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**The *mujaddid* and the *majdhūb*: Shāh ‘Alī Riḍā  
(d. 1215/1801) and the Different Narratives  
of the Ni‘mat Allāhī Renewal**

*Fabrizio Speziale*

This chapter looks at the history of the Ni‘mat Allāhī order in the Deccan region of India and of the Ni‘mat Allāhī centre which was established in Hyderabad in the second half of the 11th/17th century. The development of this branch and its new line of masters can be regarded as the main element of renewal of the order in the Deccan during the early modern period. The first part of the chapter outlines the features and the phases of the Ni‘mat Allāhī presence in the Deccan. It looks at the events that led to the Shi‘itisation of the Ni‘mat Allāhī branch of Hyderabad and at how this Shi‘i group of Sufis integrated themselves in the local environment. The second part looks in particular at one master of this lineage of Sufis, Shāh ‘Alī Riḍā Dakanī (d. 1215/1801) who is considered the architect of the plan to restore the order in Iran by sending a group of disciples among whom was Ma‘šūm ‘Alī Shāh Dakanī (d. ca 1211/1797). This narrative is based on the biographical accounts written in Iran after the migration of ‘Alī Riḍā’s disciples to this country and is closely related to the construction of another narrative, the one presenting Ma‘šūm ‘Alī Shāh Dakanī as the only successor of Shāh ‘Alī Riḍā. In this study I investigate the different image of the latter’s mystical career which emerges from the biographies of the Sufis written in the Deccan. The Indian sources reveal several elements which were omitted in the account of their master made by the Ni‘mat Allāhī who migrated to Iran, especially the issue of the controversy between Shāh ‘Alī Riḍā and his brother for leadership of the order’s headquarters in Hyderabad.

### The Ni'mat Allāhīs in the Deccan Environment

Shortly after the foundation of the order in Iran by Shāh Ni'mat Allāh Walī (d. 834/1431, Mahan), the Indian region of Deccan occupies a central role in the history of the Ni'mat Allāhī order for about four centuries. The significance of this is not related to the spread and influence of the order in the Deccan or elsewhere in India, but mainly to the fact that it was here that during the early modern period the main lineage of the Ni'mat Allāhī masters, still recognised by the Iranian Ni'mat Allāhīs, was active. If the Safawid (906–1134/1501–1722) attitude towards Sufism, which was most often adverse, did not determine the disappearance of the order in Iran, however, it did lead to its adaptation to the new political and social context and to the redefinition of the religious and spiritual authority of the masters' order in Iran.<sup>1</sup> The role of the Indian branch was closely related to the fact that at the beginning, and seemingly until mid 11th/17th century, the masters of the Deccani line were direct descendants of Shāh Khalīl Allāh (d. 860/1455–6, Bidar), the only son of Shāh Ni'mat Allāh Walī. However, although it was the direct descendants of the founder that established the order in the Deccan, they did not play any active role in the renewal and return of the order to Iran, which occurred in the second half of the 18th century.

The history of the Ni'mat Allāhiyya in the Deccan can be divided into two main periods. During the first, the order is based in the city of Bidar, where the descendants of Ni'mat Allāh Walī arrived in the first half of the 9th/15th century, shortly after which the city became the capital of the Bahmanī sultanate (748–934/1347–1528), the first independent sultanate of the Deccan. During the second period, from the second half of the 17th century up to the return to Iran, the centre of the order moved to a hill on the western outskirts of Hyderabad. By this time, the descendants of the founder had already given over leadership of the order to a new line of masters issuing from Mīr Maḥmūd (d. 1100/1689), a Shi'i of Iraqi origin who was initiated at Bidar before settling at Hyderabad. This chapter deals with this second period, which precedes the revival of the order operated in Iran by Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh Dakanī.

As far as the Bidar centre is concerned, the history of the first Ni'mat Allāhī masters of the Bahmanid age has been studied by a number of

scholars.<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, almost nothing is known of the later Ni'mat Allāhī masters of Bidar, when the city fell under the control of the Barīd Shāh (r. ca 897–1028/1492–1619) at the end of the 9th/15th century, and then of the 'Ādil Shāh of Bijapur,<sup>3</sup> who annexed Bidar in 1028/1619. Moreover, the *tadhkirat* and other historical accounts describing both the first masters of Bidar and those of Hyderabad, do not include entries on the later Ni'mat Allāhī masters of Bidar. The research on new sources regarding the later masters of Bidar must then be held to be of primary importance for future studies aiming to present a first comprehensive view of the history of the order in India.

The main sources about the Ni'mat Allāhīs of Hyderabad are the regional *tadhkirāt* (biographies) written in Persian and Urdu. We do not know of any monographic *tadhkirāt* specifically devoted to the masters of the Hyderabad line. Moreover, no text on Sufism or other topics is ascribed to the Ni'mat Allāhī masters of Hyderabad.<sup>4</sup> Biographical entries on them do appear in some biographical and historical works written in Hyderabad in the 19th and early 20th century.<sup>5</sup> Two works written in Persian are the *Mishkāt al-nubuwwat*, a biography of the Sufis composed in 1219/1804–5 by Ghulām 'Alī Qādirī (d. 1258/1842),<sup>6</sup> and the *Gulzār-i āṣafiyya*, a historical work with a chapter on the biographies of the Sufis, by Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān (b. 1199/1784–5) a court physician of the third Nizām of Hyderabad Sikandar Jāh (r. 1218–1244/1803–1829).<sup>7</sup> Both authors were Sunni Sufis and contemporaries of Shāh 'Alī Riḍā and his son Shāh Mīrān (d. 1230/1814), the last masters of the Hyderabadī branch. Another important work is the *Maḥbūb-i dhī al-minan: Tadhkira-yi awliyā'-i Dakan*, a biographical dictionary of the Sufis of the Deccan written in Urdu by 'Abd al-Jabbār Khān Malkāpūrī at the beginning of the 20th century.<sup>8</sup> It constitutes the third volume of the author's historical-biographical work entitled *Maḥbūb al-tawārikh*. A more recent work is the *Tadhkira-yi awliyā'-i Ḥaydarābād* by Murād 'Alī Ṭālī which was published in the 1970s and is mainly based on the works of Ghulām 'Alī Qādirī, Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān and 'Abd al-Jabbār Malkāpūrī, in the chapters concerning the Ni'mat Allāhīs.

