RESURGENCE OF THE SUHRAWARDI SILSILA DURING THE LODI PERIOD (1451-1576 AD)

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The period, intervening Timur's invasion of India in 1398 A.D. and the establishment of the Lodi dynasty in 1451 A.D. is socially and culturally uneventful in the history of the Delhi Sultanate. The cities and towns from Lahore and Multan up to Delhi and Meerut were sacked by Timur; the people were either taken away as captives, or they fled away to safer places as far as Gujarat and the Deccan. Even the Capital of Delhi that had become a place of refuge for all those who had merit and skill in a certain field was denuded of its cultural elite for a long time. No scholar or sufi of eminence is reported to have flourished in Delhi or its dependencies till Sultan Buhlul's accession to the throne in 1451 A.D.; the apparent reason being the non-availability of jobs, want of royal patronage and the penury the men of learning were reduced to during the last years of the Saiyid dynasty. With the advent of the Lodis to power, however, an epoch of cultural progress and economic recovery started again in the Sultanate of Delhi. Once again the city of Delhi and its dependencies began to lure men of learning, piety and arts from different places.

The prosperity of the empire and the promise of royal patronage attracted to Delhi, Agra and other surrounding towns, the *masha'ikh* (sufi saints), the 'ulama' (scholars) and the danishmands (jurists) from different parts of India as well as foreign countries with new ideas and influences of different cultures and civilizations.

The Lodi period is also marked by the emergence of certain new silsilas (orders) and the resurgence of the old ones, such as the Suhrawardiyya and the Chishtiyya. The Suhrawardi sufts revived the popularity of their silsila and played an important role in the cultural and religious life of the Sultanate. The contribution made by them to the Indo-Persian literature is also of immense significance. Besides poetry, they wrote commentaries on standard Arabic texts in simple and readable Persian prose. All this led to revival of orthodoxy as well as the dissemination of Islamic learning and culture. These sufts also seem to have played an important part in accomplishing a high degree of reconciliation between the worldly and the spiritual components of the Indian Muslim society. This paper aims at studying the lives and activities of the

Suhrawardi sufis during this period. It analyses the importance of their social role and seeks to assess the extent of their contribution to the revival of Islamic orthodoxy. Attention has also been paid to practices and the changed attitude of these sufis towards the state.

The evidence available in miscellaneous medieval sources leaves little doubt about Sultan Buhlul's devotion to the religious men, 'ulama' as well as the sufis, from the beginning of his career. As early as he was the governor (muqta') of Sirhind, he seems to have invited many saints and scholars including Shaykh Muhammad bin Ja'far al-Makki al-Husayni, the spiritual successor (khalifa) of Shaykh Nasir al-Din Chiragh of Delhi, who was the most outstanding Chishti saint, and made adequate provisions for their maintenance. Shaykh Husayni was a widely travelled and highly educated sufi. He was celebrated for his compositions both in verse as well as in prose.

After the occupation of Delhi by Buhlul in 1451 A.D. the Suhrawardis emerged as the patron saints of the newly founded dynasty. Sometime in the beginning of Sultan Buhlul's reign, Shaykh Yusuf Qurayshi, a descendant of Shaykh Baha' al-Din Zakariya, whom people of Multan had accepted as their king for his noble descent and family influence in 1443 A.D., was driven away by the Muslim Langah chief, Rai Sahrah and was obliged to seek refuge at Delhi. Sultan Buhlul welcomed the Shaykh with due respect and further cemented his ties with him by giving his daughter to his son, Shah 'Abd Allah Qurayshi in marriage. In dowry, besides a palace outside Delhi, the Lodi Sultan assigned the revenue of the large iqta of Phulet, now included in the district of Muzaffarnagar in the U.P., amounting to one million tankas annually for the maintenance of his khangah and family 5 Soon the centre of Suhrawardi missionary activities shifted from Multan and Uchchh to Delhi. Shaykh Yusuf does not seem to have lived long after because he was already an aged man. He was succeeded by Shah 'Abd Allah Qurayshi; who was known for his learning and devotion to religion, and gradually rose to be one of the most revered sufis of Delhi. His disciples included some prominent intellectuals as well. Incensed with the feeling of Divine love, he lived most of his time in a state of mystical excitement and spiritual intoxication. His aversion for worldly things was no secret. According to the author of the Akhbar al-Akhyar, 6 he was endowed with the qualities expected of a special recipient of Divine Grace. His descent from Shaykh Baha' al-Din Zakariya, and his personal austerity, learning and mystical intoxication greatly contributed to his prestige and popularity among the people. Frequently given to ecstasy, he once set his house ablaze reducing his property worth hundreds of thousands of tankas to ashes.⁷ People could save his wife, the daughter of Sultan Buhlul with great difficulty. His disciple, Shaykh 'Abd al-Wahhab Bukhari refers to him in the preface to his tafsir (exegesis) of the Quran as Rais al-'uqala' al-majanin⁸ (chief of the ecstatic intellectuals).

