Nawabi Karnatak: Muhammad Ali Khan in the Making of a Mughal Successor State in Pre-colonial South India, 1749-1795

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Chapter 6: Nawabi Religion

If you wish to see the features of Allāh
Go and look at the countenance of Wālājāh[1]

This chapter will discuss the Nawab's religious beliefs and his religious patronage. Unlike the other pillars of the state, many aspects of the Nawab's religious activities have been highlighted before, especially in Susan Bayly's study of Islam and Christianity in Tamilnadu. Bayly has pointed out Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan's many attempts to create a "high" orthodox Islamic identity within his court while at the same time—and similar to his methods as related to statecraft—making himself a patron and protector of all other major sects in Karnatak, in both formal and mystical aspects. As Bayly underlines, the Nawab created links to Sufism and the Hindu Tamilnadu pirs in particular; this was because he had a profound understanding of Tamilnadu's society. In this, these mystical forms of both religions were complicatedly intermixed and their sacred places revered by members of the local population, thus transcending religious boundaries. As such, their shrines were crucial resources of mystical power and thus could help support his rule.[2] Bayly has provided a good overall picture of the Nawab's inclusive religious policies and I am in full agreement with her propositions. However, some important issues related to the Nawab's pious activities can be further elaborated, especially regarding his religious self-representation and the motives for his patronage of each sect. Instead of taking the latitudinarian policy for granted—based on the simple assumption that he tried to please as many parts of the population as possible—I will further investigate the links between his religious patronage and the political situation in his state, as well as the changing cultural landscape of South Asia more widely during the eighteenth century. Like those examining the pillars of the sword and the pen, this chapter will start with an overview of some of the most significant religious developments in South Asia, with particular focus on the eighteenth century. Then, I will discuss the Nawab's self-fashioning and the most prominent religious institutions or groups with which he associated.

[1] A verse in Hindi composed by Prince Ghulam Husain and presented to Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan, his father and spiritual guide, in thanks for his grant of *Khilafat* of Chishtiyya to him. See: Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part I*, 16.
[2] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 161-179. See also: Susan Bayly, "The South Indian State and the Creation of Muslim Community," in *The Eighteenth Century in Indian History*, ed. Peter J. Marshall (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 203-239.

6.1 The Role of Religion in Early Modern South Asia

Islam in Mughal India

The Mughal emperors, like the Ottoman sultans, were officially Hanafi Sunnis.[3] Although they followed the same Islamic legal school, relations between the Mughals and both the Muslim caliphate and the sharifate of Mecca—at the center of universal Islam—were certainly not cordial. The Mughal rulers acknowledged only the first four caliphs, not any later caliphs or caliphates. Emperor Akbar even claimed that he himself was the caliph and called Mughal territory *Dar al-Khilafa* ("The Abode of the Caliphate").[4] Although the Mughals occasionally sent ships with pilgrims to Mecca, the numbers were insignificant compared to other major Muslim polities in Egypt, Syria, and Turkey at the time. Furthermore, insults were frequently thrown between the Mughal emperors and the sharifs of Mecca. The Mughal emperors regarded the sharifs as corrupt people who pocketed cash donations meant for the holy cities. On the other hand, the Meccan sharifs looked upon the Mughals with derision. An example of their mutual intolerance occurred in 1659, when Emperor Aurangzeb sent a gift of 660,000 rupees to Mecca but deliberately arranged for it to bypass the sharifs, and distributed it to local scholars, jurists, and citizens directly. The sharifs, for their part, rejected the donation as insignificant and refused to recognize Aurangzeb—known to be the most devout orthodox ruler of all the Mughal emperors—as legitimate.[5] Yet these should also be viewed as part of the competition between the Mughals and the Ottomans at the time; since the early sixteenth century, the Ottomans had gained control of most of the Islamic heartlands (i.e. the Arabian Peninsula), including the *Haramayn* ("the two holy sanctuaries [of Islam]," the cities of Mecca and Medina). From then on, the Ottomans declared their empire to be "the Ottoman Caliphate," the leader of the Muslim world, and the protector of the Haramayn and the sharifate. The Ottoman Empire was acknowledged as such by many Muslim polities, ulama, and people across the world.[6] However, the Mughal imperial house was one exception.

Regarding the other most prominent strands of Islam in South Asia, namely Shiism and Sufism, the Mughal court was generally tolerant, although degrees of patronage varied from one emperor to another. Most of the emperors tolerated Shiism, which was followed by

[3] Hanafism is one of the four main Sunni legal schools. The other three are Malikism, Shafiism, and Hanbalism.
[4] Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India*, 24, 30, 56.
[5] See further details in: Ziauddin Sardar, *Mecca: The Sacred City* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 258-259.
[6] Jan-Peter Hartung, "Enacting the Rule of Islam: On Courtly Patronage of Religious Scholars in Pre-and Early Modern Times," in *Court Cultures in the Muslim World: Seventh to Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Albrecht Fuess and Jan-Peter Hartung (London-New York: Routledge, 2011), 313.

many Indo-Irani officers at the court and much of the empire's population. However, the emperors never explicitly promoted the sect. In some periods, such as the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb, Shiism was extremely restricted. However, according to Cole, after Aurangzeb's reign, the imperial court became decidedly more tolerant towards Shiism.[7] Sufism, on the other hand, generally received significant patronage. As Alam underlines, the akhlaq treatises were not alone in supporting religious tolerance in early modern South Asia; the powerful influence of Sufi ideals, which circulated throughout the region, did so too.[8]

The three most prominent Sufi orders in early modern South Asia were the Chishtiyya, Qadiriyya, and Naqshbandiyya. Although there was distinctness or discretnese among the Sufi orders and masters, most Sufi sects—as well as the most popular Sufi saints—sought to promote religious syncretism, tolerance, and respect between believers.[9] One of the principal doctrines held by these Sufis—that of "The Unity of Being" (*wahdat al-wujud*)— referred not only to the various branches of Islam but to all non-Islamic beliefs, too. Therefore, while their doctrines and ritual were often branded as un-Islamic by "orthodox" Muslims,[10] Sufi masters were generally credited with greatly contributing to the expansion of Islam and conciliation between Muslim and non-Muslim populations.[11] There is much evidence indicating that Sufi saints were widely venerated by Hindus, of all classes and castes, throughout the subcontinent. This may, at least in part, have been the result of Sufi efforts to understand Hindu philosophy and spread doctrines of unity. However, as the historians Richard Eaton and Mattison Mines suggest, their popularity among the commoners was also largely thanks to their inherent mystical characteristics, which easily fitted the mind of people who were predisposed towards mysticism.[12] As Nile Green has proposed, due to their significant influence over a large part of the population of South Asia, Sufis (and their writings) were an effective tool by which Muslim conquerors were able to link the old politico-cultural center to the newly-conquered territories and the newly-arrived rulers to the

[7] Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*, 40, 188.
[8] Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 6, 81.
[9] Nile Green, *Indian Sufism since the Seventeenth Century: Saints, Books and Empires in the Muslim Deccan* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2006), 6-7, Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 171; Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 105, 168, 226; Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*, 230; Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall*, 17; Richard M. Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2011), 54-55.
[10] Various Sufi doctrines and practices which are often seen by ulama as "unorthodox" include the veneration of the *dargahs* or tombs containing the relics of saints; the *urs* celebrations to commemorate the anniversary of a Sufi saint's death; and the veneration of masters by their disciples, using prayers. See: Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 6, 81; Nile Green, *Making Space: Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 31-64 (the latter is especially for the origin and development of the urs ritual).
[11] Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 6, 82, 91, 110, 113, 159; More, *The Political Evolution of Muslims in Tamilnadu and Madras*, 27; Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall*, 15-16.
[12] Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, 166-170; Sharma, *Mughal Government and Administration*, 8; Mattison Mines, "Islamisation and Muslim Ethnicity in South India," *Man*, New Series 10, 3 (1975): 407. According to Eaton and Mines, many Sufi practices, from the veneration of individual Sufis, through festivals at saints' tombs, to the celebrations of urs, are very much in keeping with Hindu traditions in venerating gods/goddesses and pilgrimages to and festivals at Hindu shrines. Also, the Sufi *'urs* festival is, in many ways, reminiscent of the Hindu "cart" festival, with feats of faqirs, processions, and the sanctification of residential areas.

local population(s). The basic principle was to encourage the locals in newly-conquered places to worship the same saints and share the same imagined religious boundaries as the center.[13]

