

## ATTITUDE TOWARDS DISEASES DURING THE SULTANATE PERIOD

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### **Abstract**

This paper seeks to examine the manifold superstitions, different types of local treatments and spiritual methods for the treatment of various diseases during the period of the Sultanate of Delhi. Contemporary historical accounts, especially *malfuzat* literature, allude to contemporary social superstitious beliefs and practices, cures of diseases, spiritual healing, and local treatment. Even the literate, rational, and sceptical people were unable to withstand and check the widespread nature of these practices, which led to practices like visiting the graves and tombs for recovery from illness, belief in charms, amulets (naqsh), and talismans (tawidh) for curing diseases, prayers and faith in deities for recovery from illness, belief in black magic, witchcraft, and evil eye as a cause of disease, and belief in astrology and horoscopes became common. Sufi Shaikhs played an essential role as spiritual healers. Superstitious beliefs, local treatments, and spiritual healing methods regarding the causes and cures of various diseases became prevalent among the common masses. In the past, people used magical and exorcist practices to eliminate illnesses. Even though there has been continuous progress in the medical sciences for curing various ailments, these beliefs were ingrained in people's minds and intensely practised by the people throughout the period of the Delhi Sultanate. It needs to be noted however that being religious increases a patient's satisfaction and adherence to treatment, spiritual healing and the therapeutic powers of reciting the Quranic verses. The benefits derived from reciting surahs of the Holy Qur'an and Hadith while praying, have beneficial therapeutic outcomes. Numerous medical practitioners emerged in Sultanate society due to the prevalence of superstition and local healing methods. Divine healers boasted about their supernatural diagnostic powers, while witch doctors were responsible for exorcising evil spirits from their patients.

**Keywords:** *Spiritual Healing ('ilaj-i-ruhani), Superstition, Local Treatments, Visiting Graves, Witchcraft, Black Magic, Evil Eye, Charms, Amulets (Naqsh), Talisman (ta'widh), Horoscopes, Quranic Verses.*

Contemporary historical accounts, especially *mal'fuzat* literature, allude to contemporary social superstitious beliefs and practices, cures of diseases, spiritual healing, and local treatment. These widespread practices were so pervasive that even literate, rational, and sceptical people could not withstand them or verify their legitimacy. The practices like visiting the graves and tombs for recovery from illness, belief in charms, amulets (*naqsh*), and talismans (*ta'widh*) for curing diseases, prayers and faith in deities for recovery from illness, belief in black magic, witchcraft, and evil eye as a cause of disease, and belief in astrology and horoscopes were popular among the masses during the period of Delhi Sultanate. This paper seeks to examine the manifold superstitions, different types of local treatments, and spiritual methods for the treatment of various diseases during the period of the Sultanate of Delhi.

Along with scientific treatment, people had superstitious beliefs regarding the cause and cure of diseases, as sometimes the skill of a medical practitioner was attributed to divine power. For example, while discussing the skill of an expert physician in treating specific ailments, Hasan Nizami writes that the physician of an enlightened mind displayed extraordinary talent in curing diseases. He was as (God forbid) successful as Jesus in treating various diseases. By his perfect mastery of medical science, he could remove the mark of leprosy from the face of the moon, and by his long experience, he could cure the sun of its jaundice. By the way, he cured ailments and restored patients to normal health. He proved the truth of the adage that the Holy Ghost helped him. Moreover, Hasan Nizami mentions the recovery of Sultan Qutbuddin Aibek from illness and writes that the physician acting on the dictum of the Prophet of Islam ﷺ that there is a remedy for every ailment, judiciously chose and mixed several ingredients, liquid as well as solid, and thus prepared a cathartic medicine in the form of a drink which suited the temperament of Sultan and which he duly prescribed for him. It is said that Sultan Qutbuddin Aibek got cured by the medicine prescribed by a skilled physician and by the prayers of a set of people whose tongues adorned by their invocations to God with the ornament of the blessings of true devotees answered.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Hasan Nizami highlights that besides scientific treatment methods, people had firm irrational beliefs about curing ailments. This view of the thirteenth-century scholar proved true in *Tarikh-i-Firozshahi*, a fourteenth-century work by Shams Siraj Afif, who elaborates that out of 18,000 diseases in all, expert physicians didn't know anything about six

thousand diseases. They could recognise only 6,000 diseases without knowing their treatment. And it was about another 6,000 diseases that the physicians could correctly diagnose and prescribe appropriate medicines for treatment. Thus, people were forced to resort to unscientific therapies for various ailments when the proper cure was unavailable.<sup>2</sup> It shows that besides scientific treatment methods, people utilised unscientific methods for curing diseases.

In the Sultanate period, people believed in superstition and good and bad omens. Different superstitions had been prevalent in the Sultanate society as remedies for various ailments. For the elites, a version of Galenic medicine was known as *Tibb-i-Yunani*. Several Sultanate sources mention the practice of *Tibb-i-Yunani*, such as *Tarikh-i-Firozshahi* of Zia-ud-Din Barani and *Sirat-i-Firozshahi* by an anonymous author. Besides, several works related to *Tibb-i-Yunani* were compiled, and other works associated with *Ayurveda* have been translated into Persian. But unfortunately, neither of these medical works nor the physicians affected the largest segment of the common masses during the Sultanate period. There were two popular medicines for the ordinary people: *Tibb-i-Nabawi*<sup>3</sup> (medicine inscriptively validated concerning the dicta of Prophet Muhammad Peace be upon him, his progeny and descendants) and *ayurveda* (an indigenous system based on Atharva Veda and developed by several classical Indian practitioners).

