# To Whom Do You Belong?:
## *Pīr-Murīd* Relationship and *Silsila* in Medieval India

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## Introduction: "order" and *silsila*

In Persian works written in Medieval India, we seldom meet with the word "Tariqa" and, even when we do, it is usually used without any adjective, thus indicating the Sufic path in general. Actually, two "major" Sufi groups in Medieval India, the Chishtīs and the Suhrawardīs, used the same work *'Awārif al-maʿārif* by Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī as a basic text and there does not appear to be much difference in their teaching (tariqa). Modern research works on Indian Sufism might be conscious of this fact because most of them do not use the word Tariqa for Sufi groups or lineages. Yet researchers agree that there are groups of people sharing a particular teaching/training (tariqa) and/or teacher-disciple lineage (*silsila*), either having a concrete organization or not [Ernst 1997: 121]. Some call it "order," others "brotherhood," yet others put an emphasis on saint worship and use "(shrine/tomb) cult." At the same time, *silsila*, an Arabic/Persian word for Sufic lineage, is frequently used as a synonym for order [Ernst and Lawrence 2002: 72; Islam 2002: 96; Rizvi 1983: 83; Siddiqi 1989: 32]. It seems that *silsila* has been considered by modern researchers to be the crucial factor in forming an order (Tariqa) in Medieval India, and some of them explain Sufi orders as "the networks and lineages [Ernst and Lawrence 2002: 18-19]." Therefore, to analyze several aspects of *silsila* might help to understand the nature of an order (Tariqa) and its formation in Medieval India.

## Persian sources and terms on *silsila* in Medieval India

Before starting the main discussion, I would like to refer to two basic points about materials used in this article and the terms and expressions used for *silsila* found in these materials.

There have been discussions about the credibility and character of *tadhkira* (biographies) or a genre called *malfūzāt* written in this period [Ernst 1992 and 2004; Habib 1950; Steinfels 2002]. As long as the date of the writings is reasonably established, their credibility does not concern this article much because our concern is the perceptions found in these works rather than veracity of the contents. As for the date of writing, two *malfūzāt*s, *Fawā'id al-fu'ād* and *Jāmiʿ al-ʿulūm*, are in diary form with dates and the texts are authentic. Hence, it can be said that these works present the perceptions of people on the given dates, *Fawā'id al-fu'ād* in the beginning of the fourteenth century, and *Jāmiʿ al-ʿulūm* in the early 1380s.[1] *Khayr al-majālis* is also in diary form but without dates. Though Jackson doubts "the degree of fidelity to the actual words and teaching of Nasiruddin as presented in this work [Jackson 1985: 50]," still it seems to be sure that this work is by Ḥamīd Qalandar, who lived in the middle of the fourteenth century. Therefore, it is regarded as a work of this age. Other works, *Aḥsan al-aqwāl*, *Qiwām al-ʿaqā'id* and *Siyar al-awliyā'*, contain the sayings of earlier *shaykh*s but these are in a topic-based form, which means that much more editing has been

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1)　For JU, see Steifels' work [Steiffels 2002]

done than to the diary form. For this reason, perceptions seen in those works are considered to be of the middle or late fourteenth century.

In those *malfūẓāt*s and other Sufic works written in Persian in Medieval India, Sufi lineage itself is called by various names such as *khwāndān*, *khwānwāda* or *silsila*. The first two, which usually apply to blood relationships, are more frequently seen representing Sufi lineage than *silsila* during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Judging from this, the analogy of kinship might often have been used at that time for understanding Sufi lineages based on the *pīr-murīd* (master-disciple) relationship.[2] At first these two words tended to have been used more frequently for a family-based lineage of shaykhhood such as the Suhrawardīs in Multan, but later these words were used, in many cases, interchangeably as we can see in some sixteenth century historical works.[3]

> The *khwānwāda* of Hindustan's *shaykh*s are numerous but of those which have great repute and surpass other *shaykh*'s *silsila* in numbers there are but two. One is the *khwāndān* of Chishtīya in Ajmer linked to the *khwāja*s of Chisht, and the other is the *khwāndān* of Suhrawardīya in Multan going back to Shaykh al-shuyūkh Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn ʿUmar Suhrawardī. [TF: 374]

> In Hindustan, fourteen *silsila* are chosen and they are called "fourteen *khwānwāda*."[4] [Ain: 209]

As it is the most commonly used in modern researches, the word *silsila* will be adopted in this article except for direct quotations. Still it is better to keep in mind that *silsila* is not the sole word used for Sufi lineages in Medieval India.