Similarly, Shaykh Sama' al-Din Kambu was also attracted by the fame of Sultan Buhlul Lodi. Born at Multan in 1405 A.D., he was celebrated for his

mastery over different branches of Islamic learning. His father, Shaykh Fakhr al-Din alias Budda was a murid of Shaykh Raju Qattal, the brother and successor of Makhdum Jahaniyan. Shaykh Budda made proper arrangement for the education of his son who is said to have completed his study of jurisprudence and other branches of Islamic studies at an early age. Having completed his study of the traditional sciences, he joined the circle of murids (disciples) of Shavkh Kabir al-Din, the successor of Shavkh Raju Qattal in Multan, Impressed by his devotion to religion and learning, his pir confered on him khilafat and thus allowed him to enrol murids in his own right. He seems to have left Multan after its fall to the Langahs. He spent some time at Ranthambore and Biyana before he finally settled down in Delhi on a permanent basis. His khanqah (hospice) was visited by a large number of people, including the Sultan, princes and nobles. 10 Whatever futuhat (unsolicited gifts in cash) the Shaykh received from these visitors, he distributed them among his dependants and other deserving people who gathered at the gate of his khanqah. He was always sympathetic to the poor. He borrowed money for distribution among them if they came to him after the money received in futuh had been given away. He also distributed seasonal fruits among those who could not afford to buy them. Shaykh Jamali informs us that he would get up daily at midnight. renew his ablutions and busy himself in tahajjud prayers, which were followed by the recitation of religious formulas in praise of God. Thereafter, he engaged himself in meditation till dawn. Having offered morning prayers, he spent some time in the company of his disciples. Then he oftered chasht and Ishraq prayers, 11 which were followed by his lectures on tafsir, hadith, and figh. Praising his role as a religious guide who had deep concern for the education of people, Jamali pays rich tributes to the Shaykh.

Shaykh 'Abd al-Haqq Muhaddith also testifies to the fact that Shaykh Sama' al-Din was known for his spiritual excellence and mastery over esoteric as well as exoteric sciences. He authored several scholarly works, out of which his Persian commentary on 'Iraqi's 'Lama'at and the Miftah al-Asrar that was largely based on the Arabic treatises of Aziz Nasafi (d.1263), were very popular during the 16th century. The long passage quoted in the Akhbar al-Akhyar by the Muhaddith from the Miftah al-Asrar reveals that it dealt with different aspects of sufism.

Mushtaqi's brief reference to Shaykh Sama' al-Din in the Waqi'at also substantiates the fact that Shaykh Sama'al-Din was the most revered sufi of Delhi in his days. ¹⁴ This statement finds corroboration in the Mihr-o-Mah¹⁵ and the Muntakhab al-Tawarikh. ¹⁶

As regards Shaykh Sama'al-Din's relations with the Lodi Sultans, it may be pointed out that he entered the Lodi empire at a time when Sultan Buhlul was faced with a difficult situation. In 1466 A.D., Ahmad Khan Jilwani, son of Yusuf Khan, an old servant of Buhlul, who held the territory of Biyana as its muqta' (governor) repudiated his allegiance to Sultan Buhlul in favour of his rival, Sultan Husayn Sharqi of Jaunpur and had the khutba read in the latter's

name. Jamali informs us on the authority of Shaykh Nasir-al-Din, son of Shaikh Sama' al-Din that during Sama' al-Din's stay at Biyana, Sultan Ahmad Jilwani called on him with his companions, including Sayyid Khonda Mir Rasuldar, better known as Murtada Khan. At this time Sultan Husayn Jaunpuri was bent upon conquering the capital of Delhi. Sultan Ahmad Jilwani who was strongly committed to support the Sharqi Sultan, requested the Shaykh to pray for his success as he was a grand king. This infuriated the Shaykh, who reprimanded Ahmad Jilwani for his disloyalty to Sultan Buhlul, and remarked that he would not pray for the success of a tyrant who had neither regard for justice nor fear of Allah. On hearing this Sultan Ahmad lost all hope about the success of Sultan Husayn and tried to win back Sultan Buhlul's confidence and rejoined him.¹⁷

