole, giving the prince a hope that the ladies went into God's possession. Thus, on the same spot he decided to built seven graves and the place got famous by its current name, i.e. Bibiyan Pak Daman. The seventh grave was for Bibi Tanur, a lady who used to cook meals for the chaste ladies. Abdullah, the converted name of the prince dedicated his life in the service of these ladies until his death around 719-20 and the present caretakers of the Bibiyan shrine ecstatically connect

²⁵ Shaykh Abd al-Qadir Jilani (d. 1166) was a Sufi, theologian, philosopher, speaker/orator and ascetic from Jilan, Iran. He is considered as the founder of the Qadri *Silsilah*. He was given the title of *Muhiyyudin* which means the reviver/activator of religion.

²⁶ Mufti Ghulam Sarwar Lahori, *Hadiqat al-awliya* (Lahore: Tasawwuf Foundation, 2000).

²⁷ Noor Zaidi, "A Blessing on Our People: Bibi Pak Daman, Sacred Geography and the Construction of the Nationalized Sacred", *The Muslim World*, Hartford Seminary, Vol.104, No.3-4 (2014),306-311.

²⁸ John A. Subhan, *Sufism, Its Saints and Shrines: An Introduction to the Study of Sufism with Special Reference to India* (Lucknow: Lucknow Publishing House, 1939), 121.

²⁹ Ghulam Dastagir, *Bazurgan-i-Lahore* (Karachi: Maktabul Madina, 1961), 290-292.

their lineage with Abdullah.³⁰ Dara Shikoh, (D//) in *Safinat al-awliya* negates the whole story by arguing that at the time of the Karbala tragedy, there was not a single Muslim in India; then why these ladies would come to India and their names also do not suggest their Arabic origins. He also claims that they are the daughters of Saiyyid Ahmad Tokhta Tirmidhi (d. 1205-6).³¹ His daughters prayed to Allah for their protection against armies of Chengis Khan and Allah blessed them with His security.³²

The above mentioned claims suggest that there might be many claims about the origin or identity of these ladies but there is not a single claim against their piety or sacredness. This is the reason; people still visit their shrine with the belief that their wishes would come true if they ask to Allah in their name. These sisters were unmarried and used to indulge in practices of intense prayers and fasting. It is stated that for many years many prominent Sufis including Saiyyid Ali Hujwari used to visit Bibiyan shrine in order to accomplish certain spiritual goals.³³ The Bibiyan shrine located in the area called Muhammad Garhi Shahu in Lahore and people from all religious communities visit the place without any discrimination.

2. Bibi Maryam Sughra was the mother of Saiyyid Miran Hussain Zanjani (d. 1042) who was a follower of Shaykh Abu'l-Fazal Khatli. Bibi Maryam was appreciated for her eloquence in ways she devoted herself in the service of her Lord.³⁴ Shaykh Miran got much of his awareness of Sufism and piety in his early childhood as both his parents used to absorb their days and nights in asking for God's mercy and yearning for His Love. Her date of demise is not known to the historians.

3. Bibi Fatima was the daughter of Maulana of Hissam al-Din Tirmidhi and was known for her simplicity, honesty and righteous character. She got married to Saiyyid Wajih al-Din and gave birth to one of the celebrated Sufis of India, Shaykh Baha al-Din Zakariyya in 1170 at a place, called Kot Karor.³⁵ It is stated that when her husband used to recite the Holy Quran, Shaykh Baha al-Din would stop feeding and indulge his attention thoroughly towards the recitation.³⁶ Her piety and spiritual demeanor was instrumental in moulding young Baha al-Din into the Shaykh for many future generations. No information regarding her date of birth and death was found.

³⁰ Lahori, *Hadiqat al-Awliya*, 235-237. See also, Hafizullah Khan Manzar, *Hazrat Bibi Pak Damana Lahore: Kaun Hain or Kahan sey Ayin?* (Lahore: n.d), 10-11.

³¹ Shikoh, *Safinat al-Awliya*, 749.