The Hyderabadī branch was established by 'Imād al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Ḥusaynī (d. 1100/1689), known as Mīr Maḥmūd. According to Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān and to Malkāpūrī, he was a *sayyid* descended from the eighth Twelver imam 'Alī al-Riḍā (*sādāt-i riḍāwiyya*).<sup>9</sup>



However, Ghulām 'Alī Qādirī never defines Mīr Maḥmūd and his successors as *sayyids*. Mīr Maḥmūd stayed at Bidar for three years before receiving the Ni'mat Allāhī *khilāfa* from Shams al-Dīn Ḥusaynī, the master of the Bidar centre. Once in Hyderabad, Mīr Maḥmūd settled on a hill located about six kilometres away from the city. According to one account, when he first arrived on this hill he fell into a state of mystical intoxication (*mastānah*) and when he woke up a couple of days later, he decided to build his *dargāh* there.<sup>10</sup> The *dargāh* became the centre of the order and it is there that the master and his descendants were buried. The place became known as Kūh-i Mīr Maḥmūd (the hill of Mīr Maḥmūd) and stands nowadays on the western side of the Mīr 'Ālam Tank, an artificial reservoir created at the beginning of the 19th century (fig. 4.1).

It is not known with certainty why Mīr Maḥmūd left Bidar. It should be considered, however, that Bidar had become a provincial town by then, while Hyderabad hosted an important Shi'i community and was the opulent capital of the Quṭb Shāh sultans (924–1098/1518–1687), who had long generously patronised Shi'i scholars at their court. Moreover, according to a well-known account, the founder of the dynasty, Sulṭān Qulī Quṭb al-Mulk (d. 950/1543), had received the spiritual blessing of Nūr al-Dīn Ni'mat Allāh II (d. after 906/1500),

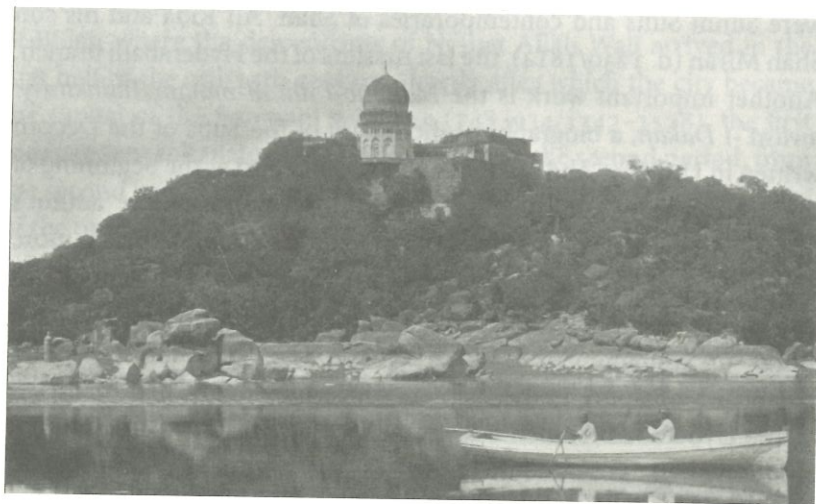


Figure 4.1. The *dargāh* of Mīr Maḥmūd seen from Mīr 'Ālam Tank, after Campbell, *Glimpses of the Nizam's Dominions*, 1898, p. 228.

a Yazd-based master, in Iran before travelling to India.<sup>11</sup> However, when Mīr Maḥmūd arrived at Hyderabad things had changed considerably. Abu'l-Ḥasan Tānā Shāh (r. 1083–1098/1672–1687), the last Quṭb Shāh sultan, was no longer a Shi'i, but a Sunni disciple of a Chishtī master, and he did not extend any patronage to Mīr Maḥmūd. Moreover, a dispute arose between Mīr Maḥmūd and Shāh Rājū (d. 1092/1681–2), the Chishtī master of the sultan and according to one account, the sultan even tried to prevent Mīr Maḥmūd from building his *dargāh*.<sup>12</sup> Mīr Maḥmūd died in 1100/1689 and was succeeded by his son, Shams al-Dīn, who spent most of his life in spiritual isolation at the *dargāh*, where he died in 1161/1748. Shams al-Dīn was succeeded by his elder son Shāh 'Alī Riḍā whose authority was contested by Shams al-Dīn's second son Muḥammad 'Alī, although Shāh 'Alī Riḍā was finally able to transmit the directing of the centre to his son, Shāh Mīrān (fig. 4.2).

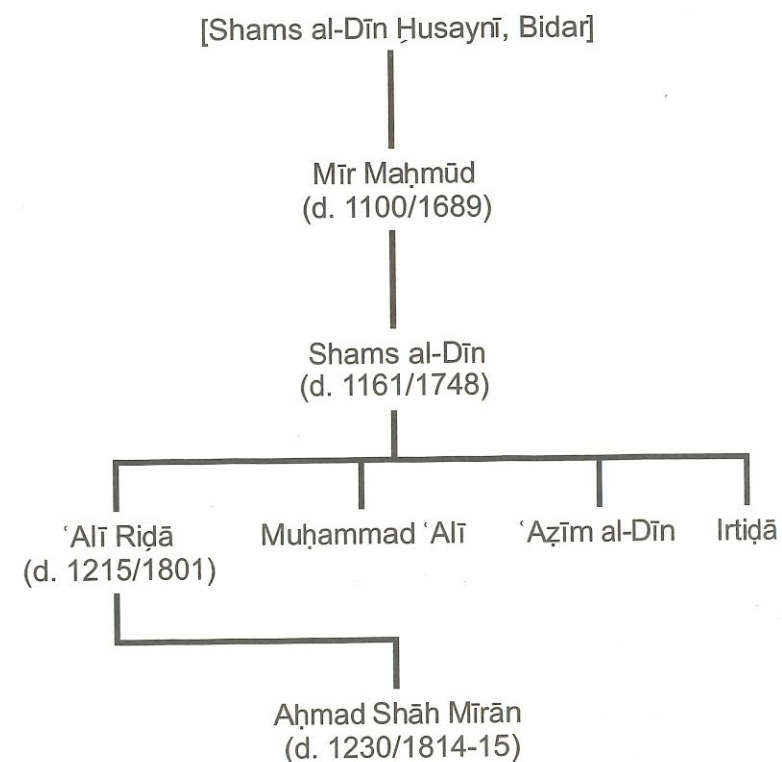


Figure 4.2. The Ni'mat Allāhī family of Hyderabad.