The physician (expert in *tibb-i-yunani* or *tibb-i-nabawi*) was not the sole recourse to suffering from physical and psychological afflictions. In that case, the Sufi saints functioned as spiritual healers. *Malfuzat* literature of the period highlights the function of the Sufi saints as healers. Numerous anecdotes depict Sufi Shaikhs as one of the restorers of the sick to health-conscious visitors. The details of the processes with which they were healed are recorded in some detail.

Visiting the tombs and graves of Sufi saints and martyrs to get their blessings to recover from various ailments was a common practice. Amir Hasan Sijzi, in his discourse on the subject of visiting graves, mentions that once the mother of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya fell ill, so she advised Shaikh Nizamuddin to visit the graves of specific martyrs (*shaheed*) and *walis* and offer prayers and blessings for recovery from illness. As directed, he visited the grave and informed his mother about the visit. At every visit, he found that her mother's illness alleviated a bit, and a marked relief was visible. In another anecdote, he referred to the illness of Shaikh-ul Islam Fariduddin of Ajodhan. Shaikh also had sent him several times to visit the graves of martyrs who were buried there.

After visiting the graves, when he returned to his presence, the Shaikh observed that his prayers had produced no effect, and he felt no relief from his illness. This time his friend responded that they were deficient and imperfect, and the Shaikh was perfect in his spirituality.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, Ibn Battuta recounts Prince Khizr Khan's pilgrimage to the tomb of the fallen warriors in Indpat, where he solemnly committed to traverse the distance and implore divine intervention for the recovery of his father, Sultan Alauddin Khilji.<sup>5</sup> Thus, tombs of saints and *pirs* have been frequently visited to offer *Fatihah* (prayer) and invoke their blessings for recovery from illness. After recovering from illness, people distributed money, food, and raiment among people experiencing poverty.<sup>6</sup> Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq visited Amir Bakht, also known as Sharaf-ul-Mulk al Khurasani, during his illness. The Sultan commanded that Amir be weighed against gold, which was given away in charity for his recovery.<sup>7</sup>

The anonymous author of *Sirat-i-Firoz Shahi*, while referring to the suffering of Sultan Shamsuddin of Lakhnauti from leprosy, mentions his visit to the tomb of Sipahsalar Mas'ud Ghazi at Bahraich for recovery from this contagious disease. At this shrine, the leprous persons took the sacred dust from the vestibule, besmeared it on their bodies, and eventually got relief from the disease.<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, it is further recorded that when a devout Hindu died, his body was burned, and the ashes were believed to prevent illness and provide relief.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, Sufism was the depository of a different *ilaj-i-ruhani* (spiritual-healing) tradition based on *tibb-i-nabawi* (Prophetic medicine), the medical sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (Upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace) About methods and rituals of *ilaj-i-ruhani* and the roles of Sufi Shaikhs as spiritual healers, many references have been found in the Indian *malfuz* and *tazkira* literature of the Sultanate period.<sup>10</sup>

The Sufis used prayers, medicines, specific practices, and abstention from certain things in treating diseases. These practices are derived from the primary religious injunctions of the Holy Qur'an. It includes not only abstaining from pork and alcohol, performing daily prayers, and cleansing the body by ablutions, but many other things. However, Prophet himself encouraged the treatment of various illnesses by using medicines, including foods and herbs, for excellent health, but for the Sufis, prayer was the most superior kind of medicine. Sufis employ *ta'widh*, which involves specific Qur'anic verses and names of God's attributes, for healing in addition to their daily prayers. In addition

to the various prayers performed by the Sufis daily, and with their knowledge of specific verses of the Qur'an and the names of multiple attributes of God, they combined them in particular ways to cure various ailments. This form of healing is called the art of *ta'widh*. Thus, Sufi khanqahs emerged as an institution that offered comprehensive religious, social, economic, and mental support and provided remedies for illness to individuals from all castes and religions, including those who were sick, needy, and mentally disturbed.

Wearing amulets and talismans and belief in charms to cure diseases were other superstitious practices prevalent during the Sultanate period. Amulets were worn by people on their arms to avert calamities and were supposed to have the efficacy of healing diseases.<sup>11</sup> Sufi saints prepared *naqsh* (charms) and *ta'widh* (talismans) and gave them to those who desired them. Pregnant women wore amulets for easy and safe delivery.<sup>12</sup> Famous Sufi saint Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi prepared such amulets and charms at the instance of his *pir*. When questioned, he said that *naqsh* (amulet) had *Allah kafi*, *Allah shafi*, and *Allah wafi* (God is sufficient God is healing and God is comprehensive). He used to preserve the fallen hair of his *Pir* with his permission and used it for treating people suffering from diseases.<sup>13</sup> A particular weaver is recorded as suffering from melancholia for which his brother, Raji, obtained an amulet from the Chishti Saint of Gangoh, which cured him.<sup>14</sup> There are references to professional amulet makers in Lahore.<sup>15</sup> There are many references to weird practices people believed in, like keeping a small piece of the skin of a red deer as a charm against epileptic fits and also to guard against the influence of evil spirits.<sup>16</sup> The people wore amulets to drive away evil spirits.<sup>17</sup>