Many Mughal emperors and officials were closely linked to one or more Sufi order and publicly revered individual Sufis as their spiritual masters. Many also claimed descent from famous Sufis.[14] The most notable Mughals who had a profound interest in Sufism were Emperor Akbar and Prince Dara Shikoh (1615-1659). Akbar's imperial cult, *Din-i Ilahi*, contained many aspects of Sufism, especially various syncretic elements and the enrolment of disciples.[15] Prince Dara Shikoh, like many other Sufi scholars, searched for religious truths beyond the boundaries of the Sharia, not only in Sufi doctrines (especially those of the Qadiriyya order) but also in Hindu mysticism. Even Emperor Aurangzeb was a Sufi disciple, too, but one who followed the rather conservative and puritanical Naqshbandiyya order.[16]

Religious Movements in Eighteenth-century South Asia

Religious movements in eighteenth-century South Asia varied from one region to another. The imperial center of Delhi saw the continuation of the orthodox movement, led by Shah Wali Allah (d. 1762), a leading Sunni scholar and a Sufi of the Naqshbandiyya order. As the power of the Mughals declined, he became increasingly active in his attempts to revive and purify Islam. His school placed emphasis on the traditional sciences—such as studying and memorizing the Quran and Hadiths—which were viewed as the principal means by which society could draw nearer to Islamic truths. At the same time, they saw rationalist Islam and the mystical doctrines of other Sufi groups as dangerous.[17]

In the North-East, around Bengal and Awadh—which, in the Mughal's heyday, had been strongholds of both orthodox Sunni Islam and Sufism—could be found increasing numbers of Irani emigrants and the expanding political power of the Shia ulama. Furthermore, there were internal changes within the latter group; the Usuli faction, known as more conservative and less tolerant, were rising to prominence at the expense of the more liberal Akbari group. This corresponded to what was occurring in the Shia heartlands of Iraq and Iran at the same time, and reflects the increasingly strong links between north-eastern

[13] Nile Green, "Geography, Empire and Sainthood in the Eighteenth-Century Muslim Deccan," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 67, 2 (2004): 216, 220; Green, *Making Space*, 170.
[14] Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 72.
[15] Dale, *The Muslim Empires*, 101-102. For more on Akbar's religious policies, see: *Maathir al-Umara*, II: 899-901.
[16] Kruijtzer, *Xenophobia in Seventeenth-Century India*, 267; Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India*, 96; Dale, *The Muslim Empires*, 196, 258; Green, "Geography, Empire and Sainthood in the Eighteenth-Century Muslim Deccan," 217; Green, *Making Space*, 267-268.
[17] Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall*, 15, 28-30.

India and those Shia centers.[18] The increasing influence of conservative Shiism led to mounting tension between Shia populations and people of all other sects in these regions,[19] and this is one of the most regularly-cited pieces of evidence that scholars such as Juan Cole and Gijs Kruijtzer have used to support their view that eighteenth-century South Asia witnessed a decline of religious harmony.

However, in the same period, there were also movements towards less orthodox doctrines and the promotion of syncretism. These were, arguably, reactions to the growth of orthodox trends during the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb and subsequently. One famous example is the ulama of the Farangi Mahall family, which was also based in Awadh. As the Farangi Mahall family was directly involved with the Karnatak Nawab, its background should be explored here. The Farangi Mahall was a famous family of Sunni Hanafi ulama based in Lucknow that had close links to the Mughal court.[20] One of their leaders, Mulla Hafiz, had been acknowledged as a distinguished scholar by Emperor Akbar. In 1695, Emperor Aurangzeb assigned to Mulla Hafiz's great-grandson, Mulla Qutb al-Din, a Dutch merchant's house, known as Farangi Mahall, to be the family residence from then on. Later Mughal emperors continued to patronize the institution, particularly by sponsoring, from the imperial treasury, its students' expenses. In the eighteenth century, the descendants of Qutb al-Din turned Farangi Mahall into one of the largest centers of Sunni learning and trained future ulama and scholars for judicial positions. Their students came from all parts of South Asia and beyond, including Arabia, Central Asia, and even China. There were even some Shia and Hindus among them.[21] In terms of doctrine, in the eighteenth century Farangi Mahall emphasized the rational sciences, logical thinking, and non-sectarian attitudes, approaches that were in sharp contrast to the traditional sciences.[22] Many of the Farangi Mahallis (Farangi Mahall masters) were also known for their efforts to balance knowledge of formal Islam with Sufism. Mulla Nizam al-Din and his sons, for example, were disciples of Saiyid Shah Abd al-Razzaq Bansawi (1636-1724), a famous eighteenth-century Qadiriyya Sufi.[23] Some Farangi Mahallis attached themselves to Chishtiyya saints, too,[24] and saints' tombs and the urs ceremony (see footnote 10, above) were also the focus of their attention.

[18] Dale, *The Muslim Empires*, 254; Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall*, 24-25.
[19] See further details in: Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*, 49, 152, 156, 171, 226-228, 249.
[20] The Farangi Mahall's ancestors can be traced back to Ayyub Ansari (d. 674), who was the Prophet's friend and "Islamic standard bearer," and also another renowned Sufi scholar, Abd Allah Ansari of Herat (1006-1088). They migrated to India during the time of the Delhi sultanate.
[21] Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*, 43, 210; Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall*, 1-2, 14-15.
[22] Their lessons culminated in a famous curriculum called *Dars-i Nizamiyya*, which was developed by Mulla Nizam al-Din in the eighteenth century and became the dominant system in South Asian Islamic education up to the twentieth century.
[23] For further information about this Sufi, see: Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India*, 99-101, 105-110; Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall*, 16, 58.
[24] Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia*, 58-59.

The Farangi Mahallis were, therefore, both Hanafi Sunni orthodox scholars and Sufi mystics.[25] The rise of the Usuli Shia ulama in Awadh in the 1750s led to an increase in Shia-Sunni conflict and significantly impacted the position of Farangi Mahall scholars; their lives were at risk from militant Shia, and the government of Awadh failed to address the situation. Many of the Farangi Mahallis, therefore, decided to emigrate. Meanwhile, many Sunni Muslim rulers and nobles throughout South Asia wanted to sponsor them and so sent invitations to this effect. This resulted in the spread of the Farangi Mahalli curriculum across South Asia, to places such as Lucknow, Rampur, Farrukhabad, Buhar (Bengal), Hyderabad, and Karnatak.[26] Their impact in the latter area will be discussed further in a subsequent section.

One also finds diversity in the religious policies of various eighteenth-century Mughal successor states. The Nishapuri dynasty of Awadh declared Shiism to be the religion of the state, something that was unprecedented in northern India and which contributed greatly to the growth of Shiism in the region. The Awadh court became steadily more Shia-focused in its institutions and culture, and its rulers increasingly based their legitimacy on religious charisma. Nawab Asaf al-Daulah of Awadh (1775-1797) and his chief ministers were famous for donating money to the Shia sacred centers of Najaf and Karbala in Iraq and for attracting Shia ulama to his new capital at Lucknow.[27] The Awadh elites' development of close connections with the Shia heartlands was, as Cole suggests, a direct consequence of Mughal decline. As the political value of ties to the Mughal emperors diminished, the Nawabs of Awadh instead searched for other sources of legitimacy.[28] Looking to the religious heartlands of the Middle East, as the Nishapuri Nawabs did, should probably be seen as part of a wider trend among eighteenth-century South Asian rulers if it is compared to the case of a contemporaneous South Asian Muslim ruler, Tipu Sultan of Mysore. After a number of unsuccessful attempts to have his rule recognized by the Mughal emperors, Tipu Sultan broke completely with them and instead sought confirmation from the Ottoman sultan and caliph at Constantinople as a means of raising his prestige as a Muslim sovereign.[29]

The Asafjahi Nizams of Hyderabad took a rather different approach. Instead of turning outwards, they chose to tie themselves more closely to local Deccan society. They

[25] Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*, 43-44; Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall*, 22-23, 58-59, 69-73; Muhammad Wali al-Haq Ansari, "Farangi Mahall," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, accessed July 27, 2018: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/farangi-mahall.
[26] Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*, 49, 209-210; Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall*, 3, 23.
[27] Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*, 40-41, 138-139, 195.
[28] Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*, 135.
[29] Brittlebank, "Assertion," 274-279; Kaveh Yazdani, "Haidar 'Ali and Tipu Sultan: Mysore's Eighteenth-Century Rulers in Transition," *Itinerario* 38, 2 (2014): 108.

were famous as rulers who honored and cultivated religious scholars from everywhere, both inside and outside of India, and especially Sufi saints, from all orders. However, according to Faruqui, they were particularly attached to the Chishtiyya order. For example, Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah demanded that, after his death, his body was to be buried in the shrine of Shaikh Burhan al-Din Gharib, the celebrated Chishtiyya Sufi, in Khuldabad, Aurangabad. This act firmly linked the political legitimacy of his dynasty to the spiritual legitimacy of the most powerful Chishtiyya branch within the Deccan, and also to the Chishtiyya order across South Asia. This can also be seen as part of the Asafjahi house's attempts to highlight its associations with its Mughal predecessors, who had been famous for their long-standing and close links with the Chishtiyya Sufis.[30] This would have helped the Asafjahi rulers in their attempts to present themselves as true and loyal Mughal successors.