³² *Hadiqat al-Awliya*, 236. See also, Manzar, *Hazrat Bibi Pak Damana Lahore*, 63-64.

³³ SHEMEEM BURNEY ABBAS, *The Female Voice in Sufi Ritual: Devotional Practices of Pakistan and India* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 130.

³⁴ Faqri, *Tadhkirah Awliya-i-Pakistan*, 44.

³⁵ Kot Karor is a place in Ferozpur District of Indian Punjab.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

4. Bibi Sara (d. 638 AH/ 1240-41AD³⁷) was an ascetic and expert of Quran and used to keep herself engaged in praying and servicing her Lord, day and night.³⁸ She was the mother of Shaykh Nizam al-Din Abu al-Muiyyid³⁹ (d. 1273) and she trained her son on spiritual lines the same way as she spent her whole life. She had a share of Divine barakah fixed to her name, that even after her death her Beloved did not disappoint her son when he pleaded God featuring his mother's name.⁴⁰ The incident says that for a long time, the land of Delhi did not have any pleasures of rain and people came running to Shaykh Abu al-Muiyyid to pray for rain; he got on the pulpit and brought out a piece of clothing from his underarm and rose it to heaven while reminiscing her mother's righteous and sacred life as no stranger had ever seen her privately. People rushed towards him overjoyed as Allah accepted his prayer without even letting him complete his prayer.⁴¹ She is buried in Delhi near the mausoleum of Khwaja Qutb al-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki.

5. Bibi Fatima Sam (d. 643 AH/ 1245 AD) was among those few Sufi women in India who were venerated and talked for their piety by male sufis in the sufi circles by their first name. She was a contemporary of Baba Farid and his brother, Shaykh Najib al-Din Mutawakkil used to call her 'sister' and take her suggestions frequently.⁴² It is also noted that whenever he was suffering from starvation, she always got an idea herself and used to send him wheat bread without any prior notice.⁴³ She has been mentioned countlessly (with or without name) in Chishti texts and also in sufi sermons. Baba Farid used to grade her prayer equal to the prayers of ten kamil (perfect) men and he used to often mention her in his discussions as she was a man in reality who was sent to this world in female cloak.⁴⁴ He also used to direct his disciples to ask for Allah's blessing while mentioning names of virtuous ladies first as they are lesser in number.⁴⁵ His khalifa Shaykh Nizam al-Din Awliya used to get spiritual barakah while praying at her tomb and he used to invest his time in training himself while residing at her tomb.⁴⁶ He used to express his gratitude towards her by saying that when a lion comes out of the jungle; no one asks for its masculinity, the same is

³⁷ The date has been mentioned in Shikoh, *Safinat al-awliya*, 749.

See also, Lahori, *Hadiqat al-awliya*, 237. But Dehalwi, *Akhbar al-akhyar* does not mention her date of demise.

³⁸ Dehalvi, *Akhbar al-akhyar*, 565. See also, Lahori, *Hadiqat al-awliya*, 237-8 and Shikoh, *Safinat al-awliya*, 749.

³⁹ Shaykh Nizam Abu al-Muiyyid (d.1273) was a disciple and *khalifa* of Khwaja Qutb al-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki. He was regarded for his expertise in *fiqh*. He used to draw his energies towards intense sessions of meditation and fasting. Once, during the reign of Sultan Iltutmish, the city of Delhi was barren due to lack of rains; Sultan asked Shaykh for his blessings and by the time Sultan reached his home, Delhi was overflowing with rain water. See, Lahori, *Khazinat al-asfiyai*, Vol.2, 142. See also, Khurd, *Siyar al-awliya*, 502.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Lahori, *Hadiqat al-awliya*, 237.

⁴² Dehalvi, *Akhbar al-akhyar*, 565. We have just mentioned this note in reference 38 without giving complete note.

⁴³ Jamali, *Siyar al-arifin*, 139-40.

⁴⁴ Kashani, *Nafais al-anfas*, 52.