### Development of *silsila* names in Medieval India

If people constituted a particular group, how did they distinguish themselves from other groups, or how they were known by others? A particular name is an important feature of a distinct group. Through the development of *silsila* names in Medieval India, we can observe the formation of Sufi groups in that period.

The most common way to distinguish lineage was to add a certain *pīr*'s name to the words for Sufi *silsila*, such as "*khwāndān* of Shaykh Bahā al-Dīn Zakariyā [QA: 17]," "*khwānwāda* of Rukn al-Dīn Chishtī [FF: 11; Faruqi 1996: 94]" or "*khwāndān* of Sīdī Aḥmad [FF: 64; Faruqi 1996: 240]."[5] To identify visitors, Sufis usually asked the name of their *pīr* or whose *murīd* he was. If the visitor was young they asked the name of his father or ancestor's *pīr*.

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2) In JU we see that fourteenth century Sufi Jalāl al-Dīn Bukhārī (see below) addressed young female murids as daughters and an old one as a sister [JU: 652].

3) A slight difference could be seen between them. *Silsila* may indicate both a single chain or a group of chains of master-disciple relationship (see below) while *khwānwāda* or *khwāndān* tend to be applied to a whole lineage without specifying a single line among the lineage. It seems that *silsila* started to surpass the other two words in the Mughal period.

4) In many Persian sources written after the fifteenth century, we can observe a categorization of *silsila*s called "fourteen *khwānwāda*," which translated as "fourteen families" by Ernst [Ernst 1997: 137; Ernst and Lawrence 2002: 24; Ain: 209-211; JS: 112b-124a; LA: 209b-219a (Chapter 14); MA: 12b-15b; MlM: 155-157; MW: 48].

5) This may mean Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Shāfiʿī al-Rifāʿī (b. 500/1106 or 512/1118, d. 578/1182).

A youth came. *Khwāja* (Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā) asked him. "Whose *murīd* was your grandfather (or ancestor)?" He answered, "Shaykh Jalāl al-Dīn Tabrīzī's." *Khwāja* said, "Shaykh Jalāl al-Dīn Tabrīzī gave his hand (to *bayʻa*) to very few persons, as did Qāḍī Ḥamīd al-Dīn Nāgawrī." [FF: 20; Faruqi 1996: 117]

*Aḥsan al-aqwāl*, a Chishtī work written in Deccan, mentions several ways to ask ones *pīr*'s name indirectly.

You should not say (to *khānqāh*'s visitors) like "Whose *murīd* are you?" Because these words show contempt and suspicion... Therefore, ask as follows. "To whom do you belong (*paywand bā kīst*)?" "On whom do you concentrate (*tawajjuh bar kih dārīd*)?" or "Where did you do shave your hair (*makhlūq kujāh*[6] *shuda and*)?" [Ahsan: 16a (Chapter 2)]

*Paywand*, which originally meant "connection, link," is frequently used to indicate the *pīr-murīd* relationship together with *taʻalluq*.[7] Other words are also used such as "depends on such-and-such a *khwāndān/khwānwāda* [FF: 63-64: Faruqi 1996: 240; JU: 571]." *Tawajjuh* is a strong concentration to one's own *pīr* [Schimmel 1975: 237] and *makhlūq* is the ritual shaving of the head done by a *pīr* at the time of affiliation.[8] All these expressions are intended to ascertain a visitors' identity through his *pīr*.

In the works written after the middle of the fourteenth century, more abstract and collective expressions such as "*khwāndān/khwānwāda* of Chisht [Siyar: 189, 211; JU: 571]" "*khwāndān* of Suhraward [JU: 571]" appear. Almost simultaneously, some groups started to be called "*Chishtīyān* [JU: 533]," "*Suhrawardīyān* [JU: 533]," "*Ṭūsīyān* [KM: 202]" and so on. For example:

Those *shaykh*s of the age like Shaykh Ḍiyā al-Dīn Rūmī and Mawlānā Shams al-Dīn Dāmġānī[9] .... used to be present in the assembly of the group (*ḥalqa*) of *Ḥaydarīyān*[10] and *Qalandarīyān*[11] and the wanderers (*musāfirān*) of land and sea who were in the (Delhi) city [Siyar: 508].

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6) The Persian word "*jāh* (place)" sometimes indicates *pīr* or *silsila* from an association with "*jāh nishīn* (successor of a *pīr* in his *khānqāh*)" [KM: 107].