Islam in South India

The Muslim warriors from North India who invaded the South and established various sultanates from the mid-fourteenth century were not the first to take Islam to South India. From the eighth century, the South had been home to large numbers of Arab Muslims who had reached the region by sea. These Arab merchants, mercenaries, and missionaries gradually set up communities on both sides of the peninsula and, over time, the Indo-Arab population became linked with many distinguished groups (tribes or castes). Well-known examples include the Mappilas (situated chiefly) in Malabar, the Nawayats in western Karnataka, and the Marakayyars in Tamilnadu.[31] Through these Indo-Arab communities, the indigenous peoples of South India were first introduced to Islam, and this resulted in the emergence of various communities of local Muslim converts.[32] We have seen in previous chapters that the Nawayats became an elite group in the Deccan and Karnatak. It seems that they were also held in high regard in the neighboring state of Mysore, because the wife of Hyder Ali Khan and the mother of Tipu Sultan were also from that tribe.[33] The literature on South India shows that the Marakkayars were equally highly regarded. They were the most prominent mercantile Muslim ethnic group in eastern Tamilnadu—economically, culturally, and politically—from medieval to early modern times.[34]

[30] Green, *Making Space*, 181-182; 278-287; Faruqui, "At Empire's End," 38; *Maathir al-Umara*, II: 422.
[31] Dennis B. McGilvray, "Arabs, Moors and Muslims: Sri Lankan Muslim Ethnicity in Regional Perspective," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 32, 2 (1998): 436; Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 1, 51-52.
[32] Labbais and Ravuttan are two examples of a converted caste/tribe. However, their origins are still debated. See: Pais, "The Navayats," 46.
[33] Pais, "The Navayats," 41-43.
[34] Many of the Marakkayars were traders or capitalists whose businesses extended from South East Asia to Arabia. Some Marakkayars received honorable titles from Hindu rajas and Nayakas in Tamilnadu, indicating their financial and political influence within local society. The Marakkayars also played a significant role as benefactors of Islam; many mosques in the region were built by them, and they were the

As noted in the previous chapter, North India was part of the Perso-Islamic cultural zone. Coastal South India, in contrast, had, from the eighth century, been gradually integrated into the so-called Arab sphere, where Islamic culture developed mainly on the basis of Arab traditions. From the fourteenth century, the intense and constant contacts with North India and Iran gradually transformed the Deccan into part of the Perso-Islamic world, yet aspects of Arab culture still persisted in South India, especially Tamilnadu, until the eighteenth century. Persian had not been the language of government and intellectual life in the region before the mid-seventeenth century, at least.[35] Many scholars of early modern Tamil literature and culture have noted that the Arabian influence was increasingly manifested the deeper south into Tamilnadu one went. According to Kokan, although they used Tamil as their mother tongue, Tamil Muslims were generally familiar with Arabic and its literature. It was customary to praise a talented Tamil Muslim scholar by saying that their command of Arabic language and literature would impress the people of Mecca. Furthermore, in the southern districts of Tamilnadu, the Quran was recited with a more accurate Arabic intonation than was the case in the northern domains, where people were becoming increasingly Persianized.[36] Jean-Baptiste Prashant More notes that Arabic-Islamic texts had long been of central importance for Tamil Muslim literature, in contrast to the works that were produced by northern, Urdu-speaking immigrants in the late seventeenth century, whose ideas were heavily influenced by Persian literature.[37] Ronit Ricci's study has illustrated that eastern Tamilnadu was, significantly, part of a "translocal" Islamic sphere that she refers to as the "Arabic Cosmopolis."[38] In short, unlike the Muslim communities in northern India and the Deccan, which were dominated by Perso-Islamic culture, in the eighteenth century South India was still primarily influence by Indo-Arab culture.

As in the North, throughout South India Sufism was the most popular form of Islam. According to Kokan, the Sufi orders were so prevalent among Tamil Muslims that there was the saying: "no man could get salvation except by acting and practicing through these orders."[39] According to a legend that was widespread in local society, the first person to bring Islam to South India was the Sufi saint Saiyid Hadrat Nathar Wali, a legendary figure from

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sponsors of many poets and scholars. In this light, the Indo-Arab Marakkayars were certainly seen as elites and cultural leaders by other groups within the local Tamilnadu population. See: More, *The Political Evolution of Muslims in Tamilnadu and Madras*, 22-25; Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 96.

[35] Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall*, 13.

[36] Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 53, 56.

[37] More, *The Political Evolution of Muslims in Tamilnadu and Madras*, 25-27.

[38] Ronit Ricci, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* ("South Asia across the Disciplines"; Chicago-London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 3-4.

[39] Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 2, 52-53.

the thirteenth century whose dargah is situated and still venerated in Trichinopoly. Most of his hagiographers have portrayed him as a noble from Rum (Turkey) or Syria who believed he had been commanded to spread the word of God in distant lands. This drove him and 900 devoted followers to South India.[40]

Sufi masters from all the main orders were venerated in the South. However, according to Mines, the most widespread and popular order was the Qadiriyya. Even today, the urs commemoration of Saiyid Abd al-Qadir Jilani (1077-1166), the founder of the order, is the most significant event of the year for Tamil Muslims, especially in the villages of the far south.[41] According to Gurney, the Qadiriyya order's branch in the South was founded by Hadrat Saiyid Abd al-Qadir of Nagore (d. 1570), whose dargah was situated in the port of Nagore, in the district of Tanjore.[42] As Eaton points out, the Qadiriyya differed from all other orders in several significant respects. One is that it had its spiritual center in Baghdad, where Saiyid Abd al-Qadir Jilani had lived. As such, the order "looked more to the Arab world for spiritual nourishment" and "led its members in India to emphasize the Middle Eastern more than the Indian aspect of their spiritual ancestry."[43] Furthermore, many Qadiriyya Sufis in South India were said to have been migrants from Arabia who had moved to the Deccan as late as the seventeenth century; thus, they were relatively inclined to the Arab model of Islam.[44] This order was rather distinctive from the Chishtiyya and the Naqshbandiyya, who were more attached to Central Asia and North India as their sources of spiritual inspiration.[45] The Arab-orientated outlook of the order must have fitted into the local communities of South India well, thus contributing to its popularity. Nainar also points out that the order was widespread, particularly in the Arabic-speaking zones of South India and elsewhere in Asia.[46]

6.2 Nawabi Self-Fashioning

Like his Mughal masters, Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan officially declared himself a Sunni Muslim of the Hanafi school.[47] As is reflected in his court literature, the Nawab went to great lengths to present himself as a pious Muslim who followed strictly all the obligatory practices in the formal tradition of Islam. He was diligent in his prayers and the study of Islamic

[40] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 116-117.
[41] Mines, "Islamisation and Muslim Ethnicity in South India," 411-412. Saiyid 'Abd al-Qadir Jilani came from Mazandaran, and later became the head of the most famous school (*madrasa*) in Baghdad.
[42] Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot," 176; see further about his legend in: Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 196-197, 243-244.
[43] Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, 54; see also: Green, *Making Space*, 12-13.
[44] Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, 124, 126.
[45] Green, *Indian Sufism since the Seventeenth Century*, 5-7. 13-15, 18-22; Green, *Making Space*, 12-13; 131-134.
[46] Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part I*, 14 (footnote).
[47] Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot," 18.

thought, built mosques, opened inns, founded hospitals, patronized the ulama, and relieved the troubles of the poor, among others, both in Karnatak and elsewhere.[48] It is recorded that the ulama frequently visited him to discuss matters relating to Islamic law.[49] The formal Muslim festivals, such as Id al-Fitr (at the end of Ramadan) and Bara Wafat (the birthday of the Prophet), were celebrated in his court with great magnificence.[50] These acts were all, as his chronicle is keen to underline, "in the way of Allāh."[51]