⁴⁵ Khurd, *Siyar al-awliya*, 758.

⁴⁶ Sarwar, *Hadiqat al-awliya*, 238.

true for Adam's offspring as one should incorporate in the acts of piety and steadfastness irrespective of one's gender⁴⁷. Akhbar al-akhyar records that Shaykh used to recall Bibi's sayings regarding excelling in spiritual stations by offering people some bread and water is much higher in comparison to praying hundreds and thousands prayers.⁴⁸ Akhbar al-akhyar also denotes a narration on Bibi Fatima Sam by Shaykh Nasir al-Din Chiragh Dehalvi that after her death, a person saw her in his dream that she was walking very fast and an angel interrupted her by asking her where she was going; she got furious and decided not to unsettle until God Himself would come to see her. Later, she saw Bibi Fatima (R.A.) and Bibi Khadija (R.A.) came to ask her for the matter and soon she heard a voice guiding both the ladies to make the way for Bibi Fatima Sam so that she could meet her Beloved.⁴⁹ It is said that she came to Delhi either from Multan or Ajodhan.⁵⁰ During her early adulthood, she was engaged to a military man but he got killed and Bibi refused to be married by saying that if companionship was written for her then the first commitment would have never ended.⁵¹ In her lifetime, sun had never seen her without a fast and at the time of breaking the fast, she used to give her bread to the needy.⁵² During her last days, she used to fast vigorously. At the time of Iftar(time of breaking fast), her maid-servant wanted her to break her fast with some bread but the thought of dying in a state of not having fast abstained her for not breaking her fast for forty days; until one day she saw a man walking in her yard and it came to light that he was the Death Angel but she asked him for time so that she could perform her salah (prayer) and then she was taken towards her Lord in fragrant piece of clothing.⁵³ After some time someone dreamt of her sitting in pleasant attire and asked for her station and she cheerfully replied that she was residing in the company of Bibi Fatima (R.A.).⁵⁴

She is buried in Andarpat but the author of Akhbar al-akhyar claims that her tomb has become a victim of ruins⁵⁵ and during the Mughal times, no one could reckon the location of Bibi's tomb.⁵⁶ Jaya Kakkar says that the tomb or dargah of Bibi Fatima Sam is located within a housing colony in Kaka Nagar- an area in New Delhi and people make a special effort to visit her grave, thereby making the dargah a less-crowded place as compared to other tombs or shrines and annual celebrations are made during October every year.⁵⁷

⁴⁷ Sijzi, *Fawaid al-fu'ad*, 184.

⁴⁸ Dehalvi, *Akhbar al-akhyar*, 565. See also, Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Hazrat Bibi Fatima Sam* (Delhi: Idara-i Adabiyat Delli, 1986), 12.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Nizami, *Hazrat Bibi Fatima Sam*, 7.

⁵¹ Ibid., 9-10.

⁵² Ibid., 4.

⁵³ Jamali, *Siyar al-arifin*, 140-41.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Dehalvi, *Akhbar al-akhyar*, 568.

⁵⁶ Jaya Kakkar, "Sufism and Women: A Note on Two Sufi women and Their Dargahs at Delhi" in H.R. Saiyyid Zaheer Hussain Jafri, *The Islamic Path: Sufism, Politics and Society in India* (New Dehli: Rainbow Publishers, 2006), 281.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