Soon afterwards, the Shaykh seems to have shifted to Delhi where he built a spacious *khanqah*, mentioned by Jamali as *dawlat khana*¹⁸ In Delhi Sultan Buhlul visited him regularly. Once the Shaykh gave a piece of advice to the Sultan, which had some bearing on his duties as a king. The Sultan accepted it in good grace. The Shaykh also honoured him with his own prayer carpet as a gift. Sultan Buhlul placed it on his head and returned to his palace. ¹⁹

The successor of Buhlul. Sultan Sikandar Lodi, also showed great respect to Shaykh Sama' al-Din. On receiving the news of his father's death on his way to Delhi in 1489 A.D. the Prince rushed to the Shaykh and sought his blessings for success. Subsequently, when in 1496 A.D., Shaykh Jamali showed some reluctance to join Sikandar Lodi's Court at Sambhal, the Sultan requested the Shaykh to intervene. On the Shaykh's bidding Jamali proceeded to Sambhal. The Shaykh also told Jamali that good relations between the saints and the rulers were in the interest of the common man. He reminded him that in the past also saintly people used to associate themselves with the rulers, because by doing so they could persuade them to do good to their subjects. On the early Suhrawardi saints who maintained close relations with the contemporary rulers. Shaykh Sama' al-Din died in 1496 A.D. and was buried on the bank of the Haud-i-Shamsi, in old Delhi.

The Khalifas of Shah 'Abd Allah Qurayshi and Shaykh Sama' al-Din also successfully maintained the influence of their silsila in the Sultanate of Delhi Some of them emerged as saints of great eminence. Shaykh 'Abd al-Wahhab Bukhari, the khalifa of Shah 'Abd Allah Qurayshi, happened to be the scion of a distinguished sufi family. He was a direct descendant of Sayyid Jalal al-Din Bukhari, the khalifa of Shaykh Baha' al-Din Zakariya whom the latter had deputed as his representative at Uchch. Shaykh Abd al-Wahhab Bukhari migrated to Delhi towards the close of Sultan Buhlul's reign and became a disciple of Shah 'Abd Allah Qurayshi. Soon afterwards, he left for pilgrimage for the second time. He travelled to other Islamic lands also and gained knowledge and experience. On his return to Delhi, he was invited by Sultan Sikandar Lodi to Agra where he was chosen as a royal boon companion (nadim).² In the year

1509, the Shaykh was sent to the central Indian fort of Narwar (in modern Madhya Pradesh) that had just been conquered and renamed as *Hisar-i Muhammad* so that he could promote Islam there. Acting as Shaykh al-Islam, he supervised the construction of several mosques and *madrasa*, ²³ in the region. In the same year, the Shaykh completed his *tafsir* of the Quran, in which every verse was explained from a *sufi* point of view. ²⁴

Shaykh 'Abd al-Wahhab Bukhari was also known as a philanthropist. He extended his help to fellow sufis and scholars regardless of their affiliation to any sufi order. ²⁵ Towards the close of Sultan Sikandar's reign, when Shaykh 'Abd al-Wahhab Bukhari, on his return from Narwar, insisted that the Sultan must grow a beard, the Sultan looked at his attitude as presumptuous and remarked that "it was because of his association with the court that people kissed his feet". When the Shaykh came to know of the Sultan's remark, he left Agra for Delhi in disgust and spent the rest of his life in instructing his murids (disciples) in esoteric as well as exoteric sciences. ²⁶ On his death in 1525 A.D. he was buried at Delhi near the tomb of his spiritual preceptor, Shah 'Abd Allah Qurayshi. ²⁷

