

**Taṣawwuf and its impact on Indian Society: An Appraisal of
Khawājah Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā'**

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Abstract

The question of the legitimacy of what has come to be known among Muslims as Sufism (Taṣawwuf /Mysticism) is often passionately debated among its proponents and opponents. Unlike its opponents, the proponents argue that an examination of Taṣawwuf and its objectives makes plainly evident that it is no way an innovation rather is completely consistent with the Islamic teachings. Appealing to the human nature, this aspect of Islam has played a very important role in changing the civilizations of the world including that of Indian subcontinent.

Sufism in India was whole-heartedly accepted. The famous and reputed Silsilās of Sufism (chains of mysticism)—Chistiya, Qadriya, Naqshbandiya and Suhrawardiya—had influenced the Indian culture, literature, society and religion, in brief, every aspect of life in their respective periods. The Sufis by their excellent character and fascinating morals and virtues swayed the Indian masses helping them to enter into the abode of Islam. The spiritual discourses of these Sufis brought revolution in the Indian society.

Examining the place of Taṣawwuf in Islam and its impact on Indian Society with special reference to Khawājah Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā' (1238-1352), one of the great and famous saint -scholars of Chistiya order who influenced the Indian culture to a great extent. The aim of the paper is also to revisit the personality and teachings of this saint- scholar in order to build peaceful and happy social living.

Introduction

According to the Muslims' popular belief this world has been staged for a test for human beings (al-Quran, 67:2; 76:2). On the basis of Quranic verse(al-Quran, 2:29) the Creator has created all that on the Earth for humanity. This has been also substantiated by a prophetic tradition that narrates: (فَانِ الدُّنْيَا خَلَقْتُ لَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ خَلَقْتُمْ لِلآخرة) meaning “Indeed the world has been created for you and you are created for Akhirah” (Ghazali, 3: 204).

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Keeping this world view in mind scholars have concluded that every human being in this transitory world is obliged by certain activities—firstly, she/he has to exploit this universe and the things created in it for two benefit of humanity appropriately and secondly, while using this material world into his/her service, she/he has to keep the commandments of Allah in mind and should not do anything erroneous which would be the cause of Allah's displeasure and wrath. To put the humanity on the right track, Allah has sent His chosen men with guidance and clear proof. Whoso follows the guidance will have neither the fear nor any grief (al-Quran, 2:38). So be in consonance with the guidance of Allah and with the intention of performing the duties—in relation to Allah as well as His creature—according to the will of Allah in this material world, two types of sciences of knowledge developed—one dealing with the exoteric deeds and other with esoteric. The science of knowledge which deals with the exoteric aspect (*zāhir*) came to be known as *fiqh* or the knowledge of rules (*'ilm al-ahkām*). Similarly, the science of knowledge which takes into account the esoteric aspect (*bātin*)—those acts and deeds which cannot be tackled with the science of *fiqh*—came to be known among Muslims as *Sūfism* (*Taṣawwuf/Mysticism*) or the Knowledge of Mysteries (*'ilm al-asrār*) (Ansari, 2004). These two aspects of knowledge are closely related to each other rather are complementary to each other like that of body and soul.

Taṣawwuf—'Ilm al-asrār

The term *Taṣawwuf* is a debatable concept. Some argue it is new invention (*bid'ah*), thus avoidable while others claim it is the heart of Islam. It is considered an essential part of *Shari‘ah* that deals with inner deeds of an individual which is meant for purification of one's soul and behaviour to attain the pleasure of Allah (Masīḥullah, 17). It is the name given to the spirit, meaning, ecstasy and excellence of *Dīn* and thus is called as the '*spirit*' or '*heart*' of Islam (*rūḥ al-Islam* or *qalb al -Islam*). It aims at to purify a man from within—from *hasad* (malice/jealousy), *hub-e-duniya* (love for mortal world), *hub-e-jah* (love for fame), *bukhl* (miserliness), *hirs*(greed), *riyā'* (hypocrisy/pretence/show), *ujub*(pride) and *Ghuroor* (haughtiness) etc. and inculcate in him the virtues like '*Tawbah*'(repentance), '*Sabr*' (patience), '*Shukr*' (gratitude, thankfulness), '*Khawf*' (Fear) '*Rija*' (hope) '*Zuhd*'(renunciation), *tawhīd*(unity of God), *tawakkal* (contentment/ full surrender and trust in Allah), '*Ikhlās*' (Sincerity), '*Šidq*' (Truthfullness), '*Hayā*'(Reserve/shyness), '*Zikr*'