6. Bibi Qarsum (d. 643AH / 1245-46 AD)⁵⁸ was a gnostic and it is stated that whatever she used to say was bound to happen.⁵⁹ She was the mother of Baba Farid, therefore, she had play a tremendous role in spiritual upright of Baba Farid. He used to narrate many stories regarding her mother's spiritual commands and miracles. *Fawaid al-fu'ad* describes an incident about the sympathetic and compassionate being of Bibi; once at night, she was praying before her Lord and a thief broke into the house and became blind due to Bibi's powerful presence. He started lamenting for not indulging in any unlawful act till death and Bibi prayed for his recovery and resumed her praying rituals. In the morning, he came with his family and promised to be faithful in Allah's service.⁶⁰ When Baba Farid was residing in Ajodhan, he sent his brother Shaykh Najib al-Din Mutawakkil to receive their mother from Hansi but on their way Bibi got thirsty and ordered Shaykh to fetch some water. It took time for Shaykh to come and he saw that Bibi was not there under the tree as where he left her, he came back to Baba Farid and upon listening to that Baba Farid ordered for cooking food and praying enormously. After some years, Shaykh Najib happened to cross the same path and he found some human bones, collected it in a bag assuming to be his mother's but when he opened the bag in front of Baba Farid, the bag came out as empty.⁶¹

7. Bibi Zuleikha (d. 648 AH/ 1250-51 AD)⁶² was an ascetic of her time. She was the mother of Shaykh Nizam al-Din Awliya. Her forefathers got forcibly migrated from Iraq to India under the barbaric session of Mongolian venture⁶³ and this shifted gears in Bibi's life from being affluent to less-privileged⁶⁴. First, they established their lives at Badaun⁶⁵- a place where Shaykh Nizam al-Din studied and his personality was shaped on spiritual lines under the guidance of his mother and scholars particularly. In later times, due to Shaykh Nizam al-Din educational needs, Bibi decided to move to Delhi where many influential scholars trained him and he was awarded with the company of his spiritual master, Baba Farid there.⁶⁶ It was primarily Bibi's spiritual presence in the home that instilled spiritual seeds in young Shaykh's mind and he used to utter, "a son is strongly influenced by the piety of his parents" while discussing Bibi Qarsum's role in Baba Farid's life.⁶⁷ The same goes accurate in Shaykh Nizam's life too.

⁵⁸ The date has been mentioned in Shikoh, *Safinat al-awliya*, 749. See also, Lahori, *Hadiqat al-awliya*, 239.

⁵⁹ Lahori, *Hadiqat al-awliya*, 238.

⁶⁰ Sijzi, *Fawaid al-fu'ad*, 98. The same incident has been recorded in Khurd, *Siyar al-awliya*, 157. See also, Jamali, *Siyar al-arifin*, 185 and Ishaq, *Asrar al-awliya*, 95.

⁶¹ Khurd, *Siyar al-awliya*, 56. See also, Dehalvi, *Akhbar al-akhyar*, 568; Lahori, *Hadiqat al-awliya*, 238-39, Sijzi, *Fawaid al-fu'ad*, 99 and Shikoh, *Safinat al-awliya*, 749.

⁶² The date has been taken from Shikoh, *Safinat al-awliya*, 750. See also, Lahori, *Hadiqat al-awliya*, 239.

⁶³ Kakkar, "Sufism and Women," 282.

⁶⁴ Jandar, *Durr-i-nizami*, 5.

⁶⁵ Badaun (also spelled as Badaon) is a city in Uttar Pradesh near River Ganges and it was reportedly the capital of Delhi Sultanate during the reign of Sultan Iltutmish.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 283.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Shaykh relates that whenever something was about to happen, his mother used to get a prior notice in her dreams which claims her higher spiritual status.⁶⁸ He used to ask Allah's help by taking his mother's name either by visiting her grave or remaining at home.⁶⁹ Siyar al-awliya states that Bibi Zuleikha used to look at her son's feet and say that she was getting an idea of good fortune and name for her son.⁷⁰ But the Shaykh said to her mother that he was not seeing any fortune as she would always anticipate, upon that her mother used to advise him to wait for the moment when she would be no longer in this world. As the Shaykh used to go to her mother's grave and ask for help, her mother used to recite blessings (durud) on the Prophet (SAW) for five hundred times and the matter would come out as solved the way she wanted.⁷¹ The Shaykh used to relish her mother's memories in front of his closed disciples, "when there would be no food in our house, my mother used to say that today we are Allah's guests and this utterance would give me bliss spiritually and I used to wait eagerly to hear these words from her."⁷² Once Sultan Qutb al-Din Mubarak Khilji⁷³ took a firm decision against Shaykh and he visited her mother's grave, prayed and Sultan got killed in the hands of Khusrau Shah⁷⁴. Shaykh Nizam used to keep his head on his mother's feet on first date of every mother; once she said that upon coming month on whom feet would you bow your head and Shaykh understood that she was having her last days, upon hearing that Shaykh started crying and asked on whose abode she was leaving him but she promised to answer in the morning. At dawn, their maid rushed to get Shaykh and he repeated his question to his mother, she said "In Allah's dwelling"⁷⁵ and left the world. Her mausoleum is known as Mai Sahiba where Bibi Zuleikha along with her daughter, located in South Delhi at a place called Adhchini. Her dargah or mausoleum remains crowded with visitors like any other male Sufi of India. Yet this dargah has a distinction of opening to visitors on Wednesday instead of Thursday because Shaykh Nizam used to visit her mother's grave on the mentioned day.⁷⁶