According to the classification of the Indian Sufi orders proposed by Marc Gaborieau, the Ni'mat Allāhīs of the Deccan can be considered a 'noble' order, connected to the noble (*ashrāf*) elite, and a 'minor' order, that is to say an order of regional proportions and reach.<sup>13</sup> The available sources make no reference to other Ni'mat Allāhī centres in the Deccan or in other regions of India besides those of Bidar and Hyderabad, although we cannot rule out the existence of smaller groups at some period in nearby towns even if they are not mentioned in the sources. As for the Ni'mat Allāhīs of Hyderabad, the sources do not mention any other *khalīfa* (successor) of these masters, except for the sons who succeeded them. Although the Indian sources clearly say that Mīr Maḥmūd and his heirs had many disciples and enjoyed a popular devotion stretching beyond the Shi'i community, it is nonetheless likely that many of the disciples initiated to the order came from the Shi'i community of the city.

The Ni'mat Allāhīs of Hyderabad, operating in a Sunni majority society, did not enjoy a popularity in any way comparable to that attained later on by the order in Iran. Moreover, the masters of Hyderabad did not receive royal patronage comparable to that granted by the Bahmanī sultans of Bidar, who were Sunni, to the descendants of Ni'mat Allāh Walī. Nevertheless, although the Ni'mat Allāhīs of Hyderabad remained a group of elite Sufis, they were able to integrate themselves in the local context at different levels. Shāh 'Alī Riḍā and his son gained the favour of the second and the third Niẓāms, the rulers of the princely state of Hyderabad. The *ḥaydarābādī* masters started to celebrate the 'urs, the ceremony on the occasion of the death of a saint during which *ṣandal*, a sandal paste, is taken in procession.<sup>14</sup> As witnessed by an astonished Iranian Ni'mat Allāhī who visited Hyderabad in 1881, during the days of the 'urs people from different sects and religions, Hindus, Muslims and others would visit the *dargāh*.<sup>15</sup>

Notwithstanding the limits of the order's influence at the local level, it is worth outlining certain features of the specific place occupied by the Ni'mat Allāhī centre of Hyderabad in the history of Indian Sufism. At a transnational level, the circulation of Sufis between India and the rest of the Muslim world was mainly characterised by the migration toward South Asia of Sufi lineages originating from the western lands of the Muslim world. The reverse process was less frequent and in very

few cases led to a success comparable to that obtained by the Ni'mat Allāhīs in Iran.<sup>16</sup> As for the South Asian context, the Ni'mat Allāhī masters of Hyderabad established one of the few Shi'i centres of Indian Sufism, which is dominated by Sunni orders.<sup>17</sup>

A central question about the Indian Ni'mat Allāhīs concerns the process of Shiitisation of the order. When and why did the order become Shi'i in the Deccan? It certainly was not Shi'i when it arrived in India in the 9th/15th century, but it was already so by the time Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh was sent to revamp the order in Iran. About the Bidar period, we should agree with what has been noted by Jean Aubin in his article on the Ni'mat Allāhī family: there is no evidence that the descendants of Ni'mat Allāh Walī who settled in Bidar were Shi'a.<sup>18</sup> It is impossible to formulate any hypothesis about the later Ni'mat Allāhī masters of Bidar who lived during the post-Bahmanide period and seem to disappear from the major biographical works on the Sufis of the Deccan.

The masters of Hyderabad are the first masters of the order to be openly mentioned by the Sunni biographers of the Deccan for their connection with Shi'ism. Mīr Maḥmūd, the founder of the *ḥaydarābādī* branch, was born into a family of *mutawallis* of the shrine of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib in Najaf.<sup>19</sup> Ghulām 'Alī Qādirī writes about Mīr Maḥmūd's son, Shams al-Dīn, that 'Many of his disciples are Iranians. These people affirm that he [Shams al-Dīn] is one of them', while according to the opinion of Ghulām 'Alī 'he observes the *madhhab* of the Sufis.'<sup>20</sup> However, at the end of the biographical note on Shams al-Dīn, Ghulām 'Alī openly remarks upon the excess (*ghuluww*) of his affection (*maḥabbat*) for the *ahl al-bayt*.<sup>21</sup> Another element which clearly testifies to the Shi'i faith of these Sufis is the *'āshūr-khānah* that is part of the *dargāh* of Mīr Maḥmūd. In the Deccan, the *'āshūr-khānahs* are places devoted to the Shi'i cult where the *'alams*, the standards of the martyrs of Karbala carried during the procession of *muḥarram*, are preserved.

Therefore, the Shiitisation of the order in Hyderabad occurred for reasons very different from those that led the Ni'mat Allāhīs to convert to Shi'ism in Safawid Iran. Though Shi'ism had been the official religion of the Quṭb Shāh sultanate, when Mīr Maḥmūd arrived in Hyderabad anti-Sunni tendencies comparable to those of Safawid Iran no longer existed in the town.<sup>22</sup> In the Deccan, the Shiitisation of the



order occurred basically because the spiritual authority was transmitted within a Shi'i family, that of Mīr Maḥmūd. Afterwards, in the milieu of the Shi'i disciples of Hyderabad who congregated around these masters, emerged Ma'ṣūm 'Alī Shāh who connected the Indian branch to the Shi'i culture of Iran. That the Shiitisation of the order in India took place at a later period and that it was a partial process, seems to be confirmed by the fact that nowadays the descendants of the Ni'mat Allāhīs in the Deccan include both Sunni and Shi'i families.<sup>23</sup>

The transmission of Ni'mat Allāhī leadership in the Deccan context remains mostly based on family inheritance. Shams al-Dīn Ḥusaynī, the master of Bidar who initiated Mīr Maḥmūd, is mentioned as one of the descendants (*awlād*) of Shāh Khalīl Allāh.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, it is likely that until the 17th century the leadership of the Bidar branch remained within the family of the founder of the order. Afterwards, the leadership of the order at Hyderabad remained within Mīr Maḥmūd's family. It is therefore important to remark that the two fundamental events marking the renewal of the order in the early modern period – the foundation of the *ḥaydarābādī* branch by Mīr Maḥmūd and the return of the order to Iran through Ma'ṣūm 'Alī Shāh – also constitute fundamental breaks to this rule of family-based succession.

#### Shāh 'Alī Riḍā and the Ni'mat Allāhī Revival

Shams al-Dīn had four sons: 'Alī Riḍā Ḥusaynī (d. 1215/1801),<sup>25</sup> Muḥammad 'Alī, 'Azīm al-Dīn and Irtiḍā. The Indian biographers offer no details about the last two. The first two, 'Alī Riḍā and Muḥammad 'Alī, competed for the leadership of the *dargāh* until the Nizām of Hyderabad was eventually called to settle the dispute and to restore the right of the eldest son. Considering that Shāh 'Alī Riḍā lived about seventy years, it can be inferred that he was born around 1145/1732–3, and that he was still young, around sixteen, when he succeeded to the directing of the *dargāh* upon his father's death.