Such acts of piety were essentially no different from those of other Indo-Muslim state-builders of the time, but the Nawab's deep engagement with Sufism is a rather remarkable aspect which is worth further elaboration. The Nawab was not only declared a disciple but a Sufi master, too. To get a full understanding of how Sufism formed part of the Nawab's self-representation, a ceremony held in the Chepauk Palace provides good evidence. According to the *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz*, it was an annual practice during the Nawab's reign to prepare the Chepauk Palace to celebrate the urs of the death date of Saiyid Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, the founder of the Qadiriyya order. This was a seven-night ritual, during which the palace was finely decorated; the main hall was furnished with a pavilion and an embroidered green throne, and two green banners with the name Hadrat Mahbub Subhani—one of Saiyid Jilani's names—were erected in front of the pavilion's two pillars. Many of the Nawab's highest officials were involved in the ceremony. Muhammad Najib Khan, supreme military commander and the Nawab's boon-companion, was appointed to manage everything. Qadir Nawaz Khan was assigned to gather all the shaykhs and learned men "who had the good fortune to become disciples" of the order. Shah Qudrat Allah, who had been appointed by the Nawab as his khilafat, led the thanksgiving. Khilafat (or *khalifa*), literally meaning "successorship," is the permission granted by a Sufi master to one or a few of the best disciples (*murid*s) from his inner circle to be his religious-spiritual successor(s). Only those who received the khilafat had the authority to preach the doctrines of the master and to accept other devoted followers into the circle of murids.[52] His claim that he was a khilafat indicates that the Nawab did indeed view himself as a Sufi master of the Qadiriyya order.[53] This assertion can be proved further by the descriptions of the Nawab's acts and dress during the ceremony. Every night from 11th-16th at around 8' o'clock, the Nawab would come to give

[48] The mosques built by Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan include the majestic red sandstone Walajahi Masjid in Trichinopoly, the Masjid Mamur in Georgetown, Madras, and the sandstone Walajahi Masjid in Triplicane. See: Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 171.
[49] TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 66, *Ruznama*, 1 and 22 Aug. 1773; bundle 67, 22 Apr. 1774.
[50] TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 67, *Ruznama*, 22 Feb., 11 May, 21 Jun. 1774; bundle 68, 5 Dec. 1774.
[51] Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 11-12.
[52] Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, 165-166, 320.
[53] It is said that the Nawab was introduced into the order and later received the rank of khilafat from a less renowned Sufi named Shah Zahir al-Din Qadir of Hyderabad. See: Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot," 176; Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 91.

guidance and advice to the participants "in accordance with the regulations of the Faith, and thus admitted them as his disciples."[54] On the 17th, the Nawab put on the green dress of the shaykhs, wore the crown of the khilafat, put around his neck a rosary composed of 100 large onyx stones—a holy relic of his religious guide—and held in his hand an ordinary olive rosary for the purpose of saying his salutations. The names of the large number of other royals and courtiers who had attained discipleship and participated in the holy ritual are also given in the chronicle. They are said to have been admitted into the order by various Sufi masters—including the Nawab himself—who were preaching in the Deccan and Karnatak at the time. The Nawab also shook hands with all "his disciples" after the prayers.[55] The *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz* also hints that to be a disciple of the order somehow conferred special benefits on that person in the Karnatak court during this period. As the chronicle notes, those who were appointed by the Nawab in affairs related to this order were considered as having received special royal favor. It says that many courtiers had initially participated in this order "with a view to please him [the Nawab], and move along with times."[56]

Furthermore, the *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz* also states that, during an urs ceremony for the Qadiriyya saint in the early 1790s, the Nawab bestowed on his eldest son, Prince Ghulam Husain, the khilafat of another order, that of the Chishtiyya. He initiated the prince into the Chishtiyya and invited his five grandsons and other courtiers into the sect as well. He also gave them guidance in accordance with Chishtiyya regulations and dignified them by admitting them as his disciples.[57] This account highlights that the Nawab also presented himself as a Sufi master of the Chishtiyya order, one who had the authority to teach, admit new disciples, and appoint the khilafat. The Chishtiyya order played a significant role in the Nawab's nasab as well. As is claimed in the *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz*, during the reign of Emperor Akbar in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in their home region of Awadh, several members of the Nawab's family became the disciples of Shaykh Nizam al-Din of Amethi, a well-known Chishtiyya saint. One of the Nawab's ancestors had attained great fame, being granted the *khilat-i khilafat-i Chishtiyya* (the robe of successorship of Chishtiyya) and given the crown of khilafat, and he later became a famous pir who had the title Shaykh al-Mashayikh Alim-i Zaman. Later, Shaykh Nim Allah, the eldest son of Shaykh Alim-i Zaman, succeeded his father as a Chishtiyya Sufi. However, in the next generation, Shaykh Muhammad Munawwar—who was the great-grandfather of Nawab Muhammad

[54] Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part I*, 13.
[55] Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part I*, 13-16.
[56] Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part I*, 15.
[57] Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part I*, 14-15.

Ali—renounced Sufism and became "a devotee placing his reliance upon Allah," i.e. an orthodox Sunni Muslim.[58]

It is important to note that the Nawab not only presented himself as a Sufi master in the sense of being learned or one of the literati; he also claimed to have magical powers, as did many other celebrated Sufi saints from around the world. There are a few records in the diary of Paterson that relate the Nawab's attempts to explain to his British secretary a supernatural ability he claimed to possess, which was called "caromet" (i.e. *karamat*). This included the ability to predict the future and knowledge of events that were occurring far away. The Nawab said that he had experienced this many times and it had been witnessed by his courtiers. The Nawab gave Paterson a few examples. Once, in 1768, he had known in advance the message that was contained in a letter that had not yet arrived at his court. On another occasion, the Nawab received a report from his diwan in Tanjore that one of his own orders—that the jewelry of the noble ladies of the Tanjore raja, which had been taken from them during the struggle between the two states, be returned to them—had been miraculously given by him in Madras at the exact moment that the ladies of the Tanjore raja had expressed their desire to have their jewelry returned. The Nawab did not seek to present these events as being the result of superstitions in front of his British secretary, merely saying that he had very good senses. However, as Paterson records, the Nawab even called on his courtiers—including his scribes and messengers—to hear these astonishing acts.[59] Paterson's "caromet" comes from the Arabic term karamat (sing. *karama*), which in the Islamic context means divine grace or the ability to perform magic. It can take various forms, such as flying through the air, knowledge of future events, or the ability to heal the sick. Karamat is usually said to be one of the main features of renowned Sufi saints.[60] However, it can also be a feature of great rulers. For example, it was widely claimed that Emperor Akbar had the ability to leave his physical body and travel spiritually.[61] There are also accounts in the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* that suggest that Emperor Aurangzeb, as well as Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan, the Nawab's father, had various miraculous powers, such as the ability to read people's minds, to know people's hidden thoughts, and to predict events.[62] In this light, it seems that the Nawab was presenting himself as both a Sufi and a charismatic ruler.

[58] Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part II*, 58.
[59] IOR, Mss Eur E/379/6, DGP, Aug. 1773, 65-66, Sep. 1773, 219-220.
[60] Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*, 146-147; L. Gardet, "Karāma," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al., accessed October 13, 2018: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0445.
[61] *Maathir al-Umara*, II: 902.
[62] Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 22-23, 25-26, 66-68.

No less important than the Nawab's self-presentation as a strict orthodox Muslim and a Sufi master was his openness and generosity to all other religions, and he deliberately cultivated a harmonious and tolerant atmosphere at his court. For example, as described in the *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, every day at about half past seven in the morning the Nawab would sit in his court's hall in the company of various learned men and accomplished individuals, his brothers and sons, friends and relatives, "discussing the problems pertaining to jurisprudence and discoursing on the various religious sects."[63] The *Ruznama* also records that, on one occasion, the Nawab summoned his two sons and all his courtiers to talk about the seventeenth-century prince Dara Shikoh and his book about Islam.[64] As mentioned previously, this prince had been a champion of syncretism within the Mughal Empire. The Nawab also made it possible, and even customary, for Shia devotees to use the large water-tank of the Hindu temple in Triplicane during their ceremonial Muharram procession.[65] There are many other examples that seem to reflect the Nawab's eclectic attitudes, which I will explore in the following sections.