7) This word usually means "depend on" and is used like this: If a person with a family depends on a job (*taʻalluq bi-kasb kunad*) but his heart is devoted not to the job but to God, he is a dependent on God (*mutawakkil*). In Nanda's work based on the modern cases, *taʻalluq* is understood as a connection beyond distances [Nanda 2003: 127].

8) Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā says as follows: If your head is shaven (*maḥlūq*, in the text.), it prevents uncleanness even on a hair at the time of *ġusl* [FF: 90; Faruqi 1996: 311]. From this passage, it seems that *makhlūq* at that time was to shave the head totally. *Aḥsan al-aqwāl* tells that sayyids are exempted from *makhlūq*, most likely to keep a lock of hair, a distinct feature of sayyids [Ahsan: 27a (Chapter 5)].

9) Both of them are affiliates of Suhrawardī [AA: 84; QA: 25-32; SA: 95b].

10) They are closely connected to the Qalandars and Quṭb al-Dīn Ḥaydar is their eponymous founder. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa met them in northern India in the fourteenth century [Digby 1984: 62-65].

11) Qalandar is a wandering mendicant with particular appearance such as shaving all facial hairs. Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn Sāwī is considered to be their great *shaykh* [Digby 1984].

From this passage, we can see that some people were called by collective names derived from the lineage to which they belonged, not by their *pīr*'s personal name. Actually, this *-īyān* form for Sufi groups was already seen in the twelfth century work *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, but rarely seems to have been applied to groups based on new *silsila*s like the Chishtīs and Suhrawardīs until the later half of the fourteenth century. Collective names for *silsila*s and Sufi groups based on them were introduced at almost the same time in the case of Medieval India. At that time, almost 150 years since these *silsila*s were introduced into India, several branches had developed and the numbers of affiliated members had increased considerably after 3-4 generations of *shaykh*s' activities. This situation might have urged the development of collective names that could include all the branches sharing the same root, and all the people affiliated to these branches.

It might not be a coincidence that some Chishtī affiliates started to record their lineage at this point in time. The Chishtīs were the most successful lineage group of the age, spreading throughout a large area during the growth of the Delhi Sultanate and establishing centers in several places [Digby 2004]. Therefore, the need to remember the tie with their predecessors might have been stronger than other lineage groups. The death of the most renowned Chishtī *shaykh* Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā in 1325 might have accelerated those needs [Ernst 1992: 287; Ernst 2004: 78]. Ḥujjat al-Dīn Multānī, a *murīd* of Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā is said to have made a poem of a Chishtī *shaykh*s' lineage line descending from the Prophet Muḥammad to Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā (*shajarah-i mashā'ikh-i ṭabaqah-i khwājagān-i Chisht*) [Siyar: 317], which might be reproduced in *Khayr al-majālis* [KM: 7-8]. *Siyar al-awliyā*, the first collection of biographies and sayings in India dedicated to one lineage group, the Chishtīs, was also written in the middle of fourteenth century.

Written by Muḥammad b. Mubārak Kirmānī (also known as Mīr Khwurd), *Siyar al-awliyā* is one of the most reliable biographical works on the early Chishtīs [Ernst 2004: 87-88] and the later biographies and researches largely depend on it. Perhaps the importance of this work is increased by the fact that the author had considerable knowledge about the Chishtī family lineage line in Chisht as his uncle was affiliated to the lineage [Siyar: 211]. It is practically the first work to provide an entire image of the Chishtī *silsila* which originated in Chisht in central Afghanistan, and was then introduced and flourished in India. Early Chishtī *shaykh*s didn't mention much about their remote predecessors from the place known as Chisht in their *malfūẓāt*s.

*Siyar al-awliyā* is a good example of a description of a group structure based on a *silsila*. The work has ten chapters. The first half, from chapter 1 to 5, is spent on biographies and the latter five chapters contain various teachings and sayings in a topic-wise order. The first chapter of *Siyar al-awliyā* deals with a single *silsila* line from the Prophet Muḥammad to Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā, the author's own *pīr*. Chapter 2 is about other *khalīfa*s of that lineage line in India, like Ḥamīd al-Dīn Ṣūfī Nāgawrī a *khalīfa* of Muʿīn al-Dīn Chishtī, Badr al-Dīn Ġaznawī a *khalīfa* of Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār. Farīd al-Dīn Ganj Shakar's descendants are dealt in chapter 3. Then, *khalīfa*s and major disciples of Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā are mentioned in chapters 4 and 5. These chapters can be divided into two categories: chapters 1-3 for the predecessors and chapters 4-5 for the co-*murīd*s. Among the predecessors, the priority of the author's own *pīr*'s *silsila* line is obvious as it is put in the first,

though the other branches sharing the same root are recognized and its *pīr*s are given respect. Concerning the predecessors of the lineage group, the author's understanding is double-layered, including his own *silsila* line and others. Most affiliated members might share this understanding. Hence, the (understanding of the) most authentic *silsila* line differs between affiliates of different *pīr*s in the same *silsila* group [Ernst 1997: 136-137; Ernst and Lawrence 2002: 22-24; Lawrence 1993].