The local non-medical treatments were so prevalent in society that even in the medical texts, talismans, charms, and Quranic verses were prescribed for treating various illnesses and diseases along with the prescribed medication. In his chapters on diseases and treatment, the author of *Majmua-i-Ziae*, compiled in the early 14th Century, mentions different kinds of charms, magic, and talismans in treating various diseases and the influence of other planets and stars. This work also contains several formulae, amulets, and incantations to be used in case of illness.<sup>18</sup> Another remarkable work of this kind is *Rahat al-insan*, composed in 1376 A.D. by Ilyas ibn Shihab and dedicated to Firoz Shah. It describes common medical topics and prescriptions from both *Unani* and *Ayurveda* medicine. It also advises amulets, charms, talismans and formulas from the Quranic verses for every disease. The author explains his decision to include such topics in his treatise with an explanation that

contemporary physicians were unable to treat many diseases as they did not know how to get rid of evil spirits, which was the cause of all diseases according to the belief of most people. So, the people possessed by spirits were unlikely to be cured by the physician's treatment.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, a famous medicinal work compiled during the Lodi period by Hakim Bhua, popularly known as *Ma'adan-ush Shifa-i Sikandar Shahi*, mentions the Quranic verses to be recited for the cure of assorted diseases several times. This work contains curious calligraphic writings, amulets, and incantations and prescribes *ta'widh* for sickness. A separate section of the book deals with foretelling whether the patient will survive or not, and recommends various ways to work this out. For example, the work suggests that the physician should keep his left hand on the patient's navel and if the navel is felt to shake or make any movement, it is a sure sign of recovery (*agar naf bejunbad dalili sehat bashad*). Another method is throwing the patient's nails into the water: if they sink below the surface, the patient will survive; if the nail floats on the surface or swims, the patient was doomed to die. It also proposed that the physician should study the patient's breathing pattern. If breathing from the left side is maintained, there is hope for the patient's life. Chapter 16 of the first section (comprising 32 *fasls*) deals with good and bad omens for recovery.<sup>20</sup> However, this work compiled by Mian Bhua in 918/1513 A. D. during the reign of Sikandar Shah Lodi is one of the most widely known and frequently quoted works. Still, some of its sections have peculiarities not yet well enough explored.

There are references showing people being cured with amulets. In a discourse on the supplication, Nizamuddin Auliya narrated the story of one of his neighbours, Muhammad, in the city where he previously lived. Each year he suffered much from *naru* (a kind of skin disease). Once, Khwaja Nizamuddin Auliya planned to visit Shaikh-ul-Islam Fariduddin, and his neighbour asked him to tell Shaikh-ul-Islam about his disease and the intensity of suffering caused by it and bring *ta'widh* from him. On reaching Ajodhan, Khwaja met the Sheikh, informed him of his neighbour's condition, and asked for a *ta'widh*. The Sheikh asked him to write it out himself. As commanded, Khwaja prepared the *ta'widh* and placed it in the holy hand of the Sheikh, who saw it and asked him to give it to his neighbour. On returning from Ajodhan, he handed it over to Muhammad. It is further recorded that getting the amulet proved a definite cure, and he never suffered from the disease again in his life.<sup>21</sup> In continuation of his discourse, Nizamuddin Auliya said that once he was present at Shaikh Fariduddin's *majlis*, he saw a curl fall from his beard and settle down on his bosom. He asked the Sheikh if he could have it,

kept it as a *ta'widh*, took the curl with all due respect, folded in the garment, and brought it home. Khwajah narrates that he had experienced the tremendous effect of that one holy curl, and thenceforward, whosoever in grief and affliction came to him asking for *ta'widh*, he gave curl to him. They kept it with them till they were cured or relieved of their suffering. This became almost customary with him until one of his friends, Tajuddin Meenai, asked him for a *ta'widh* for his ailing child. But unfortunately, he had to go disappointed because Khwaja Nizamuddin had already lost that curl, thus, could not help the child of his friend who died of his ailment.<sup>22</sup>

The Quranic verses were also recited, particularly *Surah-i-Fatihah*. It was repeated one hundred thousand times for recovery from illness.<sup>23</sup> It is recorded that once Imam Nasiri fell ill, suffering from apoplexy. His relatives and friends buried him, thinking that he was dead. In the night, he became conscious and found himself in the grave. In the state of perplexity and helplessness, he remembered that one who recited the *Surah-i-Yasin* forty times in distress and misfortunes would be safely extricated from the problematic situation. He started reciting the *surah* and came out of the grave stealthily after completing the *surah's* recitation.<sup>24</sup> There was mention of suffering caused by *dunbal* and *naru*. Khwaja Nizamuddin said that the one who in the *sunnah rakats* of the 'Asr prayer recited *Surah al-Buruj*<sup>25</sup> remained protected from *dunbal* (acne or boil), and as *naru* also came under the same category of boils, it was hoped that one might be protected from that also.<sup>26</sup> Amir Hasan Sijzi records that once, he had an abscess in one of his toes, which gave him acute pain, and because of that, he was unable to attend the *majlis* of Khwajah Nizamuddin Auliya. One day when he went to pay his respects to him, he apprised him of the reason for his absence. The Khwajah asked him whether it was *naru* (guinea worm) or something else. He submitted that it was not *naru*. Suddenly, there was swelling, and because of this, he felt excruciating pain. Khwajah asked him whether he had ever suffered from *naru*. Sijzi replied that he had it around five years ago at that time. Khwajah suggested that he recite *Surah-al-Buruj* in *Sunnat rakats*<sup>27</sup> of *asr* (afternoon) prayer as a preventive against *dunbal* (acne or boil), and, as *naru* was of the same category, it was hoped that it would serve as a prophylactic against it also.<sup>28</sup> The Sufis have accumulated experience confirming that reciting *Surah al-Fatihah* with true faith and sincere conviction can cure all types of maladies, whether spiritual or worldly, external or internal. Almost all *ta'widh* include the *Surah al-Fatihah* in their writing. All six authentic (*Sahih*) *Hadith* books report that the *Sahaba* (Companions of the Prophet) used to recite *Surah al-Fatihah* to treat diseases affecting physical and mental health. According

to the Holy Prophet ﷺ *Surah al-Fatihah* worked as a balm for all ailments. Thus, the importance of *Surah al-Fatihah* can be better understood from this hadith of Prophet Muhammad (upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace). Accordingly, Shaikh Mo‘inuddin Chishti claimed that reciting *Surah al-Fatihah* continuously is a guaranteed cure for any need.