Amongst his disciples, Sayyid Jamal al-Din Bukhari and Shaykh 'Abd al-Hakin Gushanashin emerged as sufis of eminence in Kashmir and Kalpi respectively. Both of them devoted their lives to inculcating among people moral and spiritual ideals. Sayyid Jamal al-Din Bukhari popularized the teachings of the Suhrawardi silsila and converted Hindus to Islam in Kashmir. Shaykh Gushanashin is stated to have started his career as a soldier but turned a devout sufi as a consequence of his association as a murid with Shaykh Hajji 'Abd al-Wahhab. His austerity, resignation to the will of God and devotion to religion soon earned him the khilafat of his silsila. In Kalpi he lived in a cell near the Jami' Mosque built by Sultan Mahmud Turk (d.1414 A.D.), where he confined himself to the four walls of his cell, engrossed in meditation or recitation of religious formulas in praise of God. In spare time he endeavoured to train his disciples in spiritual discipline. His fame spread far and wide and people came from distant places to him in Kalpi and benefited from his blessings. 29

As regards the spiritual successors of Shaykh Sama' al-Din, some of them distinguished themselves as leading jurists while the others made a name as sufis. Mention may be made of his sons and son-in-law, Shaykh Jamali Dihlawi. Of the sons of Shaykh Sama' al-Din, Shaykh Abd Allah Bayabani, Shaykh Nasir al-Din and Shaykh Ibrahim enrolled themselves as his murids and lived as sufis while Shaykh 'Abd al-Ghafur alias Miyan Ladan Danishmand and Miyan Jamal Khan Dihlawi (grandsons) became faqihs and held positions of importance at the Lodi court. We will here confine ourselves to the discussion of the achievements of the former. Shaykh 'Abd Allah earned the nickname of 'Bayabani' because he had gone to the forest where he lived and performed severe ascetic exercises for spiritual development during his father's lifetime. Reportedly he was married to a granddaughter of Sultan Buhlul Lodi but he divorced her when she obstructed him from applying himself to the performance

of his mystical exercises.³² He died at Mandu, in Malwa, and was buried there.³³

Shaykh 'Abd Allah's brothers, Shaykh Nasir al-Din and Shaykh Ibrahim lived in Delhi as spiritual successors of their father. The disciples of Shaykh Sama' al-Din had great regard for Nasir al-Din because he had spent much time with his father and could relate his *malfuzat* (sayings) to them.³⁴ Like him, Shaykh Ibrahim was also one of the leading *sufis* of Delhi. Following the tradition of resignation and austerity of orthodox character set by the early Chishti saints, Shaykh Ibrahim kept aloof from the royal court and did not accept royal gifts. Impressed by his piety, Sultan Sikandar Lodi offered him the position of *nadim* along with a land grant for his maintenance, but the Shaykh declined.³⁵

Shaykh Hamid bin Fadl Allah Jamali is known to history more as a poet and litterateur rather than a sufi, although he enrolled murids and instructed them in sufism as a khalifa of Shaykh Sama' al-Din. He was a most widely travelled man of his age. He gained knowledge and experience from books as well as from his association with the leading scholars of different countries of the Islamic World. In his itinerary he mentions the Hijaz, the Yemen, Palestine, Rum (Ottoman Empire), Syria, 'Iraq, Iran and Khurasan etc. In Herat he met Maulana 'Abd al-Rahman Jami. On his return to Delhi, Sultan Sikandar Lodi invited him to his court in Sambhal in 1497 A.D. and appointed him the poet laureate of his court.

As a nadim of Sultan Sikandar Jamali commanded immense respect among his contemporaries. Some of his literary works, such as the diwan (collection of ghazals and qasidas), mathnawis, Mir at-al-Ma'ani and Mihr-o-Mah, and the prose tazkirah of saints entitled the Siyar-al-Árifin are still extant. 38 His lyrics (ghazals) were very popular during the 16th century. 39

According to Badaoni the Sivar al-Arifin is not entirely free from defects and discrepancies. Badaoni is correct because Jamali's account of the 13th and 14th century saints is marred by the legends and false traditions that he found floating down the stream of time and uncritically incorporated them in the work. Nevertheless, the portion relating to Shaykh Sama' al-Din and his times is invaluable as it reflects on the conditions of the Lodi period. 41