(remembrance), *Khushu'* (fearfulness, humility), '*Istiqāmat'* (uprightness) seeking and observing '*Taqwa'* (awe of Allah) etc. consequently he becomes nominee of the *Basharat*, “*qad aflaḥa man zakāhā*” (success is really attained by him who purifies it) (al-Quran, 91: 09). Since *Taṣawwuf* is a way of life to achieve perfection in manners, to cultivate and culture the mind and heart with purity of thought and good behaviour through possession of all virtues and negation of all vices by a process of self annihilation, self-realization, self-sacrifice and surrender of will before the Supreme Will of Almighty Allah, Hazrat Shah Muhammad Masīḥullah, a *Khalīfah* (rightly-guided disciple) of Hazrat Mawlana ‘Ashraf ‘Ali Thanavi, is of the opinion that it is necessary for everyone to become a *Sufī* without which a Muslim does not deserve to call himself a perfect Muslim (Masīḥullah, 21).

Dr. Israr Ahmad (1932-2010), the founder of *Tanzīm-e Islāmī*, has also discussed the reality of the term in his booklet titled, *The Reality of Taṣawwuf* in which he discussed the origin of *Taṣawwuf* and its objectives in the light of Qur’ānic and prophetic methodologies(Ahmad, 2010, 56) He summarized the subject of *Taṣawwuf* and its goals as follows:

- Salvation from ignorance and attainment of gnosis (*Ma‘ārifah*);
- Refinement and purification of the self (*Tazkiyah Al Nafs*);
- Cleansing of the spiritual heart (*Tasfiyah Al Qalb*) and the enlightenment of the soul (*Tajaliyah Al Rūḥ*);
- Sincerity and devotion to the Creator (*Ikhlās*) and detachment from material and worldly concerns (*Zuh’d*); and
- Commitment to the service of all the creatures of God. (*Ibid.*, 2-3)

Keeping these aims and objectives in view, which are also the aims and goal of Islam, the *Ṣūfīs* claim to have inherited their doctrines direct from the teachings of the holy Prophet. The method employed for attaining proximity to Allah and avoiding worldliness through perfection of morals was identical with the *Tazkiyah* (purification) and *iḥsān* (sincere worship) in the *Qur’ānic* and *Hadīth* terminology. It was, in fact, one of the four objectives of the prophethood of Muhammad as explained in this verse of the *Qur’ān* (which means):

“He is the One who raised amidst the unlettered people a messenger from among themselves who recites to them His verses, and purifies them, and teaches them the Book and the wisdom, although they were in an open error before” (al-Quran, 62: 02)

The task of maintaining a judicious balance between the rituals and the spirit of religion, safeguarding the revelatory fountain to which the faithful returned again and again to refresh his spiritual vision was performed by the successors (companions of the holy Prophet and the right-guided ‘ulama. They took care to protect and develop not only the external frame of theological discipline of the Muslim society but also helped in promoting the spiritual health of its members which linked them with the intuitive consciousness of Prophet Muhammad Khawājah Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā followed the same path. He not only promoted the spiritual health of Muslims but also showed his eagerness to widen the sphere of Islam by preaching the teachings of Islam among the non-Muslim community of India.