8. Bibi Awliya (d.655Hijri/1257AD)⁷⁷ was a Sufi from Delhi and was known for her asceticism in her locality. She used to practice seclusion in order to worship her Lord for forty days and used to take forty cloves for eating and a water vessel with her.⁷⁸ But when she used to come out of her solitude, some of the cloves were still remaining and that insists on the idea of her to be highly

⁶⁸ Khurd, *Siyar al-awliya*, 236. See also, Dehalwi, *Akhbar al-akhyar*, 568 and Lahori, *Hadiqat al-awliya*, 239.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Khurd, *Siyar al-awliya*, 236.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Dehalwi, *Akhbar al-akhyar*, 569.

⁷³ Qutb al-Din Mubarak Khilji (d. 1320) was the ruler of Delhi and the successor of Khilji dynasty after the death of Alla al-Din Khilji.

⁷⁴ Sultan Nasir al-Din Khusrau Shah (d. 1320) was a ruler and Sultan of Delhi for a very short span of time i.e. from May to September, 1320.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 570.

⁷⁶ Kakkar, "Sufism and Women", 286.

⁷⁷ The date has been taken from Lahori, *Hadiqat al-awliya*, 240. See also, Shikoh, *Safinat al-awliya*, 750.

⁷⁸ Dehalwi, *Akhbar al-akhyar*, 570.

entertained by her Beloved. It is related that Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq⁷⁹ was a devotee of Bibi Awliya.⁸⁰ Akhbar al-akhyār claims that Bibi had many children and each of the girl children was named ‘Awliya’ and her tomb is in Delhi.⁸¹

9. Bibi Raasti (d.695Hijri/1295-96AD)⁸² was a virtuous lady of her time. She was they royal princess of Ferghana but she was different from other royal princesses in her life style as she was highly inclined towards piety. It is said that she had transcended many spiritual stations at the time when her father was searching for a suitable spouse for her princess and he met a number of people for that matter and instead of giving her agreement, she used to console her father’s heart by explaining that such matters are only in Allah’s hands.⁸³ In later times, she was performing her ritual at Ka’bah (as she used to visit Makkah every now and then), she saw a man performing circles around Ka’bah in a state that rays of Allah’s Light were emitting from his body; after completing her service, she asked the man some questions including his name, his homeland and his marital status. Upon her return, she told her father that this person was the son of Shaykh Baha al-Din Zakariyya and her father visited Shaykh in order to arrange marriage between his (Shyakh’s) son Sadr al-Din Arif and the princess, Bibi Raasti.⁸⁴ Hence, she became the daughter-in-law of Shaykh Baha al-Din Zakariyya and the mother of Shaykh Rukn al-Din Abu al-Fateh late. Shaykh Zakariyya used to have special regard for her as she would be the mother of future Shaykh of the Suhrawardi Silsilah.⁸⁵ After birthing her child, she used to recite verses of the Quran to the infant instead of singing lullabies; she inducted her maids to only utter Ism-i-Azam⁸⁶ in front of the child and it was also recorded that the child would stop having milk at the time of Adhan and he would wake up with her mother in later part of the night in order to praise Allah.⁸⁷ In her duties towards her God, she used to indulge in extreme ascetic practices and was habitual of completing a Quran daily; therefore, she was a great influence in her locality that women in magnitude entered the Suhrawardi Silsilah.⁸⁸ Her resting place is outside the Pak gate in Multan and people particularly visit her dargah every Thursday.⁸⁹