In this context, it is important to notice that there are two ways to recognize a *silsila*'s structure. One is tree-shaped, descending from the Prophet Muḥammad via the *silsila*'s namesake and then splitting into several branches. The other image of a *silsila* is ascending from one's *pīr* to the Prophet Muḥammad via the *silsila*'s namesake. For the affiliated members, the second one might have more significance when they imagine their connection to the *silsila* through their *pīr*. Such an understanding could be seen in the *bay'a* formula of Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā: You make a *bay'a* with this weak one and *khwāja* of this weak one and our *khwāja*s and the Prophet... [Siyar: 323]. This formula was inherited by his successors like Sayyid Muḥammad Gīsūdarāz with some modifications [MkG: 38].

From the development of *silsila* names in Medieval India, it can be seen that affiliates started to distinguish their *silsila* by the name of their direct or relatively close *pīr*, usually within three generations. After a certain period, a collective name for a group of *silsila* lines sharing the same root appeared. In this phase, names derived from the collective name of the *silsila* were applied to the group of the *silsila*'s affiliates. Through this process, we can see that direct *pīr-murīd* relationship was of principal importance in the formation of relationships and groups among the Sufis. This is typically shown by the contents of *Siyar al-awliyā*. Written after the formation of a *silsila* group and the development of its collective name, the work theoretically acknowledges that many *silsila* lines among the Chishtī *silsila* group originated from ancestors in Chisht as it mentions several *khalīfa*s in each generation. At the same time, it declares the superiority of Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā's *silsila* line by placing it at the beginning. Thus it shows a tree-shaped picture of the Chishtī *silsila* group whose trunk is the Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā line. In this way, the author described the principal importance of his *pīr*.

### Differences between "order" and *silsila*

As shown in the former section, *silsila* is a very important factor for the formation of a so-called "order (Tariqa)" in India and many researchers use them synonymously. However, this usage is sometimes problematic for the understanding of "order (Tariqa)."

Firstly, even though a *silsila* is shared by all the affiliated members, it is basically transmitted by masters (*pīr*, *shaykh*). So *murīd*s and simple devotees are frequently not included in the word "*silsila*" seen in Medieval Persian works, and there are expressions like "*murīd*s of *khwānwāda* of Shaykh Bahā al-Dīn Zakariyā [KM: 283]." Using order and *silsila* as synonyms might obscure this fact, with some "history of order (*silsila*)" ending up as a series of biographies of individual *shaykh*s, without dealing with important aspects of an order such as social grouping or mass movement.

Secondly, what the words *silsila*, and *khwāndān/khwānwāda* in the Medieval Indian case,

indicate in Persian works tends to vary. For example, a seemingly general name like "the *silsila* of Chishtīya" may indicate a much smaller group of *pīr*s than we imagine. For example, it refers only to the hereditary line of Mawdūd Chishtī in Chisht when Mīr Khwurd says "*khwānwāda* of Chisht," to which his uncle was affiliated[12] [Siyar: 211]. It seems that affiliated members consider a *silsila* as "ours (what we are affiliated with)" and, at the same time, "theirs (the predecessor/namesakes')." In other words, sometimes even for affiliated members, a *silsila* of predecessors in the distant past and a *silsila* of nearly contemporary members refer to different groups. Concerning this point, we always have to keep in mind that *silsila* can be used for both a single lineage line and a group of lineage lines sharing the same root. A Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā *silsila* is only a part of the Chishtī *silsila* group but the same word *silsila* is applied to the both. The range of the *silsila* changes according to the context.