6.3 Religious Groups

The Ulama of the Islamic Heartlands

The first group I will discuss in relation to the Nawab's attempts to develop a religious network consisted of the ulama and other dignitaries of the Islamic heartlands. Each year from the beginning of the 1770s, and possibly several years earlier, the Nawab would send his two ships, *Safina Allah* and *Safina al-Rasul*, from Madras to Mecca, Medina, and other renowned Islamic centers in the Arabian Peninsula and Africa. These ships were loaded with presents, donations, and pilgrims. A public announcement would be made around Karnatak for anyone who wanted to perform the Hajj, as they would be able to travel in the ships at the Nawab's expense. On the day of departure, the Nawab and his courtiers would come to the port to distribute money and clothes to the pilgrims by their own hands.[66] Examples of the gifts that were sent include Indian cloth, and stone implements such as mill-stones, mortars, and pestles; these were said to be rare in Arabia and so could help the people there. The Nawab also ordered his representatives to reside permanently in the two holy cities in order to look after the Karnatak pilgrims and others who were in need. The ships also carried letters and presents from the Nawab to members of the political elite and religious scholars who

[63] Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 11.
[64] TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 67, *Ruznama*, 24 Jun. 1774.
[65] Bayly, "The South Indian State and the Creation of Muslim Community," 229.
[66] TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 68, *Ruznama*, 6, 8, and 9 Feb. 1775.

were living in various Islamic cities. There is evidence that, at least during the period 1771-1791, the Nawab was in correspondence with the sharifs of Mecca and Medina, the viceroy (*khedive*) of Egypt, and various other rulers, ulama, and dignitaries of regions around the Arabian Peninsula, such as the Hejaz, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt.[67] The Nawab also developed strong connections with the Ottoman sultans, each of whom claimed to be the caliph. As his chronicle proclaims, like his grandfather before him, the Nawab received the honorable and hereditary rights from the sultans to sweep the carpets and light the candles at the holy places in Mecca and Medina, highly-prized activities.[68] This privilege meant that his position as a Muslim ruler and the status of his state were acknowledged by the Ottoman caliphate.

The Nawab's decision to buttress his position by developing clear links with the Ottoman caliphate, the sharifate of Mecca, and other Islamic authorities in the Muslim heartlands is comparable to that of other eighteenth-century South Asian rulers, such as the Nawabs of Awadh and Tipu Sultan of Mysore, who, as discussed previously, looked for legitimacy and acceptance from the Islamic world more widely, outside the waning sphere of the Mughals. Such acts of religious piety may also reflect an attempt to compensate for the relatively humble position of his dynasty within the Mughal Empire through wider acknowledgment of him as an independent and prestigious Muslim ruler. Considering the fact that the Mughals had sometimes been looked down upon by the Meccan sharifates, such as the case of Emperor Aurangzeb in 1659, the assertions of the Nawab may be interpreted as him boasting of his religious superiority vis-à-vis his Mughal masters and other contemporaneous Indo-Muslim rulers. This assumption is given credence by an immodest statement that is reported in the *Tuzak-i Walajahi*; as the chronicle claims, the people of Arabia were extremely grateful for the charitable favors of the Karnatak Nawab, so much so that they embroidered their head-dresses with the name of "Wālājāh Sulṭānu'l-Hind," surnamed the Nawab "Sulṭānu'l-Hind," and mentioned his name next to that of the Ottoman Sultan when praying.[69]

I also suggest that the links between the Nawab's pious acts in the Islamic heartlands and claims to an aristocratic Arab lineage—as the descendant of both the Kuraysh and the second caliph—found in his nasab, as well as the other aspects of Arab orientation in his

[67] Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 12-13; Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 91, 198, 211; TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 67, *Ruznama*, 30 Aug. 1774, bundle 68, 6 and 8 Feb. 1775.
[68] Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 12.
[69] Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 13.

court, should not be overlooked. At first glance, the Karnatak court may look like any other Islamic court of either North India or the Deccan from that time, all of which were dominated by Perso-Islamic culture; yet, in fact, the Karnatak court was just as influenced by Arabic elements as by Persian ones. The Nawab, his brothers, and his sons were all well versed in both Persian and Arabic language and science. Associated with his court were many scholars who specialized in, or at least were familiar with, Arabic literature and traditions. The two most prominent examples are Moulana Baqir Agah (1743-1805), an Indo-Arab Nawayat who served the Nawab by writing letters on his behalf to the notables of Arabic-speaking lands and teaching various Arabic sciences to his two sons, and Mir Ismail Khan Abjadi, a Persian littérateur and the author of the *Anwarnama*—the first official history of the Walajah family—who also produced various Arabic texts.[70] Under the Nawab's patronage, many works were translated from Persian to Arabic and vice-versa. Furthermore, an account in the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* praises the Nawab's grandfather, Muhammad Anwar, as having been an Arabic littérateur. It is reported that, during the latter's Hajj pilgrimage, he was challenged in Mecca by a talented Muslim qadi from that city, who posed a difficult question. Muhammad Anwar gave such an ingenious response that the sharif acknowledged and praised his skill in Arabic as superior to that of the local Arab scholars.[71] As previously suggested, it was customary in Tamilnadu to praise a distinguished scholar by saying that their command of Arabic would impress the people of Mecca.

Why were highlighting his Arab noble pedigree, increasing his connections to the Arabian heartlands, and integrating Arabic elements into his court important to the Nawab? Improving his position internationally, as discussed previously in Chapter Three, must be part of the answer. Yet I argue that local competition within South India also had much to do with it. As discussed previously, a unique feature of South India was that it was home to large numbers of Indo-Arab Muslim elites, like the Marakkaryars and the Nawayats, and many local convert communities who saw these people as the nobility. The Marakkaryars and the Nawayats both linked their nasabs to those of the Arabian heartlands and prominent figures of early Islam. The Nawayats claimed they were descendants of the Kuraysh and related to the Prophet's family, and they declared Medina to be their ancestral home.[72] The Marakkayars claimed that their forefather was a descendant of Abu Bakr, the first caliph and

[70] For Baqir's life and works, see: Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 198-211; Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 97, 176. For Abjadi's, see: *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 91, 174-190; Muhammad Baqir, "Abjadi," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, accessed July 27, 2018: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/abjadi-18th-century-south-indian-poet-of-persian-and-urdu.
[71] Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 79-83; Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 13.
[72] Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 64-65; Pais, "The Navayats," 41-43.

the father-in-law of Prophet Muhammad, meaning the noble blood of the Prophet ran through their community.[73] Taking all this into account, it is obvious that the Nawab needed to compete, both culturally and ideologically, with other local Muslim elites to gain prestige within that societal context.

The Farangi Mahall

During the latter part of his reign, in 1787, Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan achieved one significant success in the expansion of his religious network, by inviting Moulana Abd al-Ali (1730-1811), aka Bahr al-Ulum, one of the most prominent ulama of the Farangi Mahall from northern India, to stay in Madras. As discussed previously, the Shia-Sunni tension in Awadh in the mid-eighteenth century drove many Farangi Mahallis from the region. Bahr al-Ulum left Lucknow and moved to Shahjahanpura, Rampur, and Buhar (Bengal) successively. Everywhere, he was offered leading posts in state or regional madrasas by different Sunni patrons, and, when his benefactor died in 1787, Nawab Muhammad Ali invited him to his court. Wanting to have that celebrated scholar there, the Nawab paid the relocation expenses for his whole party—family and disciples—said to have numbered as many as 600. When the party arrived in 1790, the Nawab came out of the palace and personally shouldered the palanquin of the scholar in order to publicly pay Bahr al-Ulum the highest possible respect. The ruler then established a religious school, known as the *Madrasa-i Kalan*, and appointed him its director, with a monthly salary of 1,000 rupees. From then on, Bahr al-Ulum was always given the most important posts dealing with religious and royal rituals at the Nawab's court. For example, he was requested to sit at the Nawab's right hand during court ceremonies that various other religious masters and scholars also attended. When Prince Ghulam Husain, the eldest son of the Nawab, ascended the throne in 1796 following his father's death, it was this Farangi Mahalli who took his hand and led the new Nawab to the throne. He taught in the Madrasa-i Kalan until his death in 1810 and is said to have inspired a revival of Islamic learning in southern India. According to Francis Robinson, Bahr al-Ulum and his father Mulla al-Din were remarkable Farangi Mahallis as they managed to combine orthodox knowledge, such as that of the Quran and Hadith, with the teachings of mysticism.[74]

Considering the fame of the Farangi Mahallis throughout South Asia and beyond, it is not necessary to explain how this invitation improved the Nawab's reputation on both

[73] See for example, the family's nasab of Shaykh Sadaqat Allah in: Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 51-52.
[74] Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 201, 227-232; Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part 1*, 14; Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall*, 71-72, 78, 81.

interstate and local levels. Furthermore, the Farangi Mahallis could link the Nawab and his court to the Mughal house, especially Emperor Aurangzeb, who was remembered as the main sponsor of the Farangi Mahall. The personal religiosity of the Nawab was probably also a significant factor here. As discussed earlier, the Nawab was particularly attached to Sufism. Likewise, both Bahr al-Ulum and his father were disciples of a celebrated Qadiriyya Sufi—Saiyid Shah Abd al-Razzaq Bansawi—and various Chishtiyya masters. It may be assumed that the Farangi Mahall had considerably influenced the Nawab's religious ideas long before the arrival of Bahr al-Ulum.

