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Everyday Ethics as Authority: Shaikh Hamiduddin Nagauri and Cross-Community Devotion in Thirteenth-Century Rajputana

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Abstract

This study examines the moral authority of Shaikh Hamiduddin Nagauri (1192–1274 AD) in the Hindu–Jain environment of thirteenth-century Rajputana. It argues that his authority was shaped less by doctrinal accommodation than by an everyday ethics that made Chishti sanctity intelligible across social and religious boundaries. Subsistence-based livelihood, household austerity, vernacular accessibility, distance from patronage, and a discipline of non-harm together formed a style of conduct that could be publicly recognised as morally credible. The study draws on a genre-sensitive reading of Chishti tazkira and malfūzāt texts alongside a local manuscript tradition, treating these materials as institutional memory rather than transparent social description. It also considers Nagaur's later devotional life as a possible afterlife of this ethical credibility. Given the archive's predominantly hagiographical and retrospective character, the study does not claim to reconstruct social reality directly or to prove cross-community reception in a complete sense. Instead, it shows how ethical discipline was represented as a basis of saintly authority in a plural regional setting.

Keywords: Sufism; Chishti Order; Nagaur; Rajasthan/Rajputana; Everyday Ethics; Inter-Communal Devotion

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Introduction and Historiographical Problem

The consolidation of the early Delhi Sultanate reshaped north India's political and social geography by intensifying mobility, patronage, and, to some extent, the circulation of skills across garrison towns¹, market centres, and older sacred landscapes (Jackson, 1999; Kumar, 1994; Wink, 1990). What appears as "expansion" was also a re-patterning of routes and nodes, notably, coercive extraction and protection travelled alongside the movement of artisans, administrators, and commercial groups, making interaction visible not only in elite chronicles but also in disputes, endowments, and the built environment (Alam, 2004; Jackson, 1999). For this reason, "culture" is treated here as practice and mediation of the ways authority became legible through objects, spatial ordering, architectural reuse, and routine public conduct, rather than as doctrine alone (Flood, 2009; Truschke, 2021).

Rajputana was a distinct part of these wider regional changes. It was not governed as a single, uniform province; rather, it functioned like a frontier zone where Sultanate control remained uneven. The Sultanate penetration was, in fact, often mediated by campaigns, tribute arrangements, and the strategic holding of nodal sites rather than consistent administrative depth (Ahluwalia, 1966). Notably, social legitimacy remained open to contestation because Rajput political culture valorised honour, autonomy, and lineage, while Jain institutions and mercantile elites sustained parallel moral economies rooted in restraint, charity, and the protection of life (Sharma, 1968; Tod, 1829).

The Jain philosophy's emphasis on *ahimsā* influenced local assessments of moral trustworthiness (Dundas, 2002).² At the same time, Sanskrit and regional literary worlds

complicated any simple civilizational separation. The inscriptions and texts capture Indo-Muslim political realities and cross-community transactions that fit awkwardly with rigid communal paradigms (Truschke, 2021). Merchant biographies also show how commercial actors operated within multi-religious settings. They negotiated protection and legitimacy while sustaining their own community institutions, without reducing diverse ethical worlds into a single, monolithic way of life (Pradhan, 2017). The end consequence is a context best defined as ethical pluralism, where traditions fought, yet an overlapping vocabulary of virtue, discipline, generosity, and preservation of life could be mobilised across boundaries (Dundas, 2002; Truschke, 2021).

Within this broader context, Nagaur, as regional histories emphasise, was not a rural backwater³ but a strategically important node linked to the corridors between Delhi, Ajmer, and western routes, and was periodically incorporated into Sultanate measures (Mathur, 1966; Shokoohy & Shokoohy, 1993). Such nodal towns were dense interfaces where soldiers, traders, Mendicants (*faqīrs*), scribes, and pilgrims overlapped, where religious institutions competed for patronage, and where local populations evaluated newcomers through practical criteria: how they lived, whom they helped, what they refused, and whether they reduced conflict or intensified it. In this environment, religious specialists produced public authority, able to arbitrate disputes and model ethical life.

Scholarship on Sufi authority shows that legitimacy regularly depended on recognisable repertoires: visible austerity, disciplined self-presentation, reputations for justice, and independence from extractive power (Digby,

¹ Garrison towns were strategically situated settlements where the Sultanate stationed troops to secure territory and routes. As administrative and supply centres, they attracted officials, merchants, artisans, scholars and religious figures.

² By the Jain dimension of *ahimsā*, this study refers to the specifically Jain moral universe in which non-violence was treated as a supreme ethical discipline governing diet, conduct, and relations with living beings, and which therefore shaped wider public judgments of moral credibility in medieval western India.

³ Rural backwater" refers to an isolated rural settlement considered peripheral to major political, economic, and cultural networks and possessing limited strategic or administrative significance.

1986). Rajputana, in that sense, was precisely an arena where Chishti practices of simplicity and service could become socially persuasive, less through theological argument than through embodied ethics (Nizami, 1961; Rizvi, 1978).

It is within this milieu that Shaikh Hamiduddin Nagauri al-Sāwalī remembered as Sultan al-Tārikīn (“King of Recluses”), emerges as a pivotal Chishti figure in rural Rajasthan (Kirmānī, n.d., pp. 245–247; Dehlavi, 1990, pp. 29–36). His career is instructive not only for Chishti spirituality, but also for how Sufi authority could be built where Hindu–Jain norms were socially embedded and where the legitimacy of Muslim presence could remain contested or fragile (Nizami, 1961; Rizvi, 1978).

This study argues that Hamiduddin’s authority is best understood not through doctrinal syncretism, but through an everyday ethics that made Chishti sanctity publicly legible across confessional boundaries. Together, subsistence-based living, strict household discipline, vernacular accessibility, a strong ethic of non-harm, and a principled distance from patronage created a way of life that reduced the social costs of proximity and made saintliness identifiable without the need for doctrinal merger. Therefore, in thirteenth-century Rajputana society, everyday ethics was not only part of Hamiduddin’s holiness but also a main way it gained social credibility.