Not only the Quranic verses but *hadith* were also prescribed for the treatment of the sick. Speaking about the virtues and excellence of *hadith* Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya refers that once Maulana Raziuddin Nishapuri fell ill and his illness was prolonged. A *danishmand*, who happened to be his neighbour, paid a visit to him and found him in a critical condition. He sat close to the pillow of the sick Maulana and read out the *hadith* ‘Said the Prophet (Peace be upon him) that speaking evil of an absent person was more outrageous than adultery.’ Maulana Raziuddin, though at the moment in the agony of his illness, asked the *danishmand* as to how he would explain the narration of the *hadith* at a time when there was no occasion to make mention of adultery or speaking evil of any absent person. *Danishmand* replied that he did not bother about the advisability of reciting the *hadith*. He had heard that if the sick person’s side recites a sahih hadith, he recovers from his sickness. Thus, the *hadith*, which he had repeated, wishing the recovery (of Maulana) from sickness, had regained his health. After that, Maulana said nothing and gradually recovered from his illness.<sup>29</sup>

People had firm faith in prayers for recovery from illness. An anecdote in *Fawa'id al-Fu'ad* mentions that once Sheikh Nizamuddin al-Muayyid<sup>30</sup> fell ill and he called Shaikh Shahi Muyatab of Badaun and asked him to pray with all his spiritual powers for his recovery from illness. Khwajah Shahi apologised and said that he himself was a man of piety and was asking him, just a commoner, to pray for him. He requested him not to say that anymore. But Shaikh Nizamuddin was not prepared to listen to him and insisted that he should pray for his recovery. Khwajah Shahi, realising that there was no way out, yielded and asked him to call two of his friends; one was a righteous man known as Sharaf and the other a tailor for his assistance. Both persons were brought; thus, all three engaged themselves in praying, and Shaikh Nizamuddin al-Muayyid recovered from his illness.<sup>31</sup> Khwaja further referred to the miraculous powers of Khwaja Shahi and said that many a time, he had told people that if anyone confronted a matter of grave importance after death, he should be advised to visit the grave of Khwaja Shahi continuously for three days. And if the case was not settled to his satisfaction, he should



also visit his grave on the fourth day. Again, if his desire was still unfulfilled, he should break the bricks of his tombs into pieces.<sup>32</sup>

Once, Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya mentions the illness of Shaikh-ul-Islam Fariduddin, from which he never recovered. In this very period of illness, he asked Shaikh Nizamuddin and some other friends to retire to a particular chamber, be awake throughout the night and pray for his recovery. They spent the whole night praying for the health and recovery of Shaikh-ul-Islam from illness. The prayer did not produce any positive effect because the persons who prayed considered themselves deficient and imperfect. In contrast, the Shaikh for whom they were praying was perfect and a saint. So hesitantly, they responded how can the prayers of the poor like them regarding saints be favourably answered? Thus, his illness seemed incurable and grew from bad to worse.<sup>33</sup>

Biographies and *malfizat* of the Sultanate period contain some peculiar descriptions of the inner conditions of the Shaikh during his routine life in contact with the sufferings of the people that reveal the state of profound empathy developed by Sufis towards human anguish. There is an anecdote of Shaikh Fariduddin Ganj-i-Shakar, reported in *Siyar-ul-Auliya*, which recalls the experience of a wounded surgeon, the healer who himself lives in a state of deep pain. It is recorded that once Muhammad Shah Ghuri, a disciple of the Shaikh, came to him in a profound state of sadness. Shaikh asked him about the matter, to which he replied that his brother was in the agony of death, and since he left him, he might already have died. Because of this reason, he was so disturbed. Shaikh replied that he had felt this way but never shared it with anyone. Then Shaikh told him to go to his brother, who would recover. Muhammad Shah Ghuri left the presence of the Shaikh and returned home, where he found his brother sitting up and eating food.<sup>34</sup>

Interestingly, there is an anecdote regarding a *darwesh* who asked people to make one who suffered from pain in one's stomach eat tripe, as that would cure him of the pain and advised to give roasted head to one afflicted with headache. As mentioned, whatever he said came to be true. Shaikh Ali Shoridah asked him to abstain from saying things like that, warning him that might prove harmful to him, and it so happened. The *darwesh* was afflicted with a disease. Shaikh went to him and said that he had already warned him and had suggested giving up the practice of saying such things as that might do some harm to him. But *darwesh* had ignored his advice; he had been afflicted by the trouble he suffered. Now *darwesh* admitted his fault and requested Shaikh to pray for restoring his health. But Shaikh did not pray, and the *darwesh* died of his

illness.<sup>35</sup> This anecdote clarifies that Sufis prescribed Quranic ayats, charms, talismans, and prayers, i.e., *ilaj-i-ruhani*, for various sicknesses and diseases; they did not support such non-medical local treatments.