Sufis

As well as proclaiming himself a Sufi, the Nawab also linked himself and his court to various legendary Sufi saints of the past and to contemporaneous South Indian masters and scholars. This section seeks to investigate how connections to each of these Sufis, and his self-fashioning as one of them, were of significance to the Nawab in his consolidation of power.

Beginning with the Sufis of the past, the aforementioned Saiyid Nathar Wali—believed to have been the first person to bring Islam to South India—was the individual whom the Nawab most intensely and closely associated with his family. Displaying the highest level of veneration for that saint, the Nawab gave the Islamic name "Natharnagar" to Trichinopoly, the southern capital of Karnatak where the saint's tomb was situated. The ruler also ordered the large-scale renovation of Nathar Wali's dargah and built a beautiful dome over it, one described as "so high as to surpass the sky and brings under the shade of its protection the fort (Trichinopoly) which is within an arrow shot."[75] Furthermore, the Nawab's queen consort and various other members of the Walajah royal family were buried in that sacred place, resting under the protection of the saint.[76]

The aforementioned Saiyid Abd al-Qadir of Nagore, who founded the Qadiriyya order in South India, was another Sufi from the past with whom the Walajah court sought to connect itself. This Sufi's life—including accounts of his miracles and the Nawab's displays of veneration to his dargah—is related in the *Tuzak-i Walajahi*. According to this chronicle, during his subjugation of French Pondicherry in 1759, the Nawab went to Nagore and visited the Sufi's dargah in order to give him nadhr.[77] Similarly, Paterson recorded that, when Prince Modar al-Mulk, the second son of the Nawab, took Karnatak's armed forces to wrest Nagore

[75] Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 132.
[76] IOR, Mss Eur E/379/8, DGP, Jun. 1774, 228.
[77] Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 196-197, 243-244.

from the VOC in 1773, the first thing he did after arriving was prostrate himself in front of the saint's tomb, giving him thanks and praying that his father would have a long life.[78] After the conquest of Tanjore, the Nawab renamed its capital city Qadirnagar, after the Sufi.[79] Another illustration of an earlier Sufi saint who is presented in the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* as a holy protector of the Nawab's dynasty is Shah Fatah Allah Sahib, whose dargah was beside the walls of Trichinopoly. Once, in a time of crisis, the saint showed his magical powers by appearing to Khayr al-Din Khan—the commander of the Nawab's forces in that city—in a dream, warning him that his enemies, Prince Nand Raj of Mysore and some Maratha mercenaries, were about to invade the fort. As a result, the citadel was protected.[80]

As described by Susan Bayly, for centuries the veneration of Saiyid Nathar Wali transcended the boundaries between followers of orthodox and "folk" Islam, of Muslim and non-Muslim adherents, of Deccanis and Tamils, and of all social classes and occupations. Therefore, all the rulers of South India considered his shrine to be a crucial source of legitimacy.[81] Saiyid Abd al-Qadir was no different. According to Dennis McGilvray, his dargah constantly attracted the devotion of the local Tamil people, especially the Marakkayar elites.[82] As such, it is not surprising that the Nawab chose to clearly link his house with the dargahs of both these saints. The case of Shah Fatah Allah Sahib is the best example of how the Nawab used the spiritual power of a deceased Sufi to help secure his political position. By claiming that the spirit of this legendary Sufi had assisted him in saving Trichinopoly from the invasion of his enemies, the Nawab was broadcasting to the public that it was he, not the Mysoreans or the Marathas, who had been chosen by the saint as the legitimate ruler of this ancient Tamil capital.[83]

Regarding the Sufis of his own lifetime, it is evident that Qadiriyya Sufis played the most important roles in the Nawab's religious network. The first example is Saiyid Shah Abd al-Qadir Mehrba Fakhri (1729-1790), whose maternal family was one of the great Sufi families of the Deccan, one that was held in high esteem by the local population for its profound mystic scholarship and spiritual powers. Around 1769, shortly after the Nawab had moved to Madras, he invited Saiyid Shah Abd al-Qadir to come from the Deccan and live near him in Mylapore. Subsequently, that Sufi master was well taken care of at the Walajah

[78] IOR, Mss Eur E/379/6, DGP, Oct. 1773, 296.
[79] Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 60.
[80] Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 167-168.
[81] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 116-117.
[82] McGilvray, "Arabs, Moors and Muslims," 442.
[83] Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 166-167.

court. He spent the rest of his life there, teaching and writing books on mysticism, and some lands in Vellore and Mylapore were granted to him.[84] The next example is that of Saiyid Shah Abd al-Latif Zawqi (1737-1780), the Qadiriyya master of a celebrated Vellore *khanaqah* (Sufi hospice) known as the Hazarat Makan. His family, which owed its pedigree to Imam Husain and Imam Hasan, had migrated from the Middle East to Delhi and then moved south to Bijapur, before finally settling in Vellore, where the father of Saiyid Zawqi—Saiyid Shah Ab al-Hasan Qurbi—founded the Hazarat Makan.[85] Saiyid Zawqi was a polymath who composed more than 150 books and made his school into an important center of learning. Other masters from this school were also venerated by the local people. The influence of the Hazarat Makan over local society and the Karnatak court was seen most clearly at the time of the Nawab's conquest of Tanjore in 1773. As it is related, when the Nawab was about to send his army to conquer it, he sought permission and blessings from that Qadiriyya master. The Sufi, in response, promised the Nawab that the fort would easily be conquered. Saiyid Zawqi also kept in regular contact not only with the Nawab but also with many other important figures at his court, such as the Nawab's two eldest sons and Muhammad Najib Khan Bahadur, the supreme military commander.[86] Maulana Baqir Agah, the prominent Arabic scholar at the Nawab's court to whom I referred earlier, was also a disciple of Saiyid Qurbi and a friend and classmate of Saiyid Zawqi.[87] Another important fact that should be noted here is that it was Sa'adat Allah Khan, the founder of the rival Nawayat dynasty, who had originally invited the family from the Deccan to Vellore, and it was the Nawayat house who consistently gave their support to the hospice.[88] The Walajah Nawab's success in bringing the Hazarat Makan into his religious network thus reflects his ability to harness one of his opponent's most important religio-political resources to support his own power and prestige.

Although the Nawab himself was firmly attached to the relatively liberal and syncretic Qadiriyya and Chishtiyya orders, he attempted to link himself to all prominent orders, including those of militant Islamic groups. The best example of the latter is Saiyid Khwaja Rahmat Allah (1699-1781), a puritanical Naqshbandiyya Sufi from Kurnool, in the Deccan, "who could not tolerate anything against the explicit orders and commandments of Allāh and

[84] Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 190-191.
[85] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 114, 153.
[86] Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 130-134, 147, 155.
[87] See more details about Maulana Baqir in Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 198-211; Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 97, 176-177.
[88] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 153.

his Apostle."[89] It is reported that Khwaja Rahmat Allah denounced all popular Muslim practices that included indulgence and extravagance in their religious ceremonies. He also vehemently attacked the carrying of *Panjas*—symbolic hands of Imam Husain—during the Muharram procession of the Shia. His extremist ideas caused some of the population living in and around his hometown—both Shia and Sunni—to take up arms against him, forcing him to flee the region. Although he had rivals, he was, at the same time, widely venerated by many others, disciples and followers. Among them was a Karnatak jagirdar of Udayagiri, who invited him to settle in Nellore, in northern Karnatak. The village where his new khanaqah was located was renamed Rahmatabad in his honor. After he arrived, various local mystic masters and students wanted to become his disciples, one of whom was Saiyid Shah Ab al-Hasan Qurbi, the Qadiriyya master of Hazarat Makan, in Vellore. When Khwaja Rahmat Allah visited Madras, the Nawab did not fail to take the opportunity to seek the prayers and blessings of this Naqshbandiyya saint. Furthermore, some time after this master's death, the Nawab ordered the construction of a huge mausoleum next to the mosque in Rahmatabad, where the Sufi's dargah was situated.[90] The Nawab also gave especial patronage to a son-in-law and disciple of Rahmat Allah, Shaykh Makhdum Abd al-Haq Sawi. Shaikh Sawi was a celebrated mystical scholar of the period who was famous as a descendent of Yusuf Adil Shah, the founder of Bijapur. In Bijapur, he had studied Islamic mystical sciences and then made pilgrimages to Mecca, Medina, and various places in South Asia, before travelling to study with Rahmat Allah. Sharing the views of his master, he infused in his disciples a strong desire to purify Sunni Islam and resist the rise of Shiism in Karnatak. Large numbers of shaykhs and saiyids in Madras and Vellore became his disciples, and he authored more than 100 works on the mystical sciences. He died some time in 1751. His body was first buried in Rahmatabad but later transferred to a cemetery in Mylapore (Madras). According to Susan Bayly, this was arranged by the Nawab following his own relocation to Madras. In 1789, the Nawab also constructed an attractive tomb over this Sufi's grave to highlight their links.[91] The Nawab's court was also known for its openness to all types of petty and less-renowned Sufis and faqirs. As Paterson describes, these people would always be received by the Nawab with the highest respect. The Nawab would seat them on the same carpet on which he sat and receive from them some enchanted cloths or consecrated cakes by touching them on his head. Many of them came to tell him their "idle dreams," in which, in