Sources, Method, and Limits of Hagiography

Any attempt to understand the authority of Shaikh Hamiduddin Nagauri in the thirteenth-century Rajputana must begin with the nature of the sources. The available material does not give us a direct or balanced record of Nagaur’s religious world. Most of it comes from Chishti hagiographical and discursive traditions, shaped by memory, teaching, and institutional self-

presentation rather than neutral documentation.

For this reason, this study does not read these sources as simple descriptions of social reality. At the same time, it does not reject them as mere legend. Instead, it treats them as historically situated forms of institutional memory, through which saintly authority was narrated, organised, and passed down over time. Hagiography is valuable not in spite of its moral and religious framing, but because it preserves the ethical forms through which sanctity became publicly credible. (Currie, 1989; Digby, 1986; Green, 2012).

In this case, the manuscript tradition of Sarūr al-Ḥudūr is read alongside Chishti tazkira and malfūḏāt texts, particularly *Siyar al-Awliyā*, *Siyar al-‘Ārifīn*, *Akhbār al-Akhyār*, and *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* (Auliya, 1996).⁴ Of course, these genres are not interchangeable and must be handled on their own terms. Interestingly, Tazkiras do not serve as contemporary biographies; instead, they condense outstanding lives into morally charged incidents, choosing those behaviours, interactions, and statements that subsequent societies felt should be preserved. Malfūḏāt similarly cannot be read as verbatim transcripts. They are selectively compiled records of remembered conversations rather than verbatim transcripts, shaped by pedagogical and ethical priorities and by the norms governing relations between Sufi masters and their disciples. Another layer is added by this manuscript tradition, which is frequently less canonically refined but is nevertheless able to preserve minute elements of local memory, such as household routines, eating customs, labour, attire, speech, and the administration of material existence.

These sources are normative and memorialising. They privilege saintly self-fashioning and disciples’ perspectives. They also give only

⁴ The principal Indo-Persian sources used in this study are *Surūr al-Ḥudūr* (MS 21/168, Habib Ganj Collection, Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University), Amīr Khurd Kirmānī’s *Siyar al-Awliyā*, Jamālī’s *Siyar al-‘Ārifīn*, ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Dehlavī’s *Akhbār al-Akhyār*, and Amīr Ḥasan Sijzi’s *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*. The manuscript, printed editions,

and translations consulted are listed in the References. Because these works differ in date, genre, and proximity to Hamiduddin Nagauri, they are read comparatively as layered records of Chishti memory rather than as interchangeable contemporary testimony.

uneven access to Hindu and Jain reception as independent voices. In addition, the manuscript tradition limits firm claims about chronology and local variation. For these reasons, this study offers a mechanism-based explanation of credibility and boundary management in mixed rural Rajasthan, rather than a complete social history of Nagaur's religious demography (Alam, 2004; Jackson, 1999; Kumar, 1994).

In Hamiduddin Nagauri's case, the archive repeatedly shows the narrative mechanisms through which sanctity was made legible to others. The argument therefore rests on a genre-sensitive close reading and triangulation of the available texts. Rather than using isolated quotations from individual works, it compares how particular practices recur across different genres, how much narrative importance they receive, and how they are interpreted within Chishti moral vocabulary.

The interpretive value of such material has been increasingly recognised in scholarship on Sufism and historical memory. Hagiography is not simply a storehouse of pious exaggeration. It is also a space where communities organise the past, classify moral worth, and preserve lasting ideas about how authority should appear and operate. In South Asian Sufism, such texts are especially important because saintly authority was often grounded less in formal office than in habits, performances, and forms of relationship that had to be repeatedly witnessed, narrated, and stabilised as reputation⁵ (Banerjee, 2021).

Their narrative logic is thematic rather than chronological: episodes are preserved less to establish sequence than to illustrate virtues and tests of character. Yet this is also what makes them useful, since their selectivity reveals which ethical practices later transmitters regarded as central to saintly authority. However, the life and remembered works of Hamiduddin still allow a historical sketch to be drawn. In this respect, the article follows Tanvir Ahmed's suggestion that

hagiographical narratives may be read not simply as memory, but also as texts through which history itself can be imagined (Ahmed, 2024).

Accordingly, the claims of this study remain bounded by the evidentiary and generic limits of the archive. It does not aim to read hagiographical tale as clear description, quantify devotion sociologically, or reconstruct Nagaur's everyday social history in any comprehensive empirical sense. Nor does it collapse representation into reality. Instead, it approaches the archive as a site of social and cultural memory in which saintly authority was preserved, narrated, and normatively coded (Assmann, 2011, p. 15-70; Halbwachs, 1992).

In this respect, hagiography is treated as a narrative form through which sanctity is organised, transmitted, and rendered exemplary (Heffernan, 1988). The argument therefore asks how repeated representations of subsistence, restraint, non-accumulation, vernacular accessibility, and guarded autonomy came to signify trustworthiness in a plural rural setting, and how these practices helped constitute ethical authority. Hagiographical sources are not transparent social evidence, but they preserve the behaviours through which saintly authority was made recognisable. In Hamiduddin's case, subsistence, restraint, vernacular accessibility, and refusal of patronage show Chishti sanctity as everyday discipline, not merely doctrine.

Ethical Practices as Authority Mechanisms

To deepen the analytic weight of "Chishti formation," it is useful to treat it less as a list of doctrines and more as a training in practices of authority. In the north Indian Sultanate milieu, Chishti credibility was cultivated through disciplined companionship (*suhbat*), ethical comportment (*adab*), controlled proximity to political power as well as an insistence that spiritual standing must be publicly legible

⁵ Important Chishti sources include *Surūr al-Ṣudūr*, a collection of conversations and teachings attributed to Hamiduddin Nagauri; Amir Khurd Kirmani's *Siyar al-Awliya*, containing biographical narratives about prominent Chishti saints; and Amir Hasan Sijzi's *Fawa'id al-*

Fu'ad, which records Nizamuddin Awliya's discourses. These works reveal how Chishti communities remembered saintly conduct, transmitted ethical instruction, and constructed enduring models of spiritual authority.

through restraint and service rather than through wealth or courtly favour (Aquil, 2005; Ernst & Lawrence, 2002). This is why Chishti authority often travelled effectively across social settings. In fact, its core idea of humility, disciplined household practice, scepticism towards patronage, and attentiveness to ordinary seekers was highly useful. When applied in regions where Muslim political legitimacy was contested, this religious syntax could become a source of social advantage, precisely because it offered a recognisable moral alternative to extraction and coercion.

