

ISLAMIC MYSTICISM IN THE EYES OF A HISTORIAN: KHALĪQ AHMAD NIZAMI'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF *TAṢAWWUF*

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Abstract

Khaliq Ahmad Nizami was one of the most prominent historians of medieval India. His main expertise was in the field of socio-political history of medieval India, particularly the period of Delhi Sultanate. He has made ground-breaking research in this field by discovering the new sources for reformulating the history of medieval India, which include the *Malḡūzāt* and *Tadhkirahs* of *Ṣūfī* saints. Nizami has identified them as the main sources of medieval Indian history, that according to him give the minute details about the socio-political system of medieval India, which are lacking in the contemporary political literature. In addition to his works on history, he has also left an enduring influence in the field of *Taṣawwuf* by contributing the various books and articles on *Taṣawwuf* in medieval India. Nizami viewed *Taṣawwuf* as the core of Islam and argued that it is based on holy Qur'ān and ḥadīth in his works. The present paper is an endeavour to highlight his contribution to *Ṣūfī* studies by analyzing his distinctive approach as a historian of medieval India. In his major writings, he has avoided both the extremes. He neither romanticizes *Taṣawwuf* nor treats it as an isolated mystical current rather he presents it as vibrant socio-political and cultural force that

shaped the medieval Indian society. The methodology applied will be historical, analytical and descriptive.

Keywords: K. A. Nizami; Cishti Order; Social Service; *Malfūzāt*; *Taṣawwuf*; Service of Humanity; Historian; Tolerance; Non-Violence

Introduction

Taṣawwuf refers to the inner dimension of the Islam and it focuses on attaining the nearness of Allah Almighty, the purification of the heart (*Tazkiya-e-nafs*) and reaching to the higher stage of *Iḥsān*. From the initial period of Islam, mystical thought and practice developed in conjunction with formal theology (*ʿIlm al-Kalām*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*), not detach from or in disagreement with them. Nevertheless, in the past century, scholarly research on *Taṣawwuf* often faced a predicament about how to view it. There are scholarly discussions about its placement whether to consider it as an original part of Islam or to place it as a movement influenced by local cultures and religions. In this discussion, the ground-breaking research of Nizami provides the clarity, balance, and historical awareness.

Nizami avoided both the extremes. He viewed *Taṣawwuf* neither as the over-exaggerated devotion which is deviated from basic principles of Islam and not as the diverse mystical phenomenon which is shaped by outer influences. But he interpreted it as the principle aspect of the Islamic culture where *Taṣawwuf* acted as a bridge between the basic beliefs, Communal harmony and Cultural mending particularly in the Indian Sub-Continent. He argued that the *Ṣūfī* orders were not heterogeneous to Islam rather they were grounded on the fundamental beliefs of Islam as rightly observed by Shaikh Shihab ud din Suhrawardi in his masterpiece *ʿAwārif al Maʿārif*. The *Ṣūfī* orders particularly the Chishtiyah order stressed on love (*Maḥabbat*), remembrance (*Dhikr*), and moral progress (*Tazkiyah al-Nafs*)¹ which helped them in gaining grounds and played a great role in the sustenance and flourishing of this order in the Indian Subcontinent.

Nizami was not just the collector of past data rather he was a scholar who understood the spiritual feelings. It has been proved by his profound engagement with primary sources such as *malfūzāt* (*Ṣūfī* discourses) *tadhkirahs* (biographical works) and original Persian manuscripts. His private library "*Kutub Khāna-i-Nizāmī*" at his residence "Nizami Villa" was an expansive treasure of rare sources and manuscripts.² He has some rare manuscripts in his personal collection which include *Iqtibās-ul-Anwār*, *Jawāhir-i-Farīdī*, *Maʿārij-ul-Wilāyat*, *Maṭlūb-ul-Ṭālibīn*, *Mirāt-ul-Asrār*, *Mūnis-ul-Arwāḥ*,