Khwājah Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā

Khwājah Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā was one of famous *Sūfi-saints* of the *Chishti* order in India. His real name was Muhammad, the name given to him by his father Khwājah Ahmad Ibn ‘Ali. The title ‘Nizam al-Millah wa al-Din’ was given to him by his spiritual mentor, Khwaja Farid al-Din Ganj Shakar and since then he began to known as Khwaja Nizam al-Din (Abdul Gani, 1989, vol. 22, 351). His forefathers were the descendants from a family of Sayyids who had migrated from Arabia to Central Asia. His grandfather Khwājah ‘Ali and maternal grandfather Khwājah‘ Arab, who were also cousins, had come down to Lahore and thence to Badayun (Nadwi, 1997, vol. 2,166). Khwājah Niẓām al-Dīn , born in 636 AH (19th October,1238 C.E) (Khan, 123; Cf. Nadvi,166), enjoys the popular titles of *Sultān al-Mashā’ikh* (distinguished leader of the sufi saints of time in India) and *Mahbōb-e-Elāhī* (beloved of God) was the fourth successor (*Khalīfa*) of Ḥadrat Khwājah Mu‘īn al-Dīn Hasan Chishtī , the founder of the illustrious order of *Chishti* saints in this country. He was specially selected by his *Pīr-o-murshid*, Ḥadrat Khwājah Farīd al-Din Ganjshakar for this onerous responsibility because of his unique merits as a learned scholar, an able and diligent administrator and a perfect spiritual master on the recommendations of a “*bashārat*” (revelation) from the Prophet (Khan, *op. cit.*, 121).

Sayyid ‘Abul Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwi writes that it were the gifts and talents of Khwājah Nizāmal-Dīn which were perhaps expressed most concisely as well as meaningfully by his spiritual guide Khwājah Farīd al-Dīn Ganjshakar while conferring his Viceregency upon him. He had said: “God has bestowed upon you the gifts of knowledge, intellect and His, love; and anyone combining these qualities is best suited to discharge the responsibilities of a vicegerent” (Nadvi, *op. cit.*, 202).

The Legacy of Khwājah Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā^(R.A)

Khwājah Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā was well versed in Qur’ān, Ḥadīth and other related sciences of the time. He was fortunate enough to study from the well known and learned scholars of the time (Nadvi, *op. cit.*, 167-70). He learnt his early education from Maulana Allaudin Asooli of Badayun. Being very intelligent and brilliant, he obtained in a short time the “*Dastar-e-Fazilat*”. He studied *Hadith* from Sheikh Kamāl ud din Zāhid (d. 684 A.H.), a noted Traditionist (*Muḥadīth*) of his time and *Fiqh* or Jurisprudence and *Mashāriq al-Anwār*, from Allama Burhān al-Dīnal-Marginiani, the author of world famous *Hidāyah* (*Ibid.*, 169-70). Besides, learning the *Qur’ān*, *Hadith* and *Fiqh*, he also studied the famous books of *Ṣūfīsm* viz, *Awārif al-Ma‘ārif*, *Risālah-i-Qushayriyah*, *Kitāb al-Lum‘a*, *Kashf al-Mahjūb* etc. Thus it is clear that Khwājah Nizām al-Dīn was the learned scholar of both the aspects, esoteric as well as exoteric. This was the essence of his character which enabled him to carve out a pride of place not only amongst the saints and *ṣūfīs* of his own time, but also enabled him to become a loved and respected personality in the annals of Islam. The essence of his personality which enabled him to gain immortal fame was also his wholehearted devotion and the love of Allah and His messenger, Prophet Muhammad .

As a preacher of Islam

In the Subcontinent, the *Ṣūfīs* made untiring, selfless and incessant struggle for the spread of Islam. They devoted their lives and gave up their homes to champion the cause of Islam in a miraculous way. Neither did they resort to arms nor to swords for this. It was their affection, sympathy, fraternity and unlimited philanthropist actions that won the hearts of people. From the very first day the *Ṣūfī* sheikhs of Chishtiyya order entered India they remained itinerant preachers of Islam. The accessions to Islam through Khwājah Nizām ud

Din Auliya' were quite numerous. A large number of people were attracted and inspired by the spiritual power and divinely endowed popularity enjoyed by the Ḳhwājah Niẓām ud Din. He, like his predecessor Chishti sheikhs, also won the confidence of the masses because of his pious and frugal living, simple and straightforward religious and social precepts, love of suffering humanity, selfless service and disregard of the barriers of caste and creed and high and low which had been for centuries the blight of an oppressive caste-ridden social order in the Country.