These archive sources are not transparent “data,” and they require critical reading. However, they preserve precisely the small-scale details through which authority is built in village settings through repeated scenes of interaction, witnessed discipline, reputational testing, and moral commentary on everyday life. In this evidentiary frame, Hamiduddin’s rural presence is not merely a pious preference; it is a communicative programme that agrarian communities could evaluate in their own moral idioms.

Scholarship on Sultanate-era Sufism shows that different orders developed distinct institutional relationships with rulers and endowed wealth. Without reducing these differences to a rigid binary, Chishti memory and self-fashioning placed special emphasis on distance from the court as a mark of integrity. This position could be contrasted with more court-facing and endowment-friendly Sufi styles in other lineages (Aquil, 2005; Ernst & Lawrence, 2002).

In a region such as Rajputana, where military power was often uneven and local autonomy remained important, a saint’s visible independence from elite patronage carried both spiritual and social force. The refusal of gifts and the minimisation of dependence suggested that the shaikh’s authority did not rest on the same mechanisms of reward, obligation, and extraction that shaped much of political life.

This is where Hamiduddin’s “rural strategy” should be read as the operationalisation of a Chishti authority-grammar under frontier-like constraints. Evidently, his village settlement

near Nagaur, his insistence on subsistence and minimal consumption, and his household’s disciplined economy functioned as public proofs of moral seriousness (Nizami, 1961; Rizvi, 1978). The point is not to romanticise agrarian life. Rather, meagre subsistence and lawful income worked as credibility mechanisms. They reduced political entanglement, limited suspicion that charisma was being monetised, and made sanctity legible through local expectations of honest labour, restraint, and socially tested reputation (Digby, 1986).

In much of Sultanate north India, Persianate administrative culture and elite literacies could widen social distance. When Sufi households and circles used vernacular registers like Hindavi and related speech worlds, they were not only communicating efficiently; they were relocating the persuasive force of spirituality into everyday moral discussion (Alam, 2004; Ernst & Lawrence, 2002). In rural settings, where the durability of a saint’s influence depended on repetition and circulation among non-elite audiences, vernacular practice helped transform ethical claims into locally repeatable idioms. This is one reason Chishti presence could become embedded in village life without requiring prior entry into courtly cultural capital.

Moreover, Hamiduddin’s dietary discipline and commitment to non-violence can be understood not as simple “accommodation”, but as a form of boundary-work. Food practices often mark community identity and moral order, and debates over eating habits can reflect deeper concerns about purity, difference, and ethical status (Ali, 2015). In South Asian milieu, where Jain and Hindu ideas of *ahimsā* carried strong public respect, a Sufi’s refusal to eat meat presented compassion as a visible part of piety. It also de-centred food as a boundary marker between communities and re-inscribed it as a shared ethical concern as especially potent move in environments where inter-communal relations were shaped as much by daily practice as by doctrinal claims.

More broadly, scholarship on Islamic legal and ethical reasoning around purity and practice helps explain why such gestures mattered. They

shaped the everyday management of religious difference, rather than remaining confined to abstract theology (Masud, 1994). Instead of erasing difference, they helped produce an overlapping moral public in which communities could retain theological distinctions while recognising shared ethical values (Dundas, 2002; Nizami, 1961). This convergence makes the rural Chishti strategy historically significant in Rajputana. It offered a form of legitimacy that did not depend on military control and provided a socially intelligible alternative to the prestige of wealth and power.

The narrative link between “formation” and “strategy” then tightens and Chishti training supplied an authority (*adab* (Etiquette), restraint, service, and caution toward patronage), while Rajputana supplied the testing ground where that experiment had to be rendered credible among agrarian households and within Hindu–Jain ethical expectations (Ernst & Lawrence, 2002; Rizvi, 1978). Hamiduddin’s rural strategy is best understood as a deliberate conversion of Chishti ethics into a locally persuasive social form one in which the saint’s household became the primary text of persuasion, and everyday practice became the medium through which intercultural legitimacy gained momentum in Rajputana.

Everyday Ethics in the Primary Record: Subsistence, Household Discipline, and Vernacular Authority

Hamiduddin’s distinctiveness in the Chishti *Silsila* is not that he articulated a new metaphysics, but that the record repeatedly frames his authority as *ethically demonstrable* in ordinary life. Across the genres that preserve him—*tazkira* biography, *malfūzāt*-style discourse, and manuscript memory—sanctity is made legible through food, livelihood, clothing, speech, and household routine rather than through miracle-display alone. This “everyday anchoring” is not an accidental stylistic feature rather it reflects a recognisable authority in medieval Indian Sufism, where reputations were stabilised

through witnessed discipline and repeatable practices that communities could evaluate over time (Digby, 1986; Rizvi, 1978). In Rajputana, where religious pluralism was dense and social legitimacy could not be assumed, such ethical legibility mattered because it allowed a Muslim saintly presence to be received as credible without requiring prior acceptance of Muslim political and cultural elite (Alam, 2004; Nizami, 1961).

A methodologically careful way is to read the sources “against each other,” because each genre performs a different function. The manuscript tradition of *Sarur-us-Sudur* is especially valuable because it preserves granular domestic and practical details (e.g., land cultivation, clothing, speech, household labour) that state-centric narratives typically ignore.⁶ *Tazkiras* such as *Siyar-ul-Auliya* and *Akhbar-ul-Akhyar* condense those details into moral exempla that can circulate as institutional memory of the Chishtiyya’s preferred ethical style.⁷

Meanwhile, the *malfūzāt* tradition provides the Chishti ethical vocabulary such as poverty (*faqr*), trust (*tawakkul*), patience (*sabr*), sincerity (*ikhlas*), through which ordinary practices are interpreted as spiritual discipline rather than rural imitation (Awliya, 1992; pp. 59–60, 70). The value lies in the convergence between domestic detail and saintly memory. When manuscript traditions preserve ordinary practices—food, clothing, livelihood, language and biographical texts turn those practices into moral examples, everyday life becomes foreground than background.