It may also be pointed out that Shaykh Jamali's association with Sultan Sikandar Lodi's court led him to become fond of wealth and aristocratic culture. His reputation as a poet as well as his friendship with Sultan Sikandar Lodi seem to have prompted Sultan Mahmud Begarha of Gujarat to send him gifts several times, sometime after the diplomatic relations had been established between the courts of Gujarat and Delhi in 1508 A.D. 42

On the death of Sultan Sikandar Lodi in 1517, Shaykh Jamali failed to maintain his position at the royal court. The favourites of the new sultan, Ibrahim Lodi, were not favourably disposed towards him, hence his retirement. On his death in 1537 A.D., he bequeathed a huge amount of wealth to his sons, Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman Gada'i and Shaykh 'Abd al-Ha'i

Hayati. Though the latter was a philanthropic sufi, his elder brother, Shaykh Gada'i was aristocratic in his attitude. He maintained a large number of fairy-faced slave-girls even in old age and spent his time in their company. ⁴⁴ As a matter of fact the close association of the Suhrawardi saints with the royal court killed the missionary spirit in them. Ultimately they became aristocrats by taste and temperament and, therefore, the silsila could not survive as a religious movement during the subsequent centuries.

To sum up, the sufi khanqahs played an important role in the process of urbanization. In most cases, the Suhrawardi khanqahs in addition to being charity houses, functioned as seats of higher learning. The head sufis delivered lectures on sufism, tafsir, fiqh and the hadith, etc. The langar (kitchen) attached to the khanqahs provided free food to the poor. It was also visited by innumerable persons daily who came to the sufis with their problems, sought their blessings and returned home with solace and mental peace. These khangahs did not generate parasitic tendencies among people, as commonly believed. On the contrary, they stabilised their emotions and thus helped in holding in check social tensions in the society. The commentaries on the 'Arabic classics by learned sufi masters not only enriched the Persian literature, but also went a long way in combating the influence of the heterodox sufis among the Muslims and inspired scholars to reform the Islamic society of later accretions. It is also worth-recalling that the ghazals and lyrics composed by Shaykh Jamali and other sufis of his silsila in Persian as well as Hindawi form an important part of our cultural heritage. In short, no history of cultural and intellectual life and thought of the Muslim community in South Asia could be complete without a reference to the role of the Suhrawardi sufis.

FOOTNOTES

 Anonymous, Tarikh-i-Gujarat, MS. British Museum, London, Or. 1819, f.27b; Muhammad Bihamad Khani, Tarikh-i-Muhammadi, MS. British Museum, London, Or. 137, f.44b; Sharaf al-Din Yazdi, Zafar Nama, ed. Muhammad Allahdad, Calcutta, 1888, Vol. II, pp.77-8.

2. Ali bin Mahmud al-Kirmani, alias Shihab Hakim, the compiler of the Ma'thir-i-Mahmud Shahi relates that in the year 1447 A.D., Sultan Mahmud Khalji of Malwa was informed about the plight of the religious divines and scholars in Delhi, that they faced starvation and could not leave for other places owing to the non-availability of financial assistance. Moved by this news, the Sultan of Malwa sent emissaries with money to them and invited them to his court. One of the scholars who joined the court of Malwa in response to this invitation was Shaykh Nizam al-Din Mahmud. On his arrival, Sultan Mahmud Khalji selected him as his nadim (boon companion) and counsellor for his learning and culture.

Rizq Allah Mushtaqi mentions Shaykh Mahmad as Shaykh Mahmud Nu'man and adds that Sultan Ghiyath al-Din Khalji, successor of Sultan Mahmud, raised him to the position of hajib (chamberlain). Shaykh Mahmud is also reported to have procured financial assistance from the Sultan for the people of Delhi who visited him from

time to time.

Shihab Hakim, Ma'thir-i-Mahmud Shahi, ed. Nurul Hasan Ansari, Delhi, 1968, pp. 67-8; Shaikh Rizq Allah Mushtaqi, Waqi'at-i Mushtaqi, MS. British Museum, London, No. Add. 11,633 f.75a.

3. Rizq Allah Mushtaqi, Waqi'at-i Mushtaqi, 3b.

4. Abd al-Haq Mahaddith states that Shaykh Husayni in addition to his famous work Bahr al-Ma'ani, wrote a number of treatises on sufism and commanded great respect among people, Akhbar-al-Akhyar, ed. Shaykh Zafar Ali, Matba'i-Ahmadi, undated, p. 156. Out of all his works, only Bahr al-Ma'ani has survived Cf. Bahr-al-Ma'ani, Matba'i-Ihtisham, Moradabad, 1889, A.D.