Khawājah Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā' was a zealous preacher of Islam but he also held the view that mere preaching was not enough to win over anyone from his ancestral religion, particularly when it was doubly guarded by caste taboos and age-old social customs. In his opinion it was necessary that one should be afforded the opportunity of intimate acquaintanceship and fellowship for a considerable period for winning him over to a new faith (Nadvi, *op. cit.*, 70). The moral excellence and godliness and the spirit of humanity and fraternity exhibited by him must have inspired the population around him and his *khānqāh*, as a revelation from on High. To the credulous minds looking forward to performance of miracles as a proof of spiritual power, the developed spirituality and miraculous deeds of the mystics must have certainly been a source of attraction and opened their way for entering the new faith. All these causes explain the conversion of large numbers around the monasteries of *Pandwah* in Bengal and those in Ahmadabad and Gulbargah in the south. Hazrat Shah Kalīm ullah, an eminent Chishti preceptor of the eleventh century was ever vigilant, as his letters to his spiritual vicegerent Sheikh Nizam ud-din of Aurangabad show, about the missionary work of his disciples. In a letter to Sheikh Niẓām uddin his spiritual mentor asked him to "try to widen the sphere of Islam by winning over people to it" (Chasti and Kalimi, 1983, 60). In another letter Shah Kalīm ullah exhorted him to continue his endeavour "to spread the word of Allah (ṣubḥāna wata‘ālā) and to shed the light of truth from east to west" (*Ibid.*, 62). Khālid Ahmad Niẓāmi writes that efforts made by Sheikh Niẓām ud-din brought a large number of non-Muslims within the fold of Islam. Although a few of them did not declare their conversion for the fear of their relatives, they had embraced the faith in all sincerity (Nizami, 303).

Impact on Indian Society

The selfless service, discipleship of Khawājah Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā', played a very important role in reforming the Indian society. His effect of the discipleship was so generously extended to all, the nobles and the commoners, the officials and the traders, on the social and moral life of the people. A vast multitude had pledged devotion to this spiritual guide. Countless people repented from their sins and turned from evil, took to prayers and devotional exercises, expelled worldly desires, covetousness and greed from their hearts and inculcated a deep religious yearning for the fellowship of Allah. The example set by Khawājah through his spirit of humanity, virtuous living and upright behaviour charged the atmosphere with a genuine religious spirit which helped the people to become truthful and genuinely religious. The piety and righteousness of this God-moved soul attracted divine blessings; natural calamities like famines and pestilence ceased to visit the land. All these blessings, to which every man in the days of Khawājah would bear witness, became a means for the ascendancy of Islam. The rules of the *Shaffāh* as well as the doctrine of the mystics gained popularity among the people. How blessed were the days when *Shaykh-ul-Islam* Khawājah Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā^(R.A) had opened wide the gates of spiritual preceptorship; encouraged the sinners to repent for their sins; and allowed all, the rich and the poor, the king and the slave, the learned and the illiterate to cleanse their souls through his spiritual guidance. Everyone who pledged allegiance to the *Shaykh* considered himself spiritually attached to him and gave up many of his vices. If anybody ever committed a sin, the *Shaykh* allowed him to offer penitence and renew his *bay'at*. Thus, all those who took the pledge to walk along the pathway of purity were saved from many vices and were gradually led, through emulation of the *Shaykh*, to prayers and litanies. Every man and woman, whether tender in years or bent with age, regularly offered obligatory prayers and vied with each other in the performance of voluntary devotions. From the city to Ghiyathpur, people had made arrangements for the wayfarers to take rest and offer their prayers. Machinations of the devil were eschewed by the people who took more interest in ascertaining the number of *rakāts* performed on different occasions and the chapters of the *Qur'ān* recited in them by their spiritual mentors. Numerous people had enthusiastically taken to memorise the *Qur'ān*. A favourite pastime of the *Shaykh*'s disciples was to instruct each other in the ways of mystic thought and practice and to relate the stories of those who had taken to a life of