After all, *silsila* is basically a concept while Tariqa or order as an object of research is, in most cases, a group of people and has physical and material elements like institutions [Trimingham 1971]. This difference is clearly seen in the case of multi-affiliation, which became popular in India in the later half of the fourteenth century. There are two ways by which a person affiliates himself to several *silsila*s. One is that a person has several *pīr*s of different *silsila*s, which could be understood as the person belonging to several groups. Another is that a person is affiliated to a *pīr* with several *silsila*s, and consequently he becomes multi-affiliated to several *silsila*s only by belonging to one group as a *murīd*. In Medieval India, there was a Sufi *pīr* Jalāl al-Dīn Bukhārī,[13] who had the *khirqa*s of 20 *silsila*s and his people became affiliated to any *silsila* he joined, either only one or plurally [JU: 266, 533, 610, 652, 670]. His descendants formed a distinct lineage called Bukhārī Sayyid in Gujarat,[14] claiming that they had 44 *silsila*s, among which 12 were inherited from him and his Sayyid lineage was the principal one [JS: 124a-222b]. This case suggests that *silsila* is just an idea shared by particular people, and direct *pīr-murīd* relationship, sometimes based on blood relationship, played a much stronger role in the group's formation.

### *Silsila* and saint worship

Lastly, it might be worth mentioning some aspects of the *pīr-murīd* relationship and *silsila* which are related to saint worship, an important element of Sufi orders.

If we think about what makes a Sufic *silsila* "valid," it is the concept that the *silsila* is a link to the Prophet Muḥammad. Perhaps this point offered common ground for the veneration of Sufi saints and *sayyid*s in Medieval India. Both Sufis and *sayyid*s could function as a medium with the Prophet Muḥammad. Most early Indian Sufis who were venerated as saints were *sayyid*s [Islam 2002: 199], and many of them showed a strong interest in *ḥadīth*, another link to the Prophet Muḥammad through the medium of texts. The common feature of Sufic *silsila*s and *sayyid*s' lineage as a link to the Prophet Muḥammad might be another reason why most Sufi saints in Medieval India were *sayyid*s, adding to Islam's "*ashraf* (the high-born) and *ardhal* (the low-born)" theory [Islam 2002: 198-205].

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12) That line is indicated in the table as "*khwāndān* of Chisht (smaller)".

13) He is said to have started "multi-affiliation" to Suhrawardī and Chishtī in India [Rizvi 1983: 272-273]. For more information about him see [EI2: Djalāl al-Dīn Ḥusayn al-Bukhārī; JU: i-ix; Rizvi 1983a: 277-282].

14) For Bukhārī Sayyids see Rizvi [Rizvi 1983: 282-284].

In saint worship, researchers usually pay attention to this-worldly benefits like healing diseases. However, devotees ask *pīr*s for help not only for this world but also for the next world. A famous Chishtī shaykh Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā tells one anecdote about the first *khirqa*.

(Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā said) On the night of Mi'rāj, the Prophet received a *khirqa* from God. It was called the *khirqa* of needy. After that, he called his Companions and said "I have received a *khirqa* from God and was ordered to give this *khirqa* to one person." Then, he turned to Abū Bakr Ṣiddīq and said, "If I give you this *khirqa* what will you do?" Abū Bakr replied, "I will be charitable, obedient and give gifts." Then he asked 'Umar. "If I give you this *khirqa* what will you do?" 'Umar said, "I will be fair and pay heed to justice." Then he asked 'Uthmān. "If I give you this *khirqa* what will you do?" He replied, "I will be cooperative and generous." Then he asked 'Alī. "If I give you this *khirqa* what will you do?" He answered, "I will gloss over other's faults and take over the sins of God's servants." The Prophet gave the *khirqa* to 'Alī and said. "I was told by the God to give this *khirqa* to whoever gave this answer." [FF: 108-109; Faruqi 1996: 357-358; QA: 87-88; Siyar: 341-342 (text for the translation)]

The message conveyed in this anecdote is clear. 'Alī's answer is the quality needed to wear a *khirqa*, i.e., be a Sufi. A Sufi *pīr* was expected to take his *murīd*s' sins as his. Therefore, it helps a *murīd* in the Last Judgement to have a *pīr* and be affiliated to a *silsila*.

Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā mentioned about one darwish. When the darwish saw a person who did not belong to anybody, he used to say "He sits without balance." This servant asked "Does it mean without weights?" Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā answered "No. It means that for the one who belongs to a *shaykh*, whatever the *murīd* did would be put to his *pīr*'s balance in the Last Judgement. From this it is said that somebody is sitting without balance, i.e., he does not have any *pīr*." [FF: 97; Faruqi 1996: 327-328]

The same kind of thinking is expressed by Dārā Shukūh, a Mughal prince and intellectual devotee of Qādirī *silsila* [Safina: 118], and modern *murīd*s in Niẓām al-Dīn Dargah [Pinto 1995: 151-152]. This thinking must have surely been shared by people of broad social standing over a long period of time, and is one of the reasons why people venerate a *pīr* and affiliated themselves to a *pīr* and *silsila*, thus forming a group (Tariqa/order).