[89] Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 100 (footnote).
[90] Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 99-103; Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 180-181; Francis Robinson, *Atlas of the Islamic World Since 1500* (Facts on File, 1982), 118-119.
[91] Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 98-111; Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 180.

the Nawab's own words, "no doubt they will always dream favorably for the Nabob of the Carnatic." But as "those are good people we must give charity … none of them went back with empty hands."[92]

As discussed previously, the evidence reflects that Sufis from all orders—but particularly the Qadiriyya—were held in high regard in South India. By presenting himself as the patron and benefactor of both past and present Sufi saints, the Nawab, a recent migrant into the region, was probably able to integrate himself quickly into the local cultural landscape. As such, the Nawab seems to have used similar tactics as the Mughals, the Asafjahi rulers of Hyderabad, the Mysore sultans, and many other Indo-Islamic rulers of medieval and early modern times, who strategically linked themselves to various celebrated Sufis by claiming genealogical links, being their generous patron and/or spiritual disciples, frequenting their lodge, tomb shrines, and festivals, sponsoring their writings, and even composing books on Sufi saints and doctrines themselves. Many rulers, such as the Asafjahi rulers and Mysore's Tipu Sultan, also interred their passed-away fathers and close relatives on the ground of Sufi shrines.[93] However, the Nawab of Karnatak likely went further than many other rulers. He held in his palace the urs ceremony, which traditionally took place at the dargah of the dead saint or in a Sufi khanaqah.[94] He dressed up and wore the crown of the khilafat, prayed to the saint, preached, admitted various disciples into the orders, and claimed that he had the ability to perform karamat. Thus, it is clear that the Nawab viewed himself as a Sufi master and treated his palace as a Sufi lodge. So far, I cannot trace any contemporaneous ruler who engaged in Sufism in the same way or to the same extent as the Nawab. However, this is nothing new if one considers the earlier models of Iranian Safavid rulers—who had claimed they were the Sufis of the Safaviyya order—or the model of Emperor Akbar's Din-i Ilahi.[95] One can also link his activity to the contemporaneous model of the Farangi Mahallis, who played a crucial role at the Nawab's court. Large numbers of leading Farangi Mahallis claimed that they were the disciples of Qadariyya and Chishtiyya saints, integrated many Sufi rituals into their school, and presented themselves as both ulama and Sufi masters.[96] An important supposition by Susan Bayly, on the overlapping and neatly analogous status of a Sufi and a ruler in early modern South India, is also probably relevant here. According to Bayly, in the South, Sufis were perceived no differently from a reigning

[92] IOR, Mss Eur E/379/6, DGP, Jul. 1773, 28.
[93] See further details and examples in Green, *Making Space*, 20-26; 33-64; 181-182; 197-198; 267-268; 278-287; Yazdani, "Haidar 'Ali and Tipu Sultan," 105.
[94] See how the urs ceremony was usually held in Sufi khanaqah in: Green, *Making Space*, 35, 58, 61.
[95] Dale, *The Muslim Empires*, 92-93; Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 61.
[96] Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia*, 58-59.

monarch. In works of literature, various saints were addressed as "king," or *padshah* (emperor), creating and ruling a Muslim domain. The same term, *wilayat* (realm), was used to refer to both the spiritual domain of a Sufi and the political domain of a ruler. The dargah of a Sufi was referred to as his court and his seat of authority. The sufferings during the saint's journey were portrayed as struggles during war of conquest, and his disciples represented his army. In Tamilnadu in particular, where Muslim states were founded much later than in the north, Sufis were widely portrayed as the forebears of "real" Muslim rulers.[97] In light of the Nawab's efforts to link himself to both past and present Sufis and to represent himself as a Sufi, he may have been inspired by this prevailing concept of the Sufi-ruler, because it was a ready-made, easily-understood, and powerful form of rule that could help him gain wide acceptance and veneration from the local population. In addition to his personal taste, the Nawab's desire to favor the Qadiriyya order above all others may be seen in light of local factors. While the Chishtiyya could link him to the Mughal court, his former master Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah of the Deccan, and his own ancestors in Awadh, and the Naqshbandiyya order could link him specifically to Emperor Aurangzeb, the Qadiriyya, with its Arab orientation, was the most popular order in South Indian society, particularly in Tamilnadu.

In addition, considering the legend of Saiyid Hadrat Nathar Wali that 900 people followed him to South India and the fact that an entourage of 600 followed the Farangi Mahalli Bahr al-Ulum into the Karnatak region, the Nawab's effort to recruit talented people from northern India and beyond into Karnatak should also be brought into consideration here. Evidently, these religious figures possessed great ability to attract people. As earlier discussed, Green has proposed that Sufis saints were important helpmates for Muslim conquerors in linking the old politico-cultural centers to the new territories.[98] They could help create shared imagined religious boundaries of people from the two areas and shed the image of new terrains as far-flung and alien. In this light, the Sufis and their networks could well support the Nawab, just like the Mughal links discussed in Chapter Two, in encouraging the relocation of service people southwardly into the Karnatak region.

Shias and Hindus

As discussed earlier, in the eighteenth century, Shia-Sunni conflict became endemic in many parts of South Asia. Some religious scholars whom the Nawab embraced into his patronage

[97] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 182-184; Green also discuss the close links between saintly and kingly rituals in medieval and early modern South Asia. See: Green, *Making Space*, see: Green, *Making Space*, 20-26.
[98] Green, "Geography, Empire and Sainthood in the Eighteenth-Century Muslim Deccan," 216, 220.

were directly involved. The Farangi Mahall master Bahr al-Ulum, for example, was forced to leave Lucknow because of threats from Shia extremists. Both of the Naqshbandiyya Sufis to whom the Nawab was attached—Khwaja Rahmat Allah and Shaykh Makhdum Abd al-Haq Sawi—worked to "purify" Sunni Islam and check Shiism in South India. A Shia littérateur in the South even seriously insulted Rahmat Allah after his death by referring to him as "a wicked dog."[99] Despite being in the middle of Sunni-Shia tension, the Nawab of Karnatak chose to raise his court above such communal conflict. As such, he stood in sharp contrast to the Nishapuri rulers of Awadh, who openly sided with the Shia. The Nawab tried to demonstrate his tolerance of Shiism in various ways, inviting and patronizing scholars from both sides. As the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* describes, the ships he sent annually to Arabia were not only bound for Mecca, Medina, and other Sunni centers, but also Shia holy places in Najaf, Karbala, and Mashhad.[100] Other accounts mention his father, Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan, as having tolerated Shia believers, and Nawab Muhammad Ali as being the main patron of the Shia festival of Muharram in Madras. As the chronicle also narrates, the Nawab even pledged, from the year 1747, that he would annually erect one of the panjas—the symbolic hands used in the ceremony—himself in order to thank to Imam Husain. This was because the Nawab's first, long-awaited son was born of Khadija Begam, who was a Shia Muslim. Moreover, he was born during a holy day in Muharram, following a prayer said by Khadija Begam's uncle, Saiyid Ali Khan, to Imam Husain during the Muharram festival a year earlier.[101] Yet the tolerance of the Nawab for Shiism can also be seen in the light of necessity. Both the Nawab's mother and his queen consort, as well as their families, were followers of Shia Islam. As already discussed, members of these two families had been the main supporters of his political ambitions even before he became the Nawab. Many Indo-Arab Nawayat elites were also Shia,[102] and it can be assumed that there were many other Indo-Shia warriors and administrators working for the Nawab or living in the region.[103]

With regard to Hinduism, the sources reveal that the Nawab was extremely careful to protect Hindu sacred places and believers, and he showed no sign of discrimination between Hindu populations and Muslims. Many accounts in the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* reflect this. For example, it reports that the Nawab once passed an ancient Hindu temple in Chidambaram and