propinquity with God. They never talked of the earthly desires nor longed for power and pelf. Many among the attendants and servants, chiefs and grandees of the King who had been united in the bonds of spiritual paternity with the Sheikh, performed voluntary prayers and kept supererogatory fasts. There was not a city block or ward in which people did not hold regular gatherings for the remembrance of God, devotional practices or auditions. A number of the Sheikh's disciples recited the entire Qur'an during the *Tarāwīh* and kept vigil in the mosques during *Ramadhān* or even on Friday nights or on the occasion of other festivals. Many of them spent two-thirds of their nights in the nocturnal prayers of *tahajjud* all round the year and some even performed the Morning Prayer with the ablution they had had for the orison of '*ishā'*. People had begun to equate heinous sins with apostasy. No Muslim dared to charge interest or indulge in hoarding. The traders had given up the habit of bargaining, short-weighing and adulteration. Most of the people sought mystical treatises from the book-sellers. It has been rightly argued that God had made *Khawājah Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā* a pure-hearted soul like Shaykh Junayd al-Baghdadi and Shaykh Ba-Yazīd Bistāmi of the bygone ages" (Barani, 1983, 46, 341)

Khawājah Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā no less impressed the non-Muslims who came in contact with him. He allowed them to take up *sūfī* practices, start *dhikr* and *fikr* and finally embrace Islam in the end. He, however, preached Islam actively and won over large sections of non-Muslims to Islam. What induced them to embrace Islam was, besides the life and practices of the *Shaykh*, the Islamic belief that God is one and that all men are children of one father and mother, equal to each other.

***Khawājah Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā*'and Politics**

The inhabitants of India came into contact with Islam since late 7th century but Indian hearts were moved by the great *Sūfī* orders that came and flourished in India at different times. They were prominent in the Indian subcontinent, though they differed in their attitudes towards the rulers and the politics of their time. Almost all saints of the *Chishti* order refrained from visiting the king of Mongols. However, the *Sūfī* saints did extend moral support to the Sultan in the construction of public works . *Khwājah Qutb al Din Bakhtiyar* (d. 1235 C.E.) was offered the post of *Shaykh al-Islam* in the court of Sultan Shams al Din Iltutmish (r. 1211-1236) in Delhi, but he refused to accept it. *Shaykh Farid al-Din Ganjshakar* (1175-1265)

warned his disciples against consorting the kings and princes. Similar was the case of ḲhwājahNizām ud Din. He declined the offer of a grant (idras) and government service (shughl) made by Sultan ‘Ala al Din Khalji(r. 1296-1316). He lived through the times of several sultans but did not pay count to anyone. When he was consistently refused to go to the court, sultan Jalaluddin Khalji sought an interview with him, who politely declined the invitation. “My house has two doors”, remarked the Shaykh. “If the Sultan enters by one, I will make my exit by the other.” But when the Sultan planned a surprise visit to the Shaykh’s, Amir Khusrau, the latter’s celebrated disciple, reported this to the Saint, who left to visit the tomb of his spiritual mentor, Baba Farid^(R.A.) at Ajodhyan, to avoid meeting the Sultan (Nizami, 1991, 105). The policy of maintaining difference and distance from the world of monarchy was not always easy to follow and it required extraordinary moral courage to resist the threats of the intrusive ways of the rulers. Admittedly, there were other levels where a constant exchange of symbols and material took place between the *khānqāh* and the imperial court.

Conclusion

Khawājah Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā’ played a very important role in spreading the message of Islam in India. He not only preached Islam in non-Muslims but various Muslims got inspirations from him and began to live a life of a good and true Muslim. His piety and devotion (‘ibādah) to Allah, his remembrance (*dhikr*), contemplation (*fikr*), his fear and love for Allah, and his simple living and renunciation (*Zuhd*) impressed the then masses who used to throng around him to seek the blessing from the Allah. Many of the courtiers,princes and officials became his disciples along with the peasants and laymen of the country. He exercised a magnetic effect on both the communities and they thronged around him and benefit themselves from the teachings of Qur’ān and Hadith . He spread the message of peace and love and thus he united the people among themselves and with Allah.Today both the communities are present but the traits like this saint scholar are missing. It is important to revisit the personality and teachings of this saint scholar for the establishment of peace and happiness in the society.

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