10. Bibi Khadija was a woman with an illustrious faith even in times when her husband, Shaykh Hamid al-Din Nagauri was providing a hand to mouth life to her. Shaykh Hamid used to work on

⁷⁹ Muhammad bin Tughlaq (d. 1351) was the Sultan of Delhi between the years 1325 and 1351.

⁸⁰ Lahori, *Hadiqat al-awliya*, 240.

⁸¹ Dehalwi, *Akhbar al-akhyar*, 570.

⁸² The date has been mentioned in Lahori, *Hadiqat al-awliya*, 240. See also, Shikoh, *Safinat al-awliya*, 750.

⁸³ Faqri, *Tadhkirah Awliya-i-Pakistan*, 86.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 87-88.

⁸⁵ Khurd, *Siyar al-arifin*, 199-200.

⁸⁶ *Ism-i-Azam* is known as one of the secret and miraculous names of Allah that He has instructed to His Chosen one only.

⁸⁷ Faqri, *Tadhkirah Awliya-i Pakistan*, 97-98.

⁸⁸ Lahori, *Hadiqat al-awliya*, 240.

⁸⁹ Shikoh, *Safinat al-awliya*, 750.

a small patch of field in the town of Nagaur in Rajputana.⁹⁰ Yet, the exact time of her death is not known but her husband's life provides an idea for her time. She used to spin cotton in order to make clothes for herself and her husband at home. Once, Sultan Iltutmish decided to gift some land to the Shaykh but Bibi reminded her partner to only rely on Allah in the time of distress, considering it derogatory for God-loving people to accept any material benefits from anyone.⁹¹ Upon that, the Shaykh praised her wife for her honesty and passion for leading a Sufi life.

11. Bibi Rani-an exemplary figure of her time, devoted her time in the service of her spiritual master and his khanqah, most significantly for Baba Farid and his deputy Shaykh Nizam al-Din Awliya. She was the wife of Saiyyid Mahmud Kirmani who was an ardent follower of Shaykh as well as a comrade for him, therefore; he used to accommodate him and his family wherever he went.⁹² She was also in charge for the Jama'atkhana-the khanqah or hospice of Baba Farid. She used to take care of the residents and the guilty like a mother with utmost warmth and kindness that it would have consoled the aching hearts.⁹³ There is no information regarding her date of death.

12. Bibi Sharifa was one of the daughters of Baba Farid, known for her piety and sanctity among the Sufi circles of her time. Her dates of birth and death are not known. Baba Farid used to regard her immensely. She was the contemporary of Shaykh Nizam al-Din Awliya. Baba Farid used to utter in state of extreme ecstasy that if it were permissible for him from Allah, he would have nominated his daughter (Bibi Sharifa) for khilafat.⁹⁴ This shows Baba Farid's utmost respect for her daughter, based on her spiritual accomplishments mainly. She got her interest in spiritual training by observing the lives of her father and elder sister, Bibi Masturah.⁹⁵

13. Bibi Lillah Kashmiri (d. 756Hijri/ 1355AD) was a dervish from Srinagar, Kashmir Valley. She was the disciple of Hazrat Bulbul Shah Kashmiri.⁹⁶ When the ruler of Kashmir accepted Islam then she also embraced the new religion in a way that it engulfed everything around her. She got married but her husband was not happy with her as she was much absorbed in her own thoughts for most of the times. There is a story that says, one day she was coming back from the well, carrying a big bucket of water on her head; her husband was following her and ordered her to walk faster by hitting her with an horsewhip, the bucket broke into piece and fell on the ground but the water got freeze on her head and she poured water into the vessel from her head. It is also said that

⁹⁰ A place in India known as the land of Rajputs, primarily in the Indian State of Rajasthan and some parts of Madhya Pradesh.