Shāh 'Alī Riḍā remained around one year as the head of the *dargāh* instructing disciples. Then he was driven by a powerful divine 'attraction' (*jadhb*) and became a *majdhūb*.<sup>26</sup> At this point, his younger brother Muḥammad 'Alī put forward a letter, allegedly written by his father, Shams al-Dīn, attesting that Shāh 'Alī Riḍā had gone mad and was dangerous and that his will was that Muḥammad 'Alī become his

regent (*nā'ib*) until Shāh 'Alī Riḍā's recovery. Muḥammad 'Alī arranged to have the letter signed by all the Sufi masters of the city, managing to take over the directing of the *dargāh* as the *sajjāda-nishīn*.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, he confined his brother to a room of the *dargāh* where, according to one version, water and food were given him through a hole. After around twelve years, Aḥmad, the young son of Shāh 'Alī Riḍā, asked 'Alī Khān (r. 1175–1218/1761–1803), the second Nizām of Hyderabad, to set his father free. Shāh 'Alī Riḍā was thus freed by the order of the Nizām and also thanks to the intervention of Iḥtishām-i Jang Zafar al-Dawla, who later became the governor of Berar province and was buried in the *dargāh* of Shāh Khalīl Allāh at Bidar.<sup>28</sup>

The Indian biographers such as Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān and Malkāpūrī do not specify in which year Shāh 'Alī Riḍā regained his position. However, considering that he was confined for twelve years one can infer that he must have been around 29 years old when his son asked for the intervention of the Nizām. Shāh 'Alī Riḍā then headed the *dargāh* for a long period of about forty years. He started to teach again and had a number of disciples. He remained nonetheless a Sufi of ecstatic temperament, who wore red clothes and loved perfumes, music and dance.<sup>29</sup> From time to time he would go with his mare to the centre of Hyderabad for the Friday prayer at the Mecca mosque. He remained in the courtyard of the mosque, under a banyan tree, where a large crowd of people came to meet him. He then went to the 'āshūr-khānah of Ḥusaynī 'Alam where he used to spend the night before returning to the *dargāh* the next day.<sup>30</sup> Dhu'l-Faqār 'Alī Shāh, the *khādim* (attendant) of the 'āshūr-khānah of Ḥusaynī 'Alam, was his disciple and other followers came to meet him there. On this occasion, the Nizām used to send 25 trays of food.<sup>31</sup>

At that time, the relationship between the Ni'mat Allāhī masters and the aristocracy of the city had changed considerably from the epoch of Mīr Maḥmūd's arrival and rivalry with the local Chishtī master of the Quṭb Shāh sultan. Despite their being Sunni, the Nizām continued the Mughal policy of employing Shi'i scholars at their court and in the administration of the State. Some Shi'i figures come to occupy prominent positions, such as in the case of Māh Laqā Bāi (d. 1240/1824),<sup>32</sup> an influential courtesan contemporary of Shāh 'Alī Riḍā and his son, and the powerful Sālār Jang family in the 19th century. The Indian biographers say that Nizām 'Alī Khān held Shāh 'Alī Riḍā



in the highest honour and that the Sufi supported the Nizām with his prayers (*du'ā*) and spiritual influence (*tawajjuh*). This was the case during the battle of Khardla, which took place in Sha'bān 1209/March 1795, when the Nizām was defeated by the Marathas. According to one account, 'Alī Riḍā was at the *dargāh* when he felt that the Nizām was in danger. Falling into an ecstatic state (*mastī*) which lasted the entire day, he engaged in a spiritual fight at the side of the Nizām, chopping at the trees of the garden of the *dargāh* with his sword in the process.<sup>33</sup>

However, according to an account given by the historian Qādir Khān Munshī in the *Tārīkh-i Āṣaf-jāhī*, written in 1266/1849–50, a few years after the battle of Khardla, 'Alī Riḍā was no longer disposed to give his spiritual protection to the Nizām. After the defeat against the Marathas and the death of his son, the Nizām fell into depression and spent his days listening to music. The night of 13 Sha'bān 1211/11 February 1797, he suffered an attack of hemiplegia that physicians were unable to treat. He called for the spiritual intercession of the Sufis, but in vain. The Nizām sent presents consisting of gold coins and jewellery to Shāh 'Alī Riḍā through Mama Barun and Mama Champa,<sup>34</sup> asking him to distribute them among the poor. Shāh 'Alī Riḍā however did not accept the present of the Nizām.<sup>35</sup> But according to the version of Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān, 'Alī Riḍā accepts the *nadhr* (donation) brought by Mama Barun and Mama Champa and is willing to pray for the Nizām.<sup>36</sup> According to the works of the Iranian Ni'mat Allāhīs,<sup>37</sup> 'Alī Riḍā also enjoyed the favour of the prime minister (*dīwān*) of Hyderabad state, Aristū Jāh (d. 1219/1804), who had Iranian ancestry and after the battle of Khardla was sent for two years as hostage to the Marathas.

Among the Indian masters of the order, Shāh 'Alī Riḍā occupies a very important place for the Iranian Ni'mat Allāhīs. He is considered the first reformer (*mujaddid*) of the order, first and foremost for having sent, in 1190/1776–7, his disciple Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh to Iran with the aim of restoring the order in its primeval homeland.<sup>38</sup> During the Mughal period (932–1274/1526–1857) and the 18th century, Indian Sufism was indeed characterised by multifaceted trends of renewal which concerned the doctrinal thought of the orders but also the genres of Sufi writings, as well as the spread of new orders and sub-orders. 'Alī Riḍā was a contemporary of such figures as Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1176/1762) and Mīrzā Maḥzar Jān-i Jānān (d. 1195/1781), two prominent Naqshbandī masters of Delhi. The Sufi scene of

Hyderabad under the Nizāms was receptive to the renewal trends arriving from Northern India, thanks in particular to the migration of many Sufis, such as Shāh Yūsuf al-Dīn and Shāh Sharīf al-Dīn, two *khulafā'* (successors) of Shāh Kalīm Allāh (d. 1142/1729) of Delhi, one of the leading authors of the Chishtī renewal of the Mughal period.