Subsistence as Method, not Background

In *Sarur-us-Sudur*, Hamiduddin’s livelihood is presented as a deliberate practice of self-limitation, not simply as rural poverty. His cultivation of a small farmland, described through the idiom of a single *bigha*, along with the seasonal pattern of farming and a modest economy of grain and coarse cloth, is narrated as disciplined restraint rather than occasional

⁶ For detailed description see , *Sarur-us-Sudur*, pp. 5, 9–14, 43, 47, 71, 75, 104, 106, 221.

⁷ For detailed description see , *Siyar-ul-Auliya*, pp. 156–164; *Akhbar-ul-Akhyar*, pp. 29–36.

hardship.⁸ From a Chishti perspective, this is best understood as *faqr* in its active sense: poverty as a conscious refusal of dependence, especially on patronage, which could turn spiritual authority into a client relationship within elite status economies (Hujwīrī, 1982; Rizvi, 1978; Trimingham, 1971). The later celebration of Hamiduddin as “Sultan al-Tarikin” therefore marks not mere withdrawal, but a disciplined rejection of the social mechanisms through which charisma was commonly converted into worldly rank.

In the Rajputana setting already outlined, subsistence also worked as a form of proximity. In agrarian moral economies, credibility was often relational. It belonged to figures who visibly shared the burdens of rural life, such as seasonal uncertainty, labour, and scarcity, rather than speaking from protected privilege. Hamiduddin’s subsistence therefore made a claim about trustworthiness. His counsel came from someone who had reduced the distance between spiritual authority and village life. Ethical guidance could then appear as advice from “within” the community, rather than instruction from above it (Nizami, 1961; Sharma, 1968). It makes the saint’s authority socially intelligible in registers that local Hindus and Jains already recognised as morally serious—restraint, honest labour, and modest consumption.

The Household as a Small Khanqah

The manuscript record repeatedly foregrounds household routines—mud dwelling, plain clothing, daily labour, and the wife’s work in spinning and cooking—as elements of a shared austerity so therefore these details shift attention from monumental religious spaces to the micro-practices of everyday discipline, and suggest that Chishti authority was produced not only through institutions, shrines, or formal teaching, but also through visible habits of

restraint within the household.⁹ The household itself becomes a disciplined environment where virtues are practiced daily: restraint, lawful income, hospitality without display, and a purposeful limitation of surplus in the khanqah, which is frequently envisioned as an architectural node of discipleship (Green, 2012). The saint’s household is thus not only a private sphere but also it is a public proof of ethical integrity. This domestic emphasis also clarifies how authority circulates beyond direct discipleship. Sufi authority, as Digby argues in a classic formulation, is socially produced through repeated interactions in which discipline is witnessed, tested, narrated, and stabilized as reputation (Digby, 1986).

Household discipline is especially effective for this process because it is continuously observable. It provides a durable field in which neighbours and visitors can evaluate congruence between claim and practice that help them to answer the question, does the Shaikh live what he teaches? In a rural environment, where households are primary units of moral reproduction and social standing, the visible integrity of household life becomes legible across religious lines. Even without a separate female biography, the repeated mention of the wife’s austerity indicates that renunciation is socially sustained rather than theatrically performed.

Vernacular authority and the politics of intimacy

The detail that the household communicated in Hindavi is not a minor ethnographic flourish rather it is a key marker of vernacular authority.¹⁰ In fact, language signals belonging. Linguistic registers can solidify boundaries by identifying insiders and outsiders in conquest-adjacent environments, particularly as Persianate administrative culture and elite

⁸ For this depiction of Hamiduddin’s disciplined livelihood, including the cultivation of a small plot, seasonal farming, and a modest economy of grain and coarse cloth, see *Sarur-us-Sudur*, pp. 9–14; *Siyar-ul-Auliya*, p. 71.

⁹ For the description of Hamiduddin’s household austerity, including his mud dwelling, simple clothing, daily labour, and the domestic work of spinning and cooking, see *Sarur-us-Sudur*, pp. 9–14.

¹⁰ For the description see, *Sarur-us-Sudur*, pp. 43, 47, 71, 104, 106.

literacies divide kings and scribes from rural publics (Alam, 2004).

Hindavi usage worked as everyday translation, reducing the sense that religious and cultural difference. By speaking in the language of village life, Hamiduddin placed spiritual instruction within the same speech world as ordinary moral discussion. His teachings could therefore be heard, repeated, and absorbed without dependence on elite cultural knowledge. Later *tazkiras* present this as humility and closeness to the people (Dehlavi, 1990, pp. 29–36). However, the manuscript detail shows something more: shared language made the Muslim saint appear less external, grounding authority in familiarity, service, and lived proximity rather than courtly or bureaucratic distance.

Everyday ethics and the management of boundaries

One of the most consequential dimensions of everyday ethics in Hamiduddin's profile is how ordinary practices manage social boundaries. Food, livelihood, and speech are not neutral, in fact, they are among the primary medium through which communities classify belonging and difference, where Hamiduddin's record is particularly useful for transcultural integration. The manuscript tradition foregrounds his non-violent, restraint-oriented discipline in ways that make ethical convergence socially feasible without doctrinal convergence (Nagaurī, 673 AH/1274–1275 CE, pp. 9–14).

Later traditions report Hamiduddin's strong opposition to meat and his wish to exclude it from ceremonial contexts (Nizami, 1961). This was more than a culinary scruple. In a Hindu–Jain ethical setting where *ahimsā* carried public prestige, such discipline helped make the saint's space less threatening and more approachable. It allowed ethical conviction and social effect to coincide: sincerity was narrated as discipline, while discipline created conditions for cross-community respect. Chishti authority in rural Rajputana therefore worked less through formal theological negotiation than through an everyday ethical style recognisable as compassionate, non-dominating, and

consistent. Everyday ethics was thus an instrument of authority.