Muhammad Awfi, who lived during the reign of Iltutmish, in his book *Jawami-u'l Hikayat* relates an exciting episode regarding procuring longevity that a mission was sent to India by a certain chief of Turkistan to procure drugs that could prolong human life.<sup>36</sup> Unlike that, Hasan Sijzi records that once Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya said that there was a prayer for the longevity of life, which was performed in the month of *Rajab*. Shaikh Badruddin Ghaznavi always performed that *namaz* but the year Shaikh died, he discontinued performing that *namaz*. When he was asked the reason for discontinuing that *namaz*, he replied that he thought his end was near at hand, and the same year, he died.<sup>37</sup>

In his *Nuh Sipihir*, Amir Khusrau unequivocally praises Hindustan. He highlights the inhabitants' exceptional abilities in sorcery and enchantment, the country's favourable climate, diverse animal life, and rich learning opportunities. According to his claim, individuals in India can revive a man who has been rendered speechless, due to a snake bite even after six months. This is achieved by placing him on an eastward flowing river, where he is carried towards Kamru's borders until an experienced witch can breathe life back into him. Brahmanas possessed a secret power by which they could bring a man to life even after his head had been cut off. Khusrau further mentions that when one is not alert, a demon enters their head and drinks as much wine as it desires. The person speaks in this state, and their words will likely come true. They could also procure longevity by diminishing the daily number of breaths. A *yogi* could live to an age of more than three hundred and fifty years by restraining his breath in this way. The Yogis, particularly those, who lived in the hills of Kashmir, could inflate the bodies of other persons with their own breath. They could magically convert themselves into wolves, dogs, and cats. They could also transform the blood from one's body with their power and infuse it again. Significantly, according to Amir Khusrau, these yogis could also affect a man, irrespective of his age, with bodily diseases while moving only. According to Khusrau, only those who have witnessed it can genuinely believe this.<sup>38</sup>

The conviction that Black Magic, witchcraft, and such could cause disease was firmly entrenched even in otherwise logical minds. Despite the stature of some prominent intellectuals of that era, they could not overcome this belief. Widespread faith in witchcraft, sorcery, and magic led people to believe these practices bring serious illnesses.

Shaikh Sharfuddin Yahya Maneri, a prominent Sufi saint from Bihar, firmly believed that witchcraft was the work of Satan. He witnessed a calf writhing on the ground and dying without apparent reason. Some women in the neighbourhood attributed it to the enchantment practised by a woman from the cowherd class who was taken to be a *kaftar*.<sup>39</sup> This means that the belief in witchcraft was common. It was believed that enchantment practised by women presumed to be witches made people suffer from certain diseases. Ibn Battuta mentions a witch who was burnt alive for her incantation. He writes that a woman practising such things was called *kaftar*. One day one such woman was brought to him, and people said she had eaten a boy's heart. He ordered them to take her to Sultan's lieutenant, who commanded that she should be burnt alive. When she was burnt, her ashes were collected by the men and women of the town as they believed that anyone who fumigated himself with those ashes was safe against *kaftar's* enchantments during that year.<sup>40</sup>

Amir Khusrau mentioned people turning invisible with a magic paste applied to their eyes.<sup>41</sup> *Malfuzat* literature records many anecdotes referring to the effects of magic. Hamid Qalandar mentions that once upon getting ill, the disease of Baba Farid could not be diagnosed. Badrud Din Sulaiman, son of Baba Farid, dreamt that the cause of the illness of his father was his victimisation of magic in Ajodhan. In his dream, he was instructed to recite a particular verse of the Quran near the grave of Shahab. He did as required, and during the excavation of the ground, he discovered a flour-made figurine with horse hair tied around it and pierced by a needle, which was human-shaped. The health of the Shaikh improved after each needle was extracted. When the figurine was broken into pieces and thrown into the water, Shaikh completely recovered. Shihab, a magician from Ajodhan, was once accused of causing Farid-Ganj-i-Shakar's prolonged illness.<sup>42</sup> There is another essential reference about Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya, who is said to have become the victim of black magic or incantation, which made him seriously ill for two months. A man, an exorcism expert, was called for his cure. He was widely known for his expertise in finding materials that might signify that some black magic had been practised. The man came and started looking around in front of the house door. He repeated, taking some clay from the ground and smelling it. At last, he stopped at a particular place, took some clay from there, smelled it, and asked the people to dig therein. They searched the area until they found evidence of black magic in the form of a figure made of mashed flour. Since then, Khawaja began to feel some relief. The man said he was well versed in the art and even offered to reveal the name of the person who had subjected him to black magic if

he wished to know it, but Nizamuddin Auliya forbade him to do so.<sup>43</sup> In some instances, the state also resorted to prosecuting a person involved in such magical practices, as in the case of Sheikh Fariduddin. His illness was found to be subjected to black magic, and the names of the persons responsible for that heinous act had also come to light. The chief magistrate and other officials at Ajodhan sent those persons to the great Sheikh and asked him how they should be dealt with. But Sheikh said they should be spared as he had already forgiven them.<sup>44</sup>

Belief in the evil or malignant eye (*nazr-i-bad*) was also widely prevalent. People were afraid of *nazr-i-bad*. It was believed that the evil eye had adverse effects.<sup>45</sup> It was thought that the evil eye and magic had some truth.<sup>46</sup> It (*nazr-i-bad*) causes considerable harm to people, especially young ones. There are many such references where people were looked upon for superstitious ways of treatment instead of consulting medical experts considering the cause of illness as *ashob-i-chashm* and *nazr-i-bad* (malignant eyes). Hasan Nizami mentions the evil eye as the cause of the illness of Qutbuddin Aibek that, unfortunately, all of a sudden, a calamity took place due to the effect of the evil eye and of the vicissitudes of hostile times; Qutbuddin Aibek was afflicted with weakness and debility.<sup>47</sup>