However, in the biographical works on the Deccan Sufis we do not find any trace of some of the fundamental events of the narrative told by the Iranian sources. The sources written in the Deccan do not say a word about the role of Shāh 'Alī Riḍā as a *mujaddid* and as the architect of the plan aiming to restore the order in Iran. Moreover, the Indian sources completely ignore Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh as well as Shāh Ṭāhir, who according to the *Ṭarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*, was the first disciple sent to Iran by Shāh 'Alī Riḍā. Indian sources are also completely silent about the six other disciples to whom Shāh 'Alī Riḍā gave permission to initiate disciples as well as about Sayyid Muḥammad, the Iranian disciple of Shāh Ṭāhir who was sent to Hyderabad, where he stayed for seven years to complete his spiritual training under the guidance of Shāh 'Alī Riḍā.<sup>39</sup> Indian sources never mention Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh as a *khalīfa* of Shāh 'Alī Riḍā, nor do they make any reference to the famous dream in which Shāh 'Alī Riḍā saw the eighth Twelver imam 'Alī Riḍā who ordered him to send his disciples to Iran.<sup>40</sup> In addition, the works written in Deccan make no reference to some of the Shi'i stances and practices mentioned by some of the Iranian sources, such as the fact that 'Alī Riḍā would curse (*la'n*) the first three caliphs when he came out of his ecstatic raptures.<sup>41</sup>

On the other hand, the sources written in Iran, such as the *Ḥadā'iq al-siyāḥa* by Mast 'Alī Shāh (d. 1253/1837–8), the *Riyāḍ al-'arīfin* by Riḍā Qulī Khān Hidāyat (d. 1288/1871) and the *Ṭarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq* by Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh Shīrāzī (d. 1344/1926), make no reference to the dispute between the two brothers and to the period when Shāh 'Alī Riḍā was segregated by Muḥammad 'Alī. However, it is certain that Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh was aware of these events as he left Hyderabad in 1190/1776–7 several years after his master had been released. Another divergent narrative of major importance concerns the succession at the head of the order in Hyderabad. The main aim of the Iranian narrative on this matter is apparently to legitimise the status of Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh as the only successor of 'Alī Riḍā. According to the *Ṭarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*, after bestowing the *khirqā*<sup>42</sup> on Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh, 'Alī Riḍā



ceased teaching the mystical path to other disciples and did not appoint other *shaykhs*.<sup>43</sup>

However, we know that the *ḥaydarābādī* line survived the master of Ma'ṣūm 'Alī Shāh for at least one generation. On the death of Shāh 'Alī Riḍā in 1801, his son Aḥmad, known as Shāh Mirān, succeeded him at the head of the *dargāh*. Shāh Mirān (d. 1230/1814–15) is described as a charismatic master who had many disciples. Like his ancestors he led a life of isolation, he lived at the *dargāh* and rarely went to Hyderabad. Shāh Mirān continued to maintain good relations with the aristocracy of Hyderabad. The third Niẓām of Hyderabad met with him and sent him a donation (*nadhṛ*) of 500 rupees.<sup>44</sup> According to Ṭālī, the Shi'i Mīr 'Ālam (d. 1809), who succeeded Aristū Jāh as prime minister of Hyderabad, also had faith in him.<sup>45</sup> Abu'l-Qāsim Mīr 'Ālam Bahādūr was the son of Sayyid Riḍā Shūshtarī (d. 1780), a Shi'i scholar from Shūshtar who emigrated to India and settled in Hyderabad, where he received the support of the first Niẓām.<sup>46</sup> In 1804, Mīr 'Ālam commissioned the reservoir which was named after him, the Mīr 'Ālam Tank, which is located at the foot of the hill where the Ni'mat Allāhī *dargāh* stands. Shāh Mirān died in 1230/1814–15, therefore heading the local branch of the order for a period of about fifteen years.

After Shāh Mirān the information about the *sajjāda-nishīn* of the *dargāh* becomes very fragmentary and it seems that the spiritual authority of the *ḥaydarābādī* line declined soon after his death. Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān, who wrote his book about thirty years after 'Alī Riḍā's death, says that in those days 'one may go to the *dargāh* only to perform the *ziyāra* (pilgrimage) to the graves of the dead masters: although there is a *sajjāda-nishīn*, there's no point in meeting him (*qābil-i mulāqāt nīstand*).<sup>47</sup> A similar account is given by Ma'ṣūm 'Alī Shāh Shīrāzī, the author of the *Ṭarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*, who travelled in the Deccan and visited the *dargāh* between November 1880 and January 1881. Shīrāzī deplors the state of ruin (*inhidām*) into which the *dargāh* had fallen and openly blames the *sajjāda-nishīn* Aḥmad 'Alī for ignoring the teachings of the order and using the revenues (*madākhl*) of the *dargāh* to finance his personal expenses.<sup>48</sup> In the early 20th century, Malkāpūrī writes that there was still a *sajjāda* who received a salary (*wazā'if*) from Hyderabad state, as well as an annual donation (*sālānah*) for the 'urs and a daily one (*yawmiyya*) to buy incense and

flowers.<sup>49</sup> A few decades later, Bilgrāmī reported however that the *dargāh* received no government subsidy but only a contribution for the 'urs of Mīr Maḥmūd which was offered by the Pāyghāh Khurshīd Jāhī, an aristocratic family of Hyderabad that traced its origins to Farīd al-Dīn Ganj-i Shakar, a prominent Chishtī master who lived in the 7th/13th century in northern India.<sup>50</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

This chapter has looked at the later period of Ni'mat Allāhī history in India, when the spiritual leadership of the order passed from the old line of Bidar to the new branch of Hyderabad. The formation of this branch and its new line of masters, which are no longer direct descendants of Shāh Khalīl Allāh, constitutes the most important element of renewal in the structure and the ramification of the Ni'mat Allāhīs in the early modern Deccan and is most likely the fundamental event which led to the Shiitisation of the order in India. The Iranian sources on the masters of the Ni'mat Allāhī order offer very few descriptions of the *ḥaydarābādī* masters before Shāh 'Alī Riḍā, whereas the biographical notes included in the Indian sources allow for a better understanding of some of the main events and features of the development of the order in post-Bahmanid Deccan.