 Ahmad Khan Akbar Shahi, Shajara-i-Suhraward, MS. Raza Library, Rampur (India), no. 2365, f.58b.

6. 'Abd al-Haqq Muhaddith, Akhbar-al-Akhyar, Matba'-i-Ahmadi, Delhi, undated, p. 247.

7. Shajara-i-Suhraward, f.58b.

8. Shaykh 'Abd al-Wahhab Bukhari, Tafsir-i-Quran, quoted in Akhbar-al-Akhyar, p.247.

9. Shajara-i-Suhraward, f. 13b.

10 Shaykh Jamali Kambu, Siyar al-'Arifin, Delhi, 1311 A.H. pp.178-90.

11. Siyar al-'Arifin, 171-75.

- 12. Akhbar al-Akhyar, p.254.
- 13 Shajara-i-Suhraward, f.13b.

14. Waqi'at-i-Mushtaqi, f.13b.

15. Shaykh Jamali, Mihr o-Mah, ed. S. Husam al-Din Rashidi, Rawalpindi, 1974, p.11.

16. Badaoni, Muntakhab al-Tawarikh, Calculta, 1864, Vol.I, p.313.

17. Siyar-al-Arifin, p.177.

18. Dawlat Khana was a term used for big mansions owned by the nobles, chiefs, etc.

19. Siyar al-'Arifin, pp.177-8.

- Ni mat Allah Harawi, Tarikh-i-Khan-i-Jahani, ed. Imam al-Din, Dacca, 1960, Vol. I, p.227.
- K.A. Nizami, The Suhrawardi Silsila And Its Influence on Medieval Indian Politics. Medieval India Quarterly, Vol.III, 1957, Nos. 1-2, pp.109-134.
- 22. Akhbar al-Akhyar, p.248; also Waqi'at-i-Mushtaqi, f 19b, 28a.
- Epigraphia Indica, Arabic and Persian Supplement. 1965, ed.Z.A. Desai, Calcutta, 1966, pp.33-38.
- 24. The work is no longer traceable. For its extracts, see Akhbar al-Akhyar, p.253.

25. Akhbar al-Akhyar, p.269.

- 26. Waqi'at-Mushtaqi, f.28a; Tarikh-i-Da'udi, p.80.
- 27. Akhbar al-Akhyar, p. 249.
- Cf. Abdul Qaiyum Rafiqi, Sufism in Kashmir, (from the 14th to the 16th Century), Delhi, 1978, p.20.
- 29. Gauthi Shattari, Gulzar -i-Abrar, Urdu tr. Muhammad Qadir Sufi, n.d.,p.317.
- 30. Shajara-i-Suhraward, ff.9b, 10a, 11a-b, 28a-b.
- 31. Siyar al-Arifin, p.183.
- 32. Shajara-i-Suhraward, f.25b.
- 33. Akhbar al-Akhyar, p.245.
- 34. Siyar-al-'Arifin, p.177.
- 35. Shajara-i-Suhraward, f.30a.
- 36. Ta'rikh-i-Khan-i Jahani, ii/790.
- 37. Siyar al-Arifin, pp.69, 139-40; also Mihr-o-Mah, op.cit., p.167.
- Cf. Yasin Khan, Shaykh Jamali And His Works, Oriental College Magazine (Lahore), Vol.II (1935), No.2,pp.27-36.
- 39. Badaoni, Vol. 1,325-26.

- 40. Ibid, also Fng. tr. Ranking, Vol.I,p.430.
- 41. Siyar al-'Arifin, pp.176-179; its introduction is also interesting.
- Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, Diplomatic Relations between the Rulers of Delhi and Gujarat during the Sixteenth Century, Medieval India-A Miscellany, Vol.III, Aligarh, 1975,pp.113-126. For a description of these presents see, Kulliyat-i-Jamali Dihlawi, MS. Raza Library, Rampur, folios not marked.
- 43. Siyar al-'Arifin, p.138.
- 44. Akhbar al-Akhyar, pp.262-3.