It was common for people to believe that evil spirits, particularly children, cause suffering. Therefore, they took measures to protect their children against them by keeping the skin of red deer as a charm against epileptic fits and to guard against the impact of evil spirits. At the same time, amulets were worn as a means of healing diseases and avoiding calamities.<sup>48</sup> Further, Hasan Sijzi shares an intriguing anecdote about how Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya successfully cured a minor child of discomfort suspected to be caused by evil spirits.<sup>49</sup> It suggests that physical ailments were thought to be caused by evil spirits. In addition to that, Ikhtisan's reference to the *Hirz-i-Yamini* charm worn on the right hand for protection conveys the idea that physical ailments were believed to be the result of evil spirits.<sup>50</sup> Even the suffering from hallucinations was also dealt with the superstitious pattern. Ahmad Yadgar records an incident of Mulla Abdul Mumin of old Delhi, a man of great wisdom who once ignited a lamp at night. As a result, two ghastly figures materialised from the lamp and were wrongly assumed to be the attendants of the light.<sup>51</sup> Parents were compelled to safeguard their children against malevolent spirits, as the populace was plagued with fear.

The ruling class was also interested in astrology and horoscopes.<sup>52</sup> When Sultan Iltutmish returned from Banian, having fallen

seriously ill, the consultation of the astrologers chose the time of his entry to Delhi.<sup>53</sup> Minhaj relates an interesting episode of the reign of Bakhtiyar Khalji regarding Rai Lakhmaniya, who ruled for eighty years. When Rai's father died, his mother was pregnant, so the crown was placed on her belly. Great men pledged loyalty to her. Before Queen's due date, astrologers and Brahmins warned that if the child were born at that moment, he would not become a sovereign. They suggested that the child would reign for eighty years if the birth occurred two hours later. On hearing the opinion of the astrologers, Queen decided to delay her delivery two hours late by ordering her legs to be tied together and caused herself to be hung with her head downwards. The astrologers were, thus, instructed to monitor for the correct delivery time. On getting the confirmation about the right time, she had herself taken down and gave birth to Rai Lakhmaniya.<sup>54</sup>

Firoz Shah was keenly interested in astronomy and put his faith in omens, auguries, amulets, and charms.<sup>55</sup> Also, people used to call snake charmers when a snake bit a person and demanded vast sums of money. The snake charmer used to chant a few words, and the snake came and started sucking the poison from the wound. After that, the snake returned, and the patient recovered.<sup>56</sup> Reciting a specific verse from the Quran three times over water was considered imperative in the event of a snake bite. It was a good sign if the patient could sip from the water.<sup>57</sup> Hindus used to venerate oxen and drink their urine to obtain blessings and for a cure when they fell sick.<sup>58</sup> Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya believed that one did not know that the suffering that one had to undergo would be the cause of one's happiness and safety in the future. In this regard, he quoted that an Arab went to the Prophet of Islam and embraced Islam ﷺ at his hands. After some time, he returned to him and said that he had been ill and financially lost since he embraced Islam. The Prophet observed that if the believer suffered a loss in his finances and happened to be a victim of some disease, it meant that his *iman* was firm and sound. Nizamuddin Auliya elaborated on the point and commented that he believed in it and confirmed that tomorrow, on the Day of Judgement, the poor and the destitute would enjoy such an exalted place that all the assembled thereat would envy them and say that they wished they had been poor and needy in the world. Likewise, those who had been primarily sick and diseased in this world would also enjoy an exalted place on the Day of Judgement, and all people remorsefully exclaim that they wished they had been ill and diseased in the world.<sup>59</sup>

Upon examining medical science, practice, and social norms, it becomes evident that there is a shared trait between medical practitioners

and spiritual leaders. There was little difference between medical practitioners and spiritual leaders who similarly managed routine and extraordinary medical problems. The use of *ilaj-i-ruhani*, spiritual powers, superstitious methods and other local healing methods have spawned various medical practitioners, including divine healers possessing supernatural diagnostic powers and witch doctors who expel malevolent spirits from patients.<sup>60</sup> Being religious increases patients' satisfaction and adherence to treatment, spiritual healing, and the therapeutic powers of reciting the Quranic verses. The benefits derived from reciting select surah of the Qur'an and hadith while praying have beneficial therapeutic outcomes.

Despite this variety of information, an analysis of the content of primary sources related to the subject leads to the conclusion that superstitious beliefs, local treatments, and spiritual healing methods regarding the cause and cure of various diseases were prevalent among the common masses. Historically, individuals employed mystical and exorcism methods in attempts to heal ailments. Even though there has been continuous progress in the medical sciences for curing various ailments, these beliefs were ingrained in people's minds and intensely practised by the people throughout the period of the Delhi Sultanate. However, the science of medicine under the Sultans of Delhi had transformed from the magico-religious field to the empirical-rational line. Still, the irrational causes and cures for the disease were considered by the masses.

### Notes and References

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- <sup>2</sup> Shams Siraj, *Afif Tarikh-i-Firuzshahi*, ed. Maulvi Wilayat Husain, Calcutta, 1891, 353-356; Eng. tr., R. C. Jauhri, *Medieval India in Transition (Tarikh-i-Firuzshahi)*, Delhi, 2001, pp. 200-202; R.C Jauhri, *Firoz Tughluq (1351-1388 A.D)*, Jalandhar, 1990, p. 129.
- <sup>3</sup> In its origin it was based on the *hadiths*, or sayings and manners of behaviour, attributed to Prophet Muhammad, which was handed down, collected, and classified by *muhadithun*, the scholars of the Holy traditions. See, J. Christoph, 'Secular and Religious Features of Medieval Arabic Medicine', in C. Leslie, p. 46.
- <sup>4</sup> Amir Hasan Sijzi, *Fawa'id ul-Fu'ad*, Nawal Kishore Press, Lucknow, 1312 A.H./1894 A. D., p. 59; Eng. tr. Zia-ul-Hasan Faruqi, New Delhi, 1996, pp. 159-160; Shaikh Abdur Rashid, *Society and Culture in Medieval India (1206-1556 A. D.)*, Calcutta, 1969, p. 86.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibn Battuta, *Rehla*, Eng. tr. Agha Mahdi Husain, *Rehla of Ibn Battuta*, Gayakwad Oriental Series, Baroda, 1976, p. 43; Shaikh Abdur Rashid, *Society and Culture in Medieval India*, Calcutta, 1969, p. 86; B. N. Luniya, *Life and Culture in Medieval India*, Indore, 1978, p. 206.