The Indian sources in particular make it possible to discern and contextualise the various stages of the mystical career of Shāh 'Alī Riḍā and to shed new light on certain events which did find their place in the key narrative about the return of the order to Iran written and transmitted by the Iranian scholars. The narrative depicting Shāh 'Alī Riḍā as a *majdhūb* is ignored by the Iranian writers. This delicate account about the ecstatic Sufi who is segregated by his brother and freed thanks to the efforts of his son and direct heir, is lost during the migration and it is replaced by the narrative of the *mujaddid* which on the other hand is unknown to the biographers of the Deccan. How should this discrepancy be read? Should these accounts be considered as incompatible versions which exclude each other or as complementary and interrelated narratives to be placed in a chronological order where the early stage of the *majdhūb* is followed by the phase of the *mujaddid*? The two spiritual experiences at the core of these narratives seem to be separated by several years. Shāh 'Alī Riḍā was most likely enraptured



by the divine *jadhb* when he was around sixteen or seventeen years old, while the dream in which he saw the imam 'Alī al-Riḍā instructing him to send his disciples to Iran may have occurred some time before he dispatched Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh, an event that we know took place when Shāh 'Alī Riḍā was forty-five years old.

The two narratives ignore each other, the two groups of writers are not aware of what the other says. However, the two narratives do not deny or exclude what the other says. Shāh 'Alī Riḍā's ambitious plan to revive the order in Iran could have been known by his disciples but remained unnoticed to the biographers of the Sufis in the Deccan, considering also that Shāh 'Alī Riḍā did not leave any writing about his thought. Moreover, this plan proved to be a difficult task while Shāh 'Alī Riḍā was alive. Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh and the disciples that gathered around him after he arrived in Iran had to face the hostility of the Shi'i clerics opposed to Sufism and finally Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh was arrested and executed in Kirmanshah after having been accused of 'licentiousness and immorality' (*fisq wa fujūr*).<sup>51</sup>

The discrepancy actually shows the differences between the perspectives from which narratives were written and read. The narrative told by the local chroniclers describes events that certainly became well known in the city and within its religious milieu and which raised different reactions, considering that Muḥammad 'Alī's appointment as the head of the *dargāh* was approved by the other Sufi masters of Hyderabad while later on this decision was revoked by the Nizām. On the other hand, the narrative of the *mujaddid*, formulated and transmitted by, and for, the Ni'mat Allāhīs in Iran, provided a powerful account for the foundation of the new Iranian branch. The second narrative involves a selective rewriting of the master's biography and mystical path. Its specific features, the imam's order bestowed in a dream that highlights the association with the Twelver faith and the removal of the unorthodox image of the ecstatic Sufi, can be seen as components of a discourse that aimed to accommodate the identity of the group to the Iranian environment and to shape an image of the master's order that could better defend its authority against the anti-Sufi discourse of the Shi'i clergy.

Nonetheless, the limits of the descriptions included in the Indian sources do not allow us to clarify better some important points. The Indian *tadhkirāt* do not say anything about the doctrines and the methods that were taught and practised by the Ni'mat Allāhī masters of

Hyderabad. Moreover, there is a lack of more precise information on how the Ni'mat Allāhī *khalīfa* was transmitted outside the family and the right of the elder son. Most likely, Shams al-Dīn did not even transmit the Ni'mat Allāhī *khalīfa* to his younger sons. The account of the dispute between Shāh 'Alī Riḍā and Muḥammad 'Alī shows quite clearly that the latter was not a *khalīfa* of his father, and he only managed to become for a while the regent (*nā'ib-i khalīfa*) of his brother.<sup>52</sup> We can therefore pose the question whether one of the elements of the reformist strategy effected by Shāh 'Alī Riḍā was precisely to transmit the *khalīfa* and the authorisation to initiate other disciples outside the family circle. Iranian sources, which do not mention Shāh 'Alī Riḍā's son, speak on the contrary of eight Sufis to whom 'Alī Riḍā gave permission to initiate other disciples. Two of them, Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh and Shāh Ṭāhir, were certainly sent to Iran. What happened to the other six, such as Asad 'Alī Shāh Dihlawī, Aḥmad 'Alī Shāh Hindūstānī, Ḥaydar 'Alī Shāh Hindī and Maḥmūd 'Alī Shāh Dakanī,<sup>53</sup> who apparently did not migrate to Iran? Did they remain in India? Unfortunately, the biographies of the Sufis of Deccan do not seem to offer any answer.

Mir Maḥmūd and his successors were Shi'i as were many of their disciples in Hyderabad, and the Ni'mat Allāhiyya remained the only Shi'i Sufi order of the city. Paradoxically, the first Ni'mat Allāhī master of Hyderabad did not receive support from the Quṭb Shāh sultans, in spite of the connection of its founder with the Iranian Ni'mat Allāhīs. But later on his heirs enjoyed the favour of several local noblemen when the city was ruled by the Sunni dynasty of the Nizāms. It is at this moment, when the Ni'mat Allāhī masters gained major influence among the local elite, that the order returned to Iran thanks precisely to the efforts of a Shi'i from a local aristocratic family, Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh Dakanī. The transmission of spiritual authority in the Hyderabad branch lasted only one generation after Shāh 'Alī Riḍā. After the death of Shāh Mīrān in the early 19th century, the centre of Hyderabad became a *dargāh* without masters, directed by a hereditary line of *sajjāda-nishīn* without any spiritual authority and where the only important rituals became those, such as the *'urs*, related to the cult of the dead saints.

## NOTES

1 On the Ni'mat Allāhīs in Safawid Iran, see Terry Graham, 'The Ni'matu'llāhī Order Under Safavid Suppression and in Indian Exile', in Leonard Lewisohn and David