Moreover, triangulating Sarur-us-Sudur with Siyar-ul-Auliya and Akhbar-ul-Akhyar shows how "life" becomes "lesson." The later *tazkira* tradition curates practice into exemplarity. In *Siyar-ul-Auliya*, Hamiduddin appears as a renouncer whose authority flows from disciplined simplicity (Kirmanī, n.d., pp. 245–247). In *Akhbar-ul-Akhyar*, the same simplicity becomes a moral critique of worldly ambition and an evidentiary proof of spiritual stature (Dehlavi, 1990, pp. 29–36). This moralisation is not a distortion; it is a function of the genre. It shows what later Chishti memory chose to preserve: not courtly proximity or political achievement, but an ethical life that could be lived within a Hindu–Jain landscape without producing antagonism. Hamiduddin's bridge-building is therefore not doctrinal eclecticism. It is better understood as a disciplined everyday ethic that made authority portable across cultural boundaries through restraint, compassion, lawful earning, and integrity. Its durability lay in practices that could be witnessed, repeated, and stabilised as reputation. (Nizami, 1961; Ernst, 1992; Rizvi, 1978).

The Vegetarianism and Interfaith Recognition

Hamiduddin Nagauri's spiritual authority in Rajputana is most convincingly illuminated where the record foregrounds *practice* especially diet and harm rather than abstract piety. In the broad Sunni legal horizon of the period, meat was legitimate, and in many Persian-Islamic social settings meat-eating was also entangled with hospitality, status, and public sociability. Against that background, the tradition's insistence on Hamiduddin's vegetarian discipline is not a curiosity but a sustained ethical posture that re-centres non-harm as a governing criterion of sanctity. In Nizami's account, Hamiduddin "was a strict vegetarian and never took meat," and he "warned his disciples against distributing meat-preparations" (Nizami, 1961, p. 188).

These statements become clearest when read through the social meaning of food in western

India. In Rajasthan's Hindu–Jain moral publics, vegetarianism was not merely diet but an embodied discipline of *ahiṃsā* (अहिंसा), a refusal to normalise harm and a public performance of restraint (Dundas, 2002). The sources suggest that Hamiduddin's vegetarian ethic signalled credibility at the everyday point of contact: consumption. It reduced the friction of closeness by detaching Muslim holiness from practices an *ahiṃsā*-oriented audience might find ethically troubling and it becomes even more explicit where diet is tied to the saint's posthumous devotional ceremony. The Nizami passage also notes that Hamiduddin cautioned disciples against preparing and distributing meat in connection with commemorative piety "after his death" (Nizami, 1961, p. 188). The logic is significant; it organises the saint's afterlife in public devotion so that veneration does not require local non-Muslim neighbours to cross a violence/food boundary that carried strong ethical charge. Rather than invoking "syncretism" as an explanatory shortcut, the mechanism is better specified as the strategic lowering of everyday symbolic costs that can otherwise harden communal distance. Vegetarian discipline, however, is only one side of the bridging repertoire.

The other is recognition, or the ability to classify moral worth across confessional lines; The Chishti *malfūzāt* tradition uses recorded speech as a means of classifying language. In fact in *Morals for the Heart* (the English translation of *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*), the Nagaur episode is narrated in a form that is unusually explicit: "The Khwaja knew a certain Hindu in Nagaur ... 'This man is a saint.'" (Auliya, 1992, p. 161). This is not a gentle gesture of "tolerance"; it is a reclassification of holiness itself. The important approach is not the eradication of diversity, but rather the assertion that saintliness is visible through ethical-spiritual traits that might manifest outside of Muslim identity.

It also records a formulation that clarifies the epistemic posture enabling such recognition: "Some Hindus acknowledge the truth of Islam yet do not become Muslims!" (Auliya, 1992, p. 236). This does not praise doctrinal equivalency;

rather, it acknowledges that recognition and conversion do not always coincide, and that the moral field cannot be reduced to a dichotomy of "Muslim truth vs Hindu error" mapped directly onto social belonging. Thus, Hamiduddin's bridge-building rests on practices that *de-centre communal boundary policing as the primary index of piety* and re-centre ethical discipline and sincerity as publicly readable measures of worth.

Knowledge, Discipline, and the Purpose of Religious Institutions

The knowledge system becomes important because in frontier-like environments such as Rajputana—where Muslim political authority could be perceived as coercive and where Jain mercantile worlds already possessed strong discourses of restraint—an institutional regime that formally polices hoarding becomes legible as a counter-ethic to extraction. The implication is that Chishti authority is produced less through display than through publicly observable, disciplined limits: what is stored, what is distributed, and what is refused. The record's second pillar is knowledge (*ilm*), which is understood as a disciplined capacity rather than as scholastic ornament (Hujwiri, 1982). The same *malfūzāt* text provides an unusually explicit epistemic schema: "There are three modes of knowledge: sensory ... cognitive ... and intuitive," followed immediately by the key clarification that intuitive knowing is "which is to say divine, knowledge" (Auliya, 1992, p. 163). This passage is valuable not because it licenses modern epistemological claims, but because it anchors a historically appropriate proposition and Chishti authority is represented as grounded in a hierarchy of knowing that links spiritual discernment to disciplined life. This linkage matters for how "institution" is conceptualized. If intuitive/divine knowledge is framed as a mode that exceeds ordinary cognition, then institutions and routines (service, controlled consumption, disciplined speech, and regulated hospitality) become the social conditions under which that higher discernment is cultivated and tested. The purpose, here, is not only to execute devotion, but to develop people who can guide others—whose counsel can persuade precisely

because it is based on disciplined knowledge and visible restraint, rather than harsh coercion.

Moreover, in Rajputana's mixed Hindu–Jain–Muslim moral world, the Chishti framing of the *khānqāh* mattered because it altered the *public meaning* of Muslim religious space. A Sufi lodge could easily be read as an extension of Sultanate presence. Importantly, Chishti discourse repeatedly recasts it as a site of *tarbiyat* – a disciplined setting where the self is trained through regulated consumption, controlled storage, ethical distribution, and routine service, with *adab* (disciplined conduct) as the visible measure of spiritual seriousness (Auliya, 1992). In this model, legitimacy is not architectural or political rather it is performative and reproducible. Thus, the Sufi lodge becomes credible to outsiders insofar as it produces a recognisable type of person who exercises restraint, is sincere, and is relatively insulated from patronage that could turn sanctity into status (Nizami, 1961).