⁹¹ Jahan, *Depiction of Women in Sources of Delhi Sultanate*, 107.

⁹² *Depiction of Women in the Sources of Delhi Sultanate*, 106.

⁹³ Nizami, *Life and Times of Shaikh Farid u'Din Ganj-i-Shakar*, 47.

⁹⁴ Aijaz al-Haqq Quddusi, *Tadhkirah Sufiya-i-Punjab* (Karachi: Salman Academy, 1962), 489. See also, Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Life and Times of Shaikh Farid u'Din Ganj-i-Shakar* (Delhi: Idara-i-Adabiyat-i-Delhi, 1973), 65 and Jahan, *Depiction of Women in the Sources of Delhi Sultanate*, 100.

⁹⁵ Quddusi, *Tadhkirah Sufiya-i-Punjab*, 487.

⁹⁶ Hazrat Bulbul Shah Kashmiri was a fourteenth century religious figure from Kashmir who got migrated from Turkey in order to introduce Islam to the valley.

a waterfall erupted from that place immediately. Her husband was petrified after seeing this and later released her from marriage.⁹⁷ She went to the jungles and let the love of her Beloved to consume her completely. Other legend states that one day she was walking on the streets uncovered and she saw her master (Bulbul Shah) coming by; she jumped into the baking furnace and people started crying, her master angrily questioned her actions and she came out of the furnace, fully covered with beautiful garment.⁹⁸ Many miraculous stories have been assigned to her name; one goes as that at the time of her death, she asked people to empty the place and within sometime her soul (including her body) took wings from this physical world.⁹⁹

14. Bibi Aram Sahiba (d.790 Hijri/ 1388AD) was highly regarded by those in the vicinity for her abstinence and asceticism. She was the sister of Saiyyid Hussain Khing-sawar.¹⁰⁰ She came to Patan with her brother.¹⁰¹ Many miracles have been denoted under her name; once a person asked about the link between him (her brother) and her and she said that he was her brother but the person doubted and hit her brother with a stick on the back. Bibi looked at him in Jalal (majesty) and to date, every new born of his family is born with a mark on his/her back.¹⁰²

15. Bibi Jaiwindi (d. 1403) was an accomplished Sufi of her time. She was the great-granddaughter of Saiyyid Jalal al-Din Bukhari¹⁰³ yet she is confusingly said to be the great-grand daughter of Makhdam Jahaniyyan as he and Saiyyid Bukhari shared the same first name and

⁹⁷ Lahori, *Hadiqat al-awliya*, 241.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Shikoh, *Safinat al-awliya*, 750.

¹⁰⁰ Saiyyid Hussain Khing-swar (d. 1396) was born in an area called Ghiyaspur near Delhi and got his initial education from Delhi. His real name is Hussain but he used to ride a white horse (which is known as 'khing' in Persian) therefore, he got the title of *Khing-sawar*- the rider of white horse. It is stated that he completed his outward knowledge till the age of 13 and he met Hazrat Behlol one day. In ecstasy, Saiyyid Hussain hit him with a stone; a horrible voice came out of Behlol's stomach and Hussain became intoxicated for almost twelve years until when he saw the Prophet (SAW) in his dream and got the orders of getting initiated on the hands of Shaykh Nizam al-Din Awliya, he later earned the deputyship/*khilafat* from his Shaykh and started his guided work in Patan, where he left the world at the age of 130 in 1396. For details, see Shah Zahoor al-Hassan Sharib, *Tadhkirah Sufiya-i-Gujarat* (Delhi: Jamil Academy, 1981),130-134.

¹⁰¹ Sharib, *Tadhkirah Sufiya-i-Gujarat*, 437.

¹⁰² Ibid., 432.