[99] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 180.
[100] Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 12.
[101] Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 7-8; Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 174.
[102] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 174.
[103] According to Karen Leonard, while the Deccan Nizams were Turkic-Sunnis, a large numbers of Muslim nobles were Shia and their numbers rose towards the end of the eighteenth century. Many of them were from families once associated with the sultanates of Bijapur and Golconda. The same may have occurred in the Karnatak court, considering the existence of many Indo-Muslim nobles who migrated from the Deccan into the Karnatak during that century. See: Leonard, "Hyderabad Political System and Its Participants," 581.

discovered that the place was being used by a French army as a weapons store. He immediately ordered his troops to expel the French, and then "gave presents to the inhabitants, honored them, and made them feel happy."[104] The *Ruznama* also records the Nawab's orders to his Muslim military leaders to take care that all Hindu places of worship be respected, that the sepoys did not enter temples, and that Hindu festivals be organized as usual.[105] And it is not only in court literature, but in Paterson's diary, too, that reports of the Nawab's many generous acts towards the Hindus can be found. When the Nawab sent a force to invade Ramnad in 1772, for example, he ordered that a land contract (*cowle*) be given as a gift to the leader of Rameswaram Island, where was situated one of the most important Hindu pagodas. He also gave assurances to the local people that they could exercise their religion freely and enjoy former privileges, and that the killing of cows would be banned. Also, the Europeans, including his British allies, were not allowed to occupy their lands.[106] Similar promises not to let the Europeans enter their lands and kill bullocks were also given to the Hindu populations of Tanjore after its conquest.[107] Furthermore, the *Ruznama* records that the Nawab granted an interview to a Hindu holy man, Sadhu from Tirupati, in the Chepauk Palace.[108] Furthermore, according to Susan Bayly, the Nawab's name appears as a benefactor in the records of various Hindu shrines throughout Karnatak. His generosity was extraordinary when compared to that of other Muslim rulers of the time; as such, he was remembered by many Hindu subjects in far more positive a light than were the Nawayat Nawabs and Mysore sultans. The records of the Tirupati temple, for example, mention the first Nawayat Nawab as someone who dramatically reduced the allowance of the temple to one-sixteenth of the amount that had been set by the former Hindu rajas, and Tipu Sultan was generally remembered as a Brahmin-killer and a despoiler of temples. [109]

Another good example of the Nawab's approach to Hinduism can be seen in his acts during the Dasara, one of the biggest annual Hindu festivals. Previously, Hindu rulers and courts had played significant roles in this festival. For example, all Hindu rajas would take the opportunity to display publicly their wealth, royal magnificence, and strength of their arms, while all subordinate chiefs were required to be present to pay homage to their overlords, and gifts were exchanged between them.[110] With some exceptions (e.g. Emperor

[104] Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 244.
[105] TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 66, *Ruznama*, 3 and 5 Oct. 1773.
[106] IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Nov. 1772, 36.
[107] IOR, Mss Eur E/379/6, DGP, Sep. 1773, 232-233.
[108] TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 68, *Ruznama*, 23 Feb. 1775.
[109] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 165-182.
[110] Brittlebank, "Assertion," 269.

Aurangzeb), the Muslim overlords usually allowed this event to be celebrated by their Hindu subordinates. As Brittlebank suggests, even the eighteenth-century Mysore rulers Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan, who were known as Brahmin killers, allowed this festival's ceremonies to be performed by the captive Wodeyar rajas in order to prevent revolts by the people of Mysore. The fact that the rituals were allowed to be organized at the sultans' consent also signified their superiority over the Hindu rulers.[111] Probably having the same aims as the Mysore sultans, Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan allowed the festival to be celebrated fully throughout Karnatak, and shortly after he had conquered Tanjore, used the occasion to publicly underscore his generosity towards the Hindus by announcing that he was allowing the Tanjore raja to perform all the public ceremonies of this festival, as was customary.[112] Moreover, some elements of the festival were even observed in the Nawab's palace in Madras. Deepavali—or the Ayudhaya Puja—the main day of the festival, was treated as a court holiday so all Hindus could fully participate in and celebrate their religious rites. Perhaps more importantly, the day before this main holiday, the Hindu officers and other Hindu elites in the region would come to the Nawab's court, offer nadhr to the Muslim ruler, and receive his blessing as part of the celebrations for their holy festival.[113]

The large number of Hindu servants at his court and the fact that the majority of the local population were Hindus are the simplest explanations for the Nawab's displays of respect and tolerance towards their religion. However, to these I would add a challenge that the Nawab was facing, namely the military expansion of the Marathas. From the time that Shivaji had founded the Maratha state, the Maratha rulers had used the idea that they were the upholders of dharma and the protectors of gods and Brahmins (from the intrusions of both Muslims and Europeans) as the principal means of legitimizing their territorial expansion.[114] There are signs that, in my opinion, could be read as the Nawab competing with the Marathas for the role of protector of Hinduism in Karnatak. In 1759, a Maratha army seized the famous Tirupati temple in northern Tamilnadu, and the Nawab-EIC alliance dispatched a force of 300 sepoys to retake the place. As is reported in an Arcot gazetteer from a later date, the sepoy army faced a significant problem when it neared the temple, because only 80 troops were "clean caste" Hindus and therefore, according to Hindu custom, only they were allowed to ascend the sacred hill on which the temple was situated. When they asked for reinforcements,

[111] Brittlebank, "Assertion," 270.
[112] TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 66, *Ruznama*, 22 Sep.1773.
[113] TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 66, *Ruznama*, 16 Oct. 1773; bundle 68, 13-15 Oct., 4 Nov. 1774. The court also did not operate during the Sankurathi festival (pongal) holiday; see: bundle 68, *Ruznama*, 11 Jan. 1775.
[114] See the Maratha concepts of kingship in: Wink, *Land and Sovereignty*, 33, 48-49.

the EIC authorities repeated the mistake by sending more Muslim and low-caste Hindu sepoys to the place. Eventually, the Nawab-EIC joint force decided on a change of plan in order to avoid making a religious insult to the famous Indic shrine.[115] This suggests that the Nawab would not allow any blemish on his record as protector of Hindu temples, even if it meant sacrificing an immediate military advantage. Such is even more significant considering Susan Bayly's remark that this Tirupati temple was situated in a Poligar area and was usually visited by various groups of low-caste forest warriors who considered Brahmanical ideals of purity relatively unimportant.[116] As such, it is likely that the perception of Brahmanical purity by the Muslim Nawab and his British ally was unusual in this case. It is reasonable to assume that the Nawab's intention was to contrast his approach with the improper behavior of the Marathas, whose position in the Indic hierarchy was contested. The Marathas claimed that they were Kshatriya, but many of their contemporaries, both Hindu and Muslim, considered them low peasants of Shudra origin, and, as such, they should not have been allowed to ascend the sacred hill.

Another ideological contest between the Nawab and the Marathas occurred when civil war broke out in the Maratha state around 1773. Two Maratha leaders—Raganatrow and his nephew Narinrow—were in conflict, and this ended in the death of Narinrow. This was discussed in great detail at the Karnatak court and, presumably, the whole of South India during this period. The British secretary Paterson learned some parts of the story from the Nawab and others from Brahmin Venkatachalam; this revolved around how Raganatrow had deceitfully and cruelly murdered his nephew by conspiring with Mohamed Yusuf, Narinrow's chief bodyguard. As the event was vividly described by Venkatachalam, during the struggle that led to his death, Narinrow ran into the house where the sacred cows were kept and then to the Brahmin priests of the palace, seeking shelter. However, the conspirators followed him and killed both the cows and the Brahmins who had attempted to intercede for him. The Nawab then used this story as a means of blackening the reputation of the Maratha leader Raganatrow, saying that Brahmins—presumably from all over South India—were livid as a result of these murders and had declared that such a wicked act (by Raganatrow) had never happened in their caste before. They even declared that Raganatrow would live no longer than six months.[117] Whether and to what extent the story of Raganatrow corresponded with historical reality notwithstanding, the circulation of this anecdote in Karnatak certainly

[115] Fox, *North Arcot*, 73-74.
[116] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 45, 167.
[117] IOR, Mss Eur E/379/6, DGP, Sep. 1773, 206-207; E/379/7, DGP, Jan. 1774, 196-197.

helped sharpen the Nawab's image as a follower of Hindu dharma and rule, and as "the protector of gods, brahmans, holy places and the cow."[118]

[118] Wink, *Land and Sovereignty*, 48.