This also links with a native Indian philosophical lens; the manner is structurally familiar even without assuming direct borrowing. Upaniṣadic logic frequently shifts authority from external display to inner formation. In Upaniṣadic philosophy, the self is not mastered by proclamation but by sustained discipline that makes conduct reliable and perception trustworthy (Bhadauriya, 2025; Olivelle, 1996/2008). Notably, Yogic ethics formalise the same linkage where insight is conditional upon practice, and moral restraints, especially non-possessiveness (*aparigraha*) and regulated life, are treated as enabling conditions for higher discernment rather than as optional virtues (Patañjali, 2009).

The Chishti epistemological schema in the *malfūzāt* tradition emphasises the shift of knowledge from sensory and cognitive registers to a higher intuitive/divine domain, giving this institutional discipline epistemic weight. Here “higher knowing” is not validated by claim alone; it is socially believable only when attached in

observable limits and trained dispositions (Auliya, 1992). In a Hindu-Jain setting where publics already evaluated moral legitimacy through restraint, self-limitation, and the avoidance of corrupting relationships, Chishti institutions might be understood as moral pedagogies rather than power symbols. Hamiduddin's authority, in this framing, rests less on doctrinal victory than on persuasion through an ethics that could be publicly assessed: disciplined self-limitation, refusal of accumulation, and serviceable conduct, allowing trust to form across communities without theological convergence (Nizami, 1961).

Critique of Materialism: the “Jital” Remark and Debates on Wealth

Beyond the preceding debate, Hamiduddin's critique of his age may also be read as a diagnosis of prestige rather than generic moralising. As Nizami preserves a formulation attributed to him that condenses a sociology of recognition into a single line: “*These days, the Jital is the Shaikh of the times. Whoever possesses the larger amount of jitals, is the Shaikh of the day*” (Nizami, 1961, p. 266).¹¹ It identifies a shift in the currency of reverence: spiritual rank is no longer stabilised by discipline and service, but increasingly by monetised status. Hence, Coin becomes the measure of authority.

Hamiduddin's critique of materialism is analytically significant because it shows a clear awareness of what happens when wealth enters the spiritual field. Devotion and authority become vulnerable to being priced, traded, and displayed. By treating the *jital* as “the shaikh of the times,” the remark theorizes the commodification of charisma where once money can be converted into saintly standing, religious prestige becomes structurally open to elite capture. It also clarifies why Hamiduddin's commitment to subsistence and refusal of gifts should be read as strategy rather than personality: renunciatory discipline functions as a counter-valuation designed to keep sanctity from being redefined as purchasable status. Therefore, these narrations do provide a bridge

¹¹ The remark is recorded in the *tazkira* tradition, most notably in *Akhbār al-Akhyār* (Dehlavi, 1910, p. 30), and is

translated and discussed in Nizami's analysis of Sultanate-era religious politics (Nizami, 1961, p. 266).

to wider intra-Sufi debates over patronage. What does it mean that material resources can sustain hospitality, teaching, and charity, but they also risk pulling institutions into courtly entanglement and competitive displays of rank.

The narrative in Nizami's text makes this counter-valuation concrete by staging refusal as an explicit household ethic. When a royal gift is offered, the wife's reply is recorded in a form that directly moralises acceptance: "Do you want to disgrace years of spiritual devotion and penitence by accepting this gift?" (Nizami, 1961, p. 188). The phrasing matters because it frames material acceptance as a threat to the saint's moral capital rather than as impartial support.

In this framing, poverty is not romantic deprivation, but it is a protective condition for spiritual integrity. Chishti malfūzāt tradition, which articulates the same anti-accumulation logic as a general norm rather than as a biographical episode. *Morals for the Heart* records: "One ought not to ... harbor worldly goods ... except the minimum," and later intensifies the principle through a striking aphorism: "Gold is there only for giving ... For keeping, a stone will do just as good" (Auliya, 1992, p. 294). These are not incidental pieties; rather, they define a moral worldview in which value is relocated from possession to distribution, and from accumulation to service.

Hamiduddin's critique is not anti-economy, but anti-conversion of money into moral rank. The target is the social process by which coin begins to certify sanctity, thereby displacing ethical discipline as the primary basis of recognition. This is why the Chishti preference for distance from courtly patronage can be read historically as an institutional strategy rather than an apolitical posture. In fact, it is a refusal and a means of preventing sanctity from being absorbed into the Sultanate's reward-and-extraction circuits.

In Rajputana, where Jain and many Hindu publics considered restraint, charity, and nonviolence as prestige-bearing values, ostentatious acquisition was not a neutral indicator of success, but it risked being read as *extraction* and moral compromise (Dundas, 2002; Truschke, 2021).

That is why Hamiduddin's anti-materialist posture strengthens "bridge-building" in a specific, testable way. In fact, it keeps saintly authority from looking like yet another route through which elites convert resources into deference. The "jītal" diagnostic clearly identifies the structural hazard of coin becoming convertible into spiritual standing, making the religious field subject to capture by those willing to pay for reputations (Nizami, 1961).

In more rigorous articulation, this is the problem of religious capital being misrecognised as moral worth: where once wealth reliably purchases symbolic reverence, the field's incentives tilt toward display, brokerage, and patronage-dependence rather than disciplined virtue (Grusendorf, 2016; Green, 2011). Contemporary scholarship on South Asian shrine economies sharpens the point further: offerings and wealth are never merely "resources," but objects of moral evaluation, continually pressured to justify themselves through redistribution, service, and public accountability and criticised when they appear as hoarded gain (Ortiz, 2021; Bigelow, 2022). The refusal narrative and the malfūzāt-style aphorisms do not function as decorative pieties; rather, they specify a counter-technique that is disciplined limits, minimised dependence on patrons, and a reorientation of value toward giving rather than accumulation. This is precisely the kind of moral performance that could remain intelligible across Hindu–Jain–Muslim ethical expectations.

Poverty, Patronage, and the Politics of Autonomy

Hamiduddin's "jītal" remark works best not as a timeless sermon against greed, but as a sharp diagnosis of a changing metric of religious worth in a monetising political order when people start treating coin as the yardstick of spiritual rank, charisma becomes *priceable*. Put differently, the line points to a structural shift in the economy of recognition, the conditions under which someone is publicly treated as a *shaikh* (Nizami, 1961).