- Morgan, ed., *The Heritage of Sufism*, vol. 3: *Late Classical Persianate Sufism (1501-1750)* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 165-200; Sholeh A. Quinn, 'Rewriting Ni'matu'llāhi History in Safavid Chronicles', in *ibid.*, pp. 201-222.
- 2 Muhammad Suleman Siddiqi, *The Bahmani Sufi* (Delhi, 1989), pp. 78-85, 155-162; Haroon Khan Sherwani, *The Bahmanis of the Deccan* (Delhi, 1985), pp. 133-134; Jean Aubin, 'De Kūhbanān à Bidar: La famille ni'matullāhi', *Studia Iranica*, 20 (1991), pp. 233-261, esp. pp. 239-246, 252-254; Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India* (Delhi, 1992), pp. 55-57; Hamid Algar, 'Ni'mat-allāhiyya', *EI2*, VIII, 1995, pp. 44-48, at p. 46; Graham, 'The Ni'matu'llāhi Order', pp. 173-178.
- 3 The 'Ādil Shāh adopted Shi'ism as the state religion for a period.
- 4 A few lines of poetry ascribed to 'Alī Ridā are mentioned by R.Q. Hidāyat, in *Riyād al-'arīfin* (Tehran, 1316 Sh./1937-8), p. 451, and Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh Shirāzi, *Tarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq* (3 vols., Tehran, n.d.), vol. 3, p. 168.
- 5 See also Fabrizio Speziale, 'À propos du nouveau ni'matullāhi. Le centre de Hyderabad au cours de la première modernité', *Studia Iranica*, 42 (2013), pp. 95-97.
- 6 Ghulām 'A. Qādiri, *Mishkāt al-nubuwwat* (Hyderabad, 1982-1985).
- 7 Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān, *Tārikh-i gulzār-i āsafīyya* (Bombay, 1308/1891).
- 8 'Abd al-Jabbār Malkāpūrī, *Maḥbūb-i dhī al-minan: Tadhkira-yi awliyā'-i Dakan* (2 vols., Hyderabad, 1332/1913-14).
- 9 Malkāpūrī, *Maḥbūb-i dhī al-minan*, vol. 2, p. 767; Khān, *Tārikh-i gulzār-i āsafīyya*, p. 341.
- 10 Malkāpūrī, *Maḥbūb-i dhī al-minan*, vol. 2, pp. 767-768.
- 11 *Tārikh-i Muḥammad Quṭb Shāhī*, MS 174. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, supplément persan.
- 12 See F. Speziale, 'À propos du nouveau ni'matullāhi', pp. 104-106.
- 13 Marc Gaborieau, 'Les ordres mystiques dans le sous-continent indien, un point de vue ethnologique', in Alexandre Popovic and Gilles Veinstein, ed., *Les ordres mystiques dans l'Islam. Cheminement et situation actuelle* (Paris, 1986), pp. 106-107.
- 14 Khān, *Tārikh-i gulzār-i āsafīyya*, p. 344; 'Alī Sayyid Murād Ṭālī', *Tadhkira-yi awliyā'-i Ḥaydarābād* (4 vols., Hyderabad, 1984) vol. 1, p. 136. On the use of *ṣandal* in Muslim rituals in India, see Ja'far Sharīf and Gerhard Andreas Herklots, *Islam in India or the Qānūn-i Islām* (Delhi, 1999), pp. 150, 188, 193, 210, 216, 309; Fabrizio Speziale, *Soufisme, religion et médecine en Islam indien* (Paris, 2010), pp. 156-158.
- 15 Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh Shirāzi, *Tarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*, vol. 3, p. 170.
- 16 One of the other major events of this kind in the history of Indian Sufism takes place shortly after the migration of the Ni'mat Allāhi of Hyderabad to Iran. Around ten years after the death of 'Alī Ridā in Hyderabad, the Kurdish Sufi Mawlānā Khālid (d. 1242/1827) was initiated in Delhi by Shāh Ghulām 'Alī (d. 1240/1824) and then spread the Naqshbandī-Mujaddidī order in the Ottoman world. See Arthur Buehler, 'Mawlānā Khālid and Shāh Ghulām 'Alī in India', in B. Abu-Manneh, ed., *The Naqshbandiyya-Khālidiyya Sufi Order*, *JHS*, 5 (2007), pp. 199-213; Cyrille Chodkiewicz, 'Mawlānā Khālid', in 'Ayn al-ḥayāt. Quaderno di Studi della Tariqa Naqshbandiyya, 3 (1997), pp. 75-96, esp. at pp. 81-83.
- 17 Another case is that of the Nūrbakhshīyya, a messianic movement with Sufi and Shi'i tendencies that was introduced in Kashmir by Shams al-Dīn 'Irāqi (d. 932/1526) towards the end of the 15th century. On the introduction and development of the Nūrbakhshīyya in Kashmir and in the regions of Baltistan and Ladakh, see the work of Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions: The Nūrbakhshīya between Medieval and Modern Islam* (Columbia, SC, 2003), pp. 198-282.
- 18 Aubin, 'De Kūhbanān à Bidar', pp. 241-242.
- 19 Qādiri, *Mishkāt al-nubuwwat*, vol. 6, p. 246; Malkāpūrī, *Maḥbūb-i dhī al-minan*, vol. 2, p. 767; Ṭālī, *Tadhkira-yi awliyā'-i Ḥaydarābād*, vol. 1, p. 125.
- 20 Qādiri, *Mishkāt al-nubuwwat*, vol. 7, p. 86.
- 21 *Ibid.*