¹⁰³ Saiyyid Jalal al-Din Bukhari (d. 1292) was a Sufi and ascetic who got highly influenced with the teachings of *Silsilah-i-Suharwardiyya* and got initiated into the *silsilah* by Shaykh Baha al-Din Zakariyya. He was born in Bukhara and acquired his early education from the city until the time he started travelling and reached Multan where he rose to many spiritual heights and earned various titles including 'Surkh Posh' meaning 'dressed in red'. He associated himself with the Jalali Sufis of Suharwardi *silsilah* and with the permission of his Shaykh, he chose Uch Sharif as his abode. He trained many disciples who started missionary activities in different areas. His disciples included Burhan al-Din Qutb-i-Alam (d. 1453) and Shah Alam Gujarati (d. 1475). He was the grandfather of Makhdam Jahaniyan Jahangasht (d. 1384) as his father Saiyyid Ahmad Kabir was Bukhari's youngest son. For a detailed account on the life of Saiyyid Sukh Posh Bukhari's life, see Mufti Ghulam Sarwar Lahori, *Khazinat al-asfiya*, Urdu tr. Muhammad Zahir al-Din Bhatti (Lahore: Maktaba-i-Nabawiyya, 1994), 62-67 and Dehalvi, *Akhbar al-akhyar*, 142-43.

Makhdum Jahaniyyan was often referred to as Jalal al-Din II.¹⁰⁴ The sacred environment of her house aided her in developing stamina for intense rounds of fasting and prayers. Her family was known in her area as the Bukhari family-primarily after the name of her great-grandfather. Like many of her family members, her tomb is situated in Uch Sharif. It is interesting that sources provide more information about the structure of her tomb than her personal life as the tomb has been marked as an important model in Islamic architecture.¹⁰⁵ The shrine was built in late 1490s on the funds provided by an Iranian prince and it resembles due to its octagonal structure with the tomb of Shah Rukn-i-Alam in Multan.¹⁰⁶ Bibi's tomb expresses various religious symbols including the signs for the universality of the wilayat of Hazrat Ali (R.A.) and symbols from Hindu spirituality such as swastika and dharmachakra were amalgamated for the first time in any monumental structure.¹⁰⁷ It also reinforces the connections between Saiyyid Surkh Posh Bukhari and the local Hindus when he arrived there with his missionary agenda. However, the tomb of Bibi Jaiwindi is in poor condition as two out of the five tombs (the pentagon) became the victims of the floods and poor administration.

16. Bibi Hajra was the wife of Saiyyid Nasir al-Din Mahmud, the daughter-in-law of Saiyyid Makhdum Jahaniyan and mother of Saiyyid Burhan al-Din Qutb-i-Alam. Makhdum Jahaniyan gave her the title of 'Sultan Khatun'.¹⁰⁸ Once, Bibi Hajra came to get blessings of Makhdum Jahaniyan and he predicted the birth of future Sufi from her and revered her to an extent that many ladies of the family questioned.¹⁰⁹ She used to invest her time in performing praying her Lord the most. Generosity was another peculiar trait of her personality.¹¹⁰ Her tomb is located in Patan. The exact date of her date is not known.

17. Bibi Sultan Khatun was regarded as identical to Rabia of Basra in questions relating to servitude and self-discipline.¹¹¹ She was the wife of Hazrat Burhan al-Din Qutb-i-Alam and was the mother of Hazrat Shah Alam Gujarati. She used to recite the Holy Quran without any count. Her mausoleum is situated near the tomb of Saiyyid Hussain Khing-sawar in Patan. There is no information on her date of demise.

¹⁰⁴ Hasan Ali Khan, *Constructing Islam on the Indus: The Material History of the Suhrawardi Sufi Order, 1200-1500AD* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 221-22.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 223.

¹⁰⁶ Ahmad Nabi Khan, *Uch: History and Architecture* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1980), 65-67.

¹⁰⁷ Khan, *Constructing Islam on the Indus*, 228.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 352.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 429.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 430.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 431.