This is precisely the moment when charisma is pulled toward routinised arrangements that is status, office-like authority, and durable ties of

reward (Weber, 1978), and it also signals a heightened convertibility between economic capital and symbolic religious authority where money can purchase deference, and the religious field becomes vulnerable to capture by resource-holders (Bourdieu, 1991). The *jītal* remark names the danger that sanctity will be socially recognised less through discipline and service than through visible access to wealth.

The danger was amplified in Rajputana because the audience for saintly authority was never only court-adjacent and never only Muslim. In fact, Rajput lineage politics and fortress autonomy, together with Jain mercantile-ethical publics, sustained their own prestige reasons in which restraint, charity, and non-harm carried high public value (Dundas, 2002; Tod, 1829). In such a plural moral landscape, patronage was not a neutral “support system.” It could re-code a Muslim saint as an extension of the Sultanate’s distributive machinery—an emissary or broker of outside power rather than a locally grounded ethical guide. The practical problem was simple: once devotion becomes legible as political alignment, cross-community trust becomes costly and unstable.

This is why “refusal” needs to be treated as institutional strategy, not temperament. The primary memory that Hamiduddin repeatedly declined assistance and grants (Dehlavī, 1990) matters because gifts are rarely free in social life. In fact, they create obligations, claims, and a moral asymmetry between giver and receiver (Mauss, 1925/2002).

In South Asian idioms of giving, the gift can carry reputational force precisely because it binds often in ways that look like moral virtue but function as social leverage (Parry, 1986). Seen in this light, refusal acts like a firewall for maligning the religious and spiritual superiority. It blocks the conversion of a saint’s moral authority into a donor’s prestige asset, and it preserves the saint’s capacity to speak against excess without being quietly disciplined by obligation. Bourdieu’s point about autonomy is directly relevant here: refusing certain forms of capital is often the only way to prevent the field from

being governed by outsiders’ resources and interests (Bourdieu, 1991).

Subsistence living then becomes the material condition that makes refusal believable rather than theatrical. The *Sarur-us-Sudur* portrait of bounded needs, cultivation, and minimal consumption is important because it reduces patrons’ leverage at the level where power actually works: dependency. In peasant moral worldview, legitimacy is routinely judged through whether a figure respects subsistence norms and resists turning scarcity into a tool of domination (Scott, 1976). Hamiduddin’s “small economy” signals exactly that kind of respectability.

The same logic clarifies why the Chishti–Suhrawardi contrast is better framed as an argument about institutional design under political economy constraints, not as a morality play. Wealth can expand a lodge’s distributive capacity (feeding travellers, sustaining students, stabilising charity), but it also increases the probability that the lodge becomes a node where elites compete to convert gifts into influence. Studies of shrine publics and Sufi moral economies repeatedly show that offerings are morally audited and politically contestable where accumulation invites suspicion, while circulation through recognised service practices is what sustains legitimacy (Ewing, 1997; Werbner & Basu, 1998). Hamiduddin’s poverty-distance posture, in this perspective, is not anti-institutional rather it is a choice to keep institutional meaning from being rewritten by patronage.

Big, endowed spaces raise visibility and capacity, but they also make charisma easier to commoditise—to move into “commodity situations” where value is negotiated, displayed, and exchanged through elite competition (Appadurai, 1986). Hamiduddin’s insistence on smallness that is low dependence, limited needs, and refusal functions as an anti-commoditisation tactic. Importantly, it keeps sanctity difficult to package as a prestige good. Furthermore, in Rajputana’s plural moral world, autonomy was not a private virtue; it was a practical device of coexistence. By refusing capture, minimising

dependence, and making moral authority readable in everyday conduct, Hamiduddin made it easier for Hindus, Jains, and Muslims to approach saintly authority as ethical guidance rather than as a political instrument, without theological merger, and proximity without submission (Nizami, 1961; Rizvi, 1978). Evidently, Hamiduddin's influence in Rajputana is best captured not by treating him as an isolated "saintly personality," but by tracking what his presence made possible institutionally and socially. His emphasis on core Chishti dispositions like *tawakkul* (trust in God), *sabr* (patience), *dhikr* (remembrance), and *khidmat* (service) helped stabilise a form of Sufi authority that could address ordinary anxieties and ethical dilemmas without requiring court mediation or coercive leverage (Rizvi, 1978; van Bruinessen & Howell, 2007).

This is why the tradition repeatedly pairs austerity with counsel: his reputation for disciplined living and knowledge attracted people seeking guidance for doubts, hardship, and everyday moral confusion, not merely ecstatic experience (Kugle, 2007). Over time, that credibility took hold. The shrine at Nagaur became a durable public node where visitation, supplication, and narrated memory reproduced saintly reputation, drawing people across social rank and religious affiliation. The persistence of devotion is therefore not a leftover "medieval mentality", but it is evidence that reputations built on restraint, compassion, and service can outlast the political regimes that first surrounded them (Renard, 2008). The wider devotional ecology of Rajasthan, Hamiduddin's shrine can be read as one instance of a broader pattern where shared cultural landscapes in which saints, stories, and ethical ideals circulated in ways that sometimes produced overlapping devotional worlds rather than tightly policed communal boundaries (Khan, 1997). When sanctity is recognised as an ethical achievement rather than a confessional monopoly and when public piety is organised around non-harm, restraint, and giving, then shrines become socially porous without becoming doctrinally "mixed" in any simplistic sense (Eaton, 2000).

The Chishti order's larger repertoire helps explain this porosity. Its stress on service to humanity, its preference for persuasion over coercion, and its relative distance from courtly power made Chishti sites more likely to function as moral commons than as sectarian fortresses (Ernst, 1997; Hardy, 1972; Trimmingham, 1971).

Conclusion: Ethical Legibility, Interfaith Coexistence, and Ecological Restraint

Hamiduddin Nagauri's significance lies not only in his place within Chishti genealogy or in the devotional afterlife of his shrine; rather, it lies in the instrument by which his authority became socially workable in a mixed Hindu–Jain–Muslim environment. The core strategy can be stated in contemporary language as ethical legibility, where credibility is produced when a religious actor lives in ways that neighbouring publics can read as disciplined, non-predatory, and oriented toward reducing harm.