- 22 The first part of the Quṭb Shāh epoch on the contrary had been marked by a religious policy that did not welcome the establishment of Sunni Sufi masters and orders. Very few Sufis settled near the walls of Golconda, the first capital of the Quṭb Shāh sultanate, see Speziale, *Soufisme, religion et médecine en Islam indien*, pp. 87-88.
- 23 Graham, 'The Ni'matu'llāhi Order', p. 174, n.23.
- 24 Khān, *Tārikh-i gulzār-i āsafīyya*, p. 341; Malkāpūrī, *Maḥbūb-i dhī al-minan*, vol. 2, p. 767.
- 25 According to Malkāpūrī he died on 8 Ramaḍān 1215/23 January 1801, when he was around 70 years old; according to Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān he died on 20 Ramaḍān 1215/4 February 1801 (Malkāpūrī, *Maḥbūb-i dhī al-minan*, vol. 1, p. 560; Khān, *Tārikh-i gulzār-i āsafīyya*, p. 345). According to the Iranian sources he would have lived more than 100 years, see Mast 'Alī Shāh, *Ḥadā'iq al-siyāha* (n.p., n.d.), p. 348; Hidāyat, *Riyād al-'arīfin*, p. 451; Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh Shirāzi, *Tarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*, vol. 3, p. 167.
- 26 *The majdhūb* (lit. 'attracted') is the ecstatic Sufi who experiences the state of *jadhb*.
- 27 Literally, the one who sits on the prayer carpet (*sajjāda*), i.e. the head of a *dargāh*.
- 28 Khān, *Tārikh-i gulzār-i āsafīyya*, p. 343; Malkāpūrī, *Maḥbūb-i dhī al-minan*, vol. 1, pp. 558-559. On Iḥtishām-i Jang Zafar al-Dawla see Muḥammad Qādir Khān Munshī, *Tārikh-i āsaf-jāhī* (Hyderabad, 1994), p. 71 and also Muḥammad Qādir Khān Munshī, *Sayr al-Hind* (Hyderabad, 1994), pp. 143-147.
- 29 Malkāpūrī, *Maḥbūb-i dhī al-minan*, vol. 1, p. 560.
- 30 This 'āshūr-khānah was established during the Quṭb Shāh epoch. Here was kept a sword said to be owned by the sixth imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) which was brought from Arabia to Golconda the reign of Sultan Muḥammad Qulī (r. 988-1020/1580-1612), the founder of Hyderabad, see Sadiq Naqvi, *Muslim Religious Institutions and their role under the Quṭb Shāhs* (Hyderabad, 1993), pp. 182-183.
- 31 Khān, *Tārikh-i gulzār-i āsafīyya*, p. 344; Ṭālī, *Tadhkira-yi awliyā'-i Ḥaydarābād*, vol. 3, p. 31.
- 32 She was an expert in music and dance and was one of the first woman poets to write a full *diwān* of *ghazals* in Urdu, see Scott Kugle, 'Courting 'Alī: Urdu Poetry, Shi'i Piety and Courtesan Power in Hyderabad', in Denis Hermann and Fabrizio Speziale, ed., *Muslim Cultures in the Indo-Iranian World during the Early-Modern and Modern Periods* (Berlin, 2010), pp. 125-166.
- 33 Malkāpūrī, *Maḥbūb-i dhī al-minan*, vol. 1, pp. 559-560; see also Khān, *Tārikh-i gulzār-i āsafīyya*, p. 345.
- 34 Two nurses and advisers of the second Nizām who led the female regiment at the Battle of Khardla, see William Dalrymple, *White Mughals* (London, 2002), p. xxiii.
- 35 Munshī, *Tārikh-i āsaf-jāhī*, pp. 68-69. According to the historian of medicine Rahbar Fārūqi, Nizām 'Alī Khān suffered from the attack of hemiplegia (*faliq*) in Sha'bān 1212/19 January 1798/16 February 1798 [Mu'in al-Dīn Rahbar Fārūqi, *Islāmī ṭibb Shahānah sar-parastiyan min* (Hyderabad, 1420/1999), p. 158]. On alms used to seek the intercession of Sufi saints in case of illness, see Speziale, *Soufisme, religion et médecine en Islam indien*, pp. 112-113.
- 36 Khān, *Tārikh-i gulzār-i āsafīyya*, p. 344.
- 37 Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh Shirāzi, *Tarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*, vol. 3, p. 167; Mast 'Alī Shāh, *Ḥadā'iq al-siyāha*, p. 349.
- 38 Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh Shirāzi, *Tarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*, vol. 3, pp. 167, 171.
- 39 See Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh Shirāzi, *Tarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*, vol. 2, p. 332, vol. 3, pp. 167-168; Mast 'Alī Shāh, *Ḥadā'iq al-siyāha*, p. 348; see also William Ronald Royce, 'Mir Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh and the Ni'mat Allāhi Revival 1776-77 to 1796-97: A Study of Sufism and its Opponents in Late Eighteenth-Century Iran' (PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 1979), pp. 83-85.
- 40 See Nasrollah Pourjavady and Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Kings of Love: The History and Poetry of the Ni'matullāhi Sufi Order of Iran* (Tehran, 1978), pp. 93-94; Richard Gramlich,



- Die schiitischen Derwischorden Persiens. 1: Die Affiliationen* (Wiesbaden, 1965), p. 30f.; Royce, 'Mir Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh', p. 90; H. Algar, 'Dakanī, Sayyed Mir 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Ma'sūm 'Alīshāh', *EIR*, 1993.
- 41 Riḍā Qulī Hidāyat, *Riyāḍ al-'arīfīn* (Tehran, 1316 Sh./1937-8), p. 451; Mast 'Alī Shāh, *Ḥadā'iq al-siyāḥa*, p. 348.
- 42 The *khirqā* is the cloak given by a Sufi master to his *khalīfa* and symbolises the transmission of the spiritual authority.
- 43 Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh Shīrāzī, *Ṭarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*, vol. 3, p. 170; see also Algar 'Dakanī'. Pourjavady and Wilson write in their study that after the death of 'Alī Riḍā—who died after his disciple Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh—the directing of the order including the Indian branch passed into the hands of the Iranian master Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh Iṣfahānī (d. 1234/1818) (*Kings of Love*, pp. 143-144). Nurbakhsh also writes that after 'Alī Riḍā's death the 'qoṭb of the order in India was Ḥusayn-'Alīshāh' (Javad Nurbakhsh, 'Dakanī, Rezā 'Alīshāh', *EIR*, 1993).
- 44 Khān, *Tārīkh-i gulzār-i Āṣafīyya*, pp. 345-346; Ṭālī, *Tadhkira-yi awliyā'-i Ḥaydarābād*, vol. 3, pp. 48-49.
- 45 Ṭālī, *Tadhkira-yi awliyā'-i Ḥaydarābād*, III, p. 48.
- 46 Mir 'Ālam was the cousin of Mir 'Abd al-Laṭīf Khān Shūshtarī (d. 1220/1806) who however in his travelogue *Tuḥfat al-'ālam* makes no reference to the Ni'mat Allāhī masters of Hyderabad. On Mir 'Ālam, see Khān, *Tārīkh-i gulzār-i Āṣafīyya*, pp. 305-315; Munshī, *Tārīkh-i Āṣaf-jāhī*, pp. 82-90.
- 47 Khān, *Tārīkh-i gulzār-i Āṣafīyya*, p. 346.
- 48 Aḥmad 'Alī lived three generations after 'Alī Riḍā, Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh Shīrāzī, *Ṭarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*, vol. 3, p. 169.
- 49 Malkāpūrī, *Mahbūb-i dhī al-minan*, vol. 1, p. 417, vol. 2, p. 770.
- 50 S.A.A. Bilgrāmī, *Ma'āthir-i Dakan* (Hyderabad, 1924), p. 93. Ṭālī reports that the last *sajjāda-nishīn* of his time was Shāh 'Alī Riḍā Ḥusaynī II who died around the early 1940s. He had no sons and therefore his place was taken by his daughter Fayḍ al-Nisā' Begum. Ṭālī also gives a short description of the 'urs of Mir Maḥmūd which included the procession of the *ṣandal*, Ṭālī, *Tadhkira-yi awliyā'-i Ḥaydarābād*, vol. 1, p. 136, vol. 3, p. 49. For a group of Ni'mat Allāhī who gathered in Hyderabad in the early 1980s, see David Pinault, *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community* (New York, 1993), p. 61.
- 51 See Algar, 'Dakanī'.
- 52 Khān, *Tārīkh-i gulzār-i āṣafīyya*, p. 343.
- 53 Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh Shīrāzī, *Ṭarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*, vol. 2, p. 332.