- <sup>6</sup> Khurd, Mir, *Siyar-ul-Auliya*, Delhi, Matba Muhibb-i-Hind, 1302 A. H./1883 A. D., p. 285; Rashid, *Society and Culture*, p. 86.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibn Battuta, *Rehla*, G.O.S. p. 246.
- <sup>8</sup> Anonymous, *Sirat-i-Firoz Shahi*, Eng. tr., Prof. S. H. Askari, Patna, 2019, pp. 69-70.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ma'adan-ul-Ma'ani* as quoted by Rashid, *Society and Culture*, p. 85.
- <sup>10</sup> For details see Amir Hasan Sijzi, *Fawaid ul-Fu'ad*, jild V, *majlis* 29, p. 432; *jild* II, *majlis* 18, p. 106; *jild* II, *majlis* 8, pp. 106-107; Mir Khurd, *Siyar-ul-Auliya*, (ed.) Muhammad ibn Mubarak Kirmani, Lahore, 1978, *bab* 1, *nuktah* vii, p. 96; Fabrizio Speziale, 'The Relation between Gelanic Medicine and Sufism in India during the Delhi and Deccan Sultanates', *East and West*, Dec. 2003, Vol. 53, No. 1/4, p. 152.
- <sup>11</sup> Amir Hasan Sijzi, *Fawaid ul-Fu'ad*, p. 63; Eng. tr., p. 164; Jamali, Shaikh, *Siyar-ul-Arifin*, Matbaa-i- Rizvi, Delhi, 1311 A. H, p. 52; Mir Khurd, *Siyar-ul-Auliya*, pp. 78, 430.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ma'adan ul-Ma'ani* as quoted by Rashid, *Society and Culture*, p. 85.
- <sup>13</sup> Amir Hasan Sijzi, *Fawaid ul-Fu'ad*, p. 63; Eng. tr. p. 164; Rashid, *Society and Culture*, p. 85.
- <sup>14</sup> *Iqtisab-ul-Anwar* as quoted by Rashid in his work *Society and Culture*, p. 85.
- <sup>15</sup> *Tarikh-i-Daudi* as quoted by Rashid, *Society and Culture*, p. 85; Luniya, *Life and Culture*, p. 206.
- <sup>16</sup> *Sirat-i-Firoz Shahi* as quoted by Rashid, *Society and Culture*, pp. 85-86.
- <sup>17</sup> *Munis-ul-Qulub* as quoted by Rashid, *Society and Culture*, p. 85.
- <sup>18</sup> *Majmua-i-Ziae* quoted by O. P. Jaggi, *History of Science and Technology in India, Vol. VIII, Medicine in Medieval India*, Delhi, 1977, pp. 108-110; Muhammad Abdul Wahab Zahuri, 'A Medical Treatise of the Time of King Muhammad Tughlaq', *Studies in Indian Medicine*, Vol. III, Part 3, 177; Fabrizio Speziale, 'The Relation Between', p. 169.
- <sup>19</sup> W. Ivanow, *Concise Descriptive Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Collection of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1985, p. 717; Prof. Altaf Ahmad Azmi, *History of Unani Medicine in India*, New Delhi, 2008, p. 13; Fabrizio Speziale, 'The Relation Between', p. 169.
- <sup>20</sup> For details see Masnad-i-'Ali Mian Bhu'a, *M'adan-ul-Shifa-i-Sikandar Shahi*, Nawal Kishore Press, Lucknow, 1877; Mansura Haider, 'Medical Works of the Medieval Period from India and Central Asia', *Diogenes*, 2016, No. 218, ISSN 0392-1921, p. 35.
- <sup>21</sup> Sijzi, *Fawaid ul-Fu'ad*, p. 63; Eng. tr., p. 164.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63; Eng. tr., p. 165.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59; Eng. tr. p. 160; Rashid, *Society and Culture*, p. 86.
- <sup>24</sup> Sijzi, *Fawaid ul-Fu'ad*, p. 60; Eng. tr., p. 161.
- <sup>25</sup> *Quran*, *Surah* No. LXXXV.
- <sup>26</sup> Sijzi, *Fawaid ul-Fu'ad*, p. 81; Eng. tr., p. 192.
- <sup>27</sup> *Sunnat rakats* are those prayers which Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) performed in addition to obligatory prayers.
- <sup>28</sup> Sijzi, *Fawaid ul-Fu'ad*, p. 161; Eng. tr., p. 310.
- <sup>29</sup> Sijzi, *Fawaid ul-Fu'ad*, p. 233-234; Eng. tr., p. 418.
- <sup>30</sup> Sheikh Nizamuddin al-Muayyid (d. 1273 A.D.) lived during the reign of Sultan Iltutmish and was, thus, a contemporary of Khwajah Qutubuddin Bakhtiar. He was famous for his masterly actions.
- <sup>31</sup> Sijzi, *Fawaid ul-Fu'ad*, p. 92; Eng. tr., pp. 210-211.
- <sup>32</sup> Sijzi, *Fawaid ul-Fu'ad*, p. 92; Eng. tr., p. 211.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 51-53; Eng. tr., pp. 148-150.
- <sup>34</sup> Mir Khurd, *Siyar-ul-Auliya*, pp. 95-96; Fabrizio Speziale, 'The Relation between Gelanic Medicine and Sufism in India during the Delhi and Deccan Sultanates', *East and West*, Dec. 2003, Vol. 53, No. 1/4, p.156.
- <sup>35</sup> Sijzi, *Fawaid ul-Fu'ad*, p. 175; Eng. tr., p. 328.