In Hamiduddin's case, the primary record repeatedly anchors authority not in claims of doctrinal superiority but in everyday conduct: subsistence, self-limitation, refusal of patronage, and a principled aversion to harm, so that sanctity becomes publicly assessable across communal lines. This is why his example speaks to present debates on interfaith dialogue. Thus, it offers a model in which coexistence is not primarily achieved by abstract "tolerance" rhetoric, but by routinised practices that reduce fear, lower symbolic distance, and prevent religious authority from being read as a channel of domination (Momin, 2004).

This is a useful corrective to contemporary interfaith discourse that often over-invests in elite-level dialogue while under-attending to the moral infrastructure that makes dialogue credible. Much scholarship on pluralism shows that "living together" in diverse societies is sustained less by formal agreement than by shared social repertoires such as habits of encounter, mutual restraint, and everyday forms of respect that keep boundaries from hardening into hostility (often without erasing difference).

From this angle, Hamiduddin's strategy vernacular integration, visible modesty, and

non-harm operate like a historically specific version of what later scholars describe as civic virtues in plural settings. The dispositions that allow disagreement to persist without turning into permanent antagonism. The important analytic point is that such virtues become persuasive precisely because they are observable. In his milieu, the saint's "argument" was enacted through a household economy and a disciplined public presence rather than through polemical reasoning. That makes his model particularly relevant for contexts where interfaith initiatives are easily dismissed as performative. In fact, ethical legibility provides a more durable base for trust than episodic symbolic gestures.

A second contemporary concern is political economy and the commodification of religion where modern scholarship on religion in public life repeatedly shows how spiritual authority becomes unstable when it is visibly captured by wealth, party alignments, or patron-client circuits because publics begin to read sanctity as a mode of influence rather than a mode of service. Hamiduddin's recurring refusal of gifts and his insistence on subsistence are therefore not antiquarian details, rather, they guide an institutional logic with modern parallels. When a religious actor minimises dependence on elite resources, it becomes harder for outsiders to convert charisma into status capital. That makes moral critique more credible and reduces the risk that followers (or neighbours) interpret devotion as political submission. In his own context, this mattered acutely because Muslim political authority in Rajputana could be socially suspect and because Jain/Hindu publics carried their own prestige economies of restraint. Refusal and smallness made it possible for people to approach him without treating the approach as capitulation to power.

Third, his example resonates with contemporary debates on ecological ethics, not as a simplistic "medieval solution" to modern crises, but as a historical repertoire that clarifies how restraint can be moralised and socially normalised. Hamiduddin's insistence on sufficiency and his aversion to harming living beings, especially as

expressed through vegetarian discipline and the request that meat not be offered in devotional contexts, frames consumption as an ethical problem rather than a private preference (Nizami, 1961, p. 186). Contemporary environmental humanities and political ecology have repeatedly argued that ecological breakdown is not only technical; rather, it is also driven by cultures of extraction, normalised overconsumption, and moral distancing from harm. From this perspective, Hamiduddin's disciplined limits and his relocation of moral prestige from accumulation to restraint become analytically interesting because they show how a religious tradition can turn sufficiency into a publicly honoured virtue rather than an individual lifestyle choice. Nasr's long-standing critique of modernity's "spiritual crisis" in relation to nature is directly relevant here, where the ethical problem is not scarcity alone, but the loss of metaphysical and moral constraints that once limited what humans felt entitled to take (Nasr, 1990).

Hamiduddin's practice does not "solve" modern ecological problems, but it illustrates a credible way to link spiritual formation to restrained consumption and non-harm; this is an alignment that contemporary ecological ethics often seeks but struggles to institutionalise.

In the pages of *History*, Hamiduddin's understanding of Culture and People lies in how it reframes "bridge-building." The primary record suggests that his bridging was not primarily doctrinal syncretism; it was a disciplined social form where peasant-like subsistence, linguistic integration, refusal of elite capture, and a compassion-centred ethic could be recognised by Hindu and Jain neighbours as morally serious. These practices functioned as a stable instrument of authority, making sanctity legible in an environment where confessional boundaries existed but did not always have to be politically sharp. His shrine's enduring cross-community devotion at Nagaur is best understood as the institutional afterlife of that credibility. Shrines persist when they continue to function as public moral commons; they are sites where people can seek relief, blessing, or

counsel without treating the act as communal betrayal (Khan, 1997; Renard, 2008).

Shaikh Hamiduddin Nagauri's career illuminates how spiritual authority could be produced in thirteenth-century Rajputana without coercion or proximity to power. His authority was stabilised through a vernacular ethic—subsistence, restraint, non-harm, and guarded autonomy—that lowered the political and moral costs of inter-communal proximity and made trust possible across boundaries. The continuing life of his shrine at Nagaur shows how such reputations can outlast the regimes that first framed them. For present debates, the most useful takeaway is not romantic admiration but analytic clarity such as ethical legibility, visible restraint, service, and non-capture by patronage, which can function as a practical infrastructure of coexistence; and sufficiency can be moralised as a disciplined virtue with ecological implications (Momin, 2004; Nasr, 1990). Hamiduddin's example thus offers a historically grounded vocabulary for thinking about pluralism in India: coexistence as practice, not proclamation; harmony as autonomy and restraint, not erasure of difference.

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Ethical Approval

Not applicable to this historical, text-based study.

Conflict of Interest

We declare that there are no conflicts of interest, financial or non-financial, in relation to the content of this study.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)–Assisted Technologies

The authors declare that this study was not conducted using AI-assisted technologies.

Author Contribution Statement

VSB conceptualised the study and developed the research question. **VSB** led the research design, conducted the primary and secondary literature review, and curated the source base. **VSB** undertook the analysis and interpretation of the materials and supervised the overall writing and revision of the manuscript.

SM and **ST** collaborated on locating, curating, and organising archival/documentary sources and undertook an extensive review of the scholarly literature, contributing to the study’s sociological interpretation and contextual analysis.

SS substantially strengthened the manuscript through rigorous line-by-line editing and revision, improving clarity, coherence, and overall quality.

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Data Availability Statement

Not Applicable.

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