## Conclusion

*Silsila* is chain(s) of *pīr-murīd* relationship. Theoretically every *pīr* has a *pīr*, even if only in dreams or visions, and therefore there is a *silsila*.[15] In that sense *silsila* and *pīr-murīd* relationship are inseparable. However, if we look more closely, their functions in the formation of Tariqa (order)

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15) Whether a *silsila* acquired in dreams or visions could be legitimate or not is another matter and requires a separate study.

are different. *Silsila* provides a conceptual base for Tariqa. It is an ethereal connection with the great predecessors and the Prophet Muḥammad, the origin of all Sufi *silsila*s. People who want this connection go to a *pīr*. On the other hand, the *pīr-murīd* relationship works on a more physical level by forming a group surrounding one *pīr*. Each group based on a *pīr-murīd* relationship could be called a Tariqa. In the case that several such groups share the same predecessor and *silsila* those groups may make a bigger group, which could also be called Tariqa. Thus, both *silsila* and *pīr-murīd* relationship can be sufficient conditions for Tariqa. At the same time, as we see that *pīr-murīd* relationship is not conducted in all Tariqas, or that some Tariqas maintain their cohesion through a particular practice even if people forget the *silsila*,[16] it cannot be said that either a *silsila* or a *pīr-murīd* relationship is a necessary condition for Tariqa. The degree that these two factors have contributed to forming a Tariqa varies from place to place. However, in the Indian Subcontinent through the ages, *silsila* and *pīr-murīd* relationship have been among the strongest factors in forming a Tariqa. To further clarify these points more research may be needed.
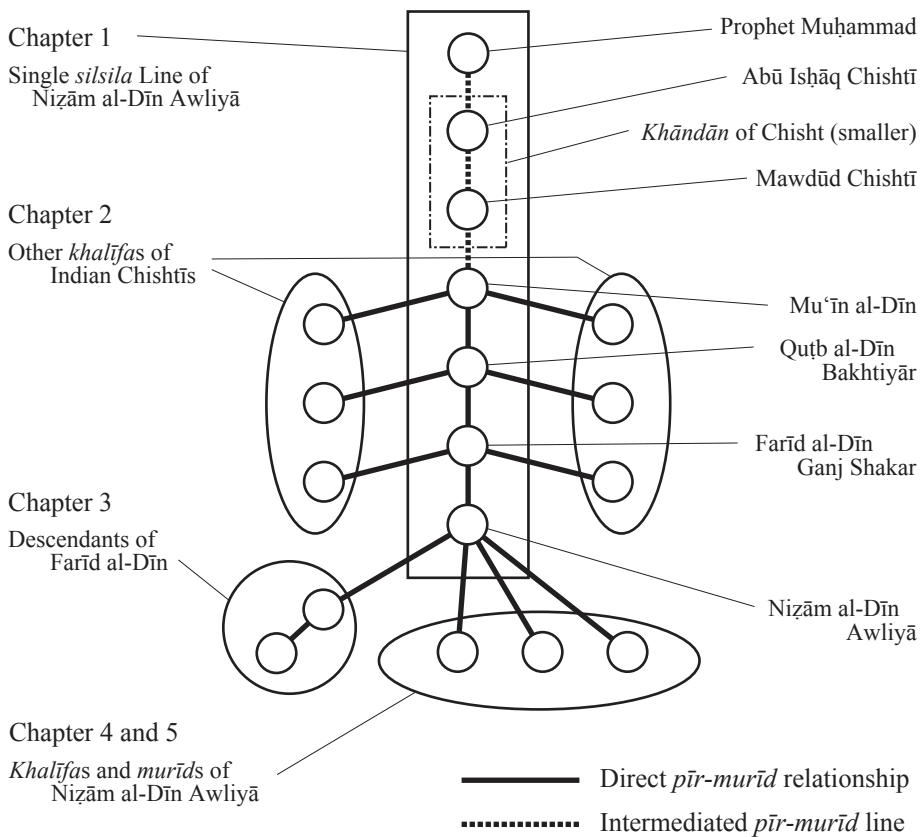


**Table** Structure of *Siyar al-awliyā*

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16)   For Tariqas without *silsila* but sharing a particular way of *ḏikr*, see Fujii's article in this volume.

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