- <sup>36</sup> Awfi, *Jawami-ul-Hikayat*, Eng. Tr., Elliot & Dowson, *History of India as told by its own Historians*, Vol. II, pp. 173-174; Jaggi, *History of Science and Technology*, p. 99.
- <sup>37</sup> Sijzi, *Fawaid ul-Fu'ad*, p. 23; Eng. tr., pp. 102-103.
- <sup>38</sup> Khusrau felt highly pleased in describing the art of Indian magicians. He believed that in India a man dying of snake poison could be restored to life; the span of a man's life could be extended; the soul of a man could be transferred to the body of another man; the blood of a man could be transfused to another man's body; a *yogi* could live for two hundred years by practising the exercise of slow breathing, and rain could be stopped falling from the clouds etc. Amir Khusrau, *Nuh Sipihir*, pp. 191-194; Eng. tr., Elliot & Dowson, Vol. III, pp. 563-564; Jaggi, *History of Science and Technology*, pp. 103-104. Syed Sabahuddin Abdur Rahman, 'Affectionate Response to the Indian Environment, *Amir Khusrau Memorial Volume*, Publication Division, Government of India, New Delhi, 1975, p. 146.
- <sup>39</sup> *Munis-ul-Qulub* as quoted by Rashid, *Society and Culture*, p. 84.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibn Battuta, *Rehla*, Eng. tr. Gibbs, p. 225; Rashid, *Society and Culture*, p. 84.
- <sup>41</sup> Amir Khusrau, *Nuh Sipihir*, pp. 191-194; Eng. tr., Elliot & Dowson, Vol. III, pp. 563-564; John Zubrzycki, *Empire of Enchantment: The Story of Indian Magic*, p. 73
- <sup>42</sup> Hamid Qalandar, *Khair-ul-Majalis*, ed. K. A. Nizami, Aligarh, 1959, pp. 116-117; Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century*, New Delhi, 2002, p. 316
- <sup>43</sup> Sijzi, *Fawaid ul-Fu'ad*, p. 178; Eng. tr., pp. 331-332; Rashid, *Society and Culture*, p. 84.
- <sup>44</sup> Sijzi, *Fawaid ul-Fu'ad*, p. 178; Eng. tr., p. 332.
- <sup>45</sup> Sijzi, *Fawaid ul-Fu'ad*, p. 68; Eng. tr., p. 173.
- <sup>46</sup> There is a long conversation on evil eye and magic. For details see Sijzi, *Fawaid ul-Fu'ad*, pp. 68-69; Eng. tr., p. 173.
- <sup>47</sup> Hasan Nizami, *Taj-ul-Ma'thir*, p. 133; Eng. tr., p. 120.
- <sup>48</sup> Luniya, *Life and Culture*, pp. 205, 206.
- <sup>49</sup> Sijzi, *Fawaid ul-Fu'ad*, p. 254; Eng. tr. pp. 448-449; A. Rashid, *Society and Culture*, p. 85.
- <sup>50</sup> *Basatin-ul-Uns* as quoted by Rashid, *Society and Culture*, p. 85.
- <sup>51</sup> Ahmad Yadgar *Tarikh-i-Shahi* also known as *Tarikh-i-Salatin-i-Afghana*, ed. M. Hidayat Hosain, Calcutta, 1939, p. 44.
- <sup>52</sup> For details See, Fazila Shahnawaz, 'Science of Astronomy and Astrology in Delhi Sultanate', *Narratives of the Shared Past: Gangetic Valley through the Millennium*, (ed.) S. N. R. Rizvi, New Delhi, 2016, pp. 90-95.
- <sup>53</sup> Minhaj Siraj Juzjani, *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, ed. Captain Nassau Lees, Mawlawis Khadim Hosain and Abd al-Hai, Calcutta, 1864, p. 176; K. A. Nizami, *Royalty in Medieval India*, New Delhi, 1997, p. 133; Muhammad Habib & K. A. Nizami, *Comprehensive History of India*, Vol. V, Delhi, 1983, p. 222.
- <sup>54</sup> Minhaj, *Tabaqat*, Eng. tr., Elliot & Dowson, Vol. II, p. 307; Jaggi, *History of Science and Technology*, p. 105.
- <sup>55</sup> Firoz Shah Tughluq, *Futuh-i-Firozshahi*, Eng. tr. Azra Alavi, New Delhi, 1996, p. 8.
- <sup>56</sup> Shihab al-Din al Umri, *Masalik al absar fi-mamalik al amsar*, Eng. tr. Iqtidar Husain Siddiqi, Aligarh, n.d.
- <sup>57</sup> *Khwan-i-Pir Ni'amat* (compiled by Zain Badr Arabi, contains the discourses of Makhdam Sharfuddin Yahya Maneri) as quoted by Rashid, *Society and Culture*, p. 82.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibn Battuta, *Travels*, Eng. tr. Gibb, p. 648.
- <sup>59</sup> Sijzi, *Fawaid ul-Fu'ad*, pp. 228-229; Eng. tr., p. 411.
- <sup>60</sup> Mansura Haider, 'Medical Works of the Medieval Period', p. 38.