

Interpreting Sufism: A Study on *Hidayathul Adhkiya* of Zainuddin Mkhdom 1

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Hidayathul Adhkiya Ila Tariqil Awliya is a poem written by renowned Islamic scholar of Ponnani, Zainuddin Mkhdom 1 in the beginning of 16th century. Ponnani at that time was a flourishing trade centre when the author reached there from Kochi, where he was instrumental in laying the foundation for the Islamic learning, culture and leadership. His activities in Ponnani included the construction of the Ponnani Juma Masjid, in which he was appointed as the Qazi; establishment of the Darsu in the Juma Masjid as a centre of higher learning in Islamic knowledge; composition of certain number of books and other writings¹ that would help the students their pursuit of Islamic learning; composition of the poem Thahriridh² as an exposition to the need for fighting for the defence of public interest. (Zainuddin Makhdom, 2021, p. 4) All these undertakings acted as parts of an integral task that paved the foundation for the cultivation of Islamic learning in Ponnani which later earned the honour of being designated as the Makkah of Malabar where students from abroad even Ceylon, Sumatra, and Java visited in pursuit of Knowledge. The composition the poem under discussion here is also belong to that category of work that Makhdom I had was the beginning of a tradition to stimulate the Islamic Culture and is to be continued through his descendants for a long period until Mampuram Thangals came to the scene.

The Historical background of the poem is also very significant to consider. It was composed in the commencement of 16th century when the Portuguese power had appeared in the Arabian Sea. The

public life was going to face heavy encounters in land and sea. The articulation of public life needed fresh dimensions as it was heading towards serious crises. The relatively peaceful atmosphere of the preceding centuries, as we know it today, was going to endure changes for renewed threats in all most all the fields of life. The demand of the time was something new and meaningful one which a leader like Makhdum cannot deny to his age. And this poem under discussion here was far more fruitful than any other composition of the author. (Verankutty Moulavi, pp. 17-18)

Coming to the reason why Makhdum I composed Hidayath al Adhkiya is noteworthy, because the poet was not certain as to which branch of knowledge he should occupy himself with: should he excel in the knowledge of Fiqh (Islamic Law) or should he dedicate predominantly to spirituality. Then he had a dream on 24 Sha'ban 914 A. H.(December 18, 1508) in which he was told that it is better to devote to mysticism. For a swimmer in the river, if he wants to cross from one shore to the other, in order to reach his goal he has to swim [against] the course in which the river flows, he has to swim upstream.... He must not swim straight away across the river, [because] he would be swept away by the current of the river and will not reach his goal, instead at a place downstream. Makhdum I realised from this that occupying oneself with mysticism will bring someone to his goal while occupying oneself with Fiqh and the like will not allow one to arrive at one's goal. It was after having this vision, he wrote this poem. (Verankutty Moulavi, 2015, pp. 16-17).

The historical context in which Sufism emerged itself into a complete mystical system needs to be considered in this context because it will provide deeper vision into the historical framework of this Poem which is also mystical in content. According to Ibn Khaldun,

Sufism 'belongs to the sciences of the religious law that originated in Islam and it is based on (the assumption) that the method of those people (who later on came to be called Sufis) had always been considered by the important first three generation of Muslims as the path of truth and right guidance. Their approach is based upon persistent application to divine worship, complete devotion to God, dislike to the false splendour of the world, self-discipline from the

pleasure, property, and position to which the great mass desires, and withdrawal from the world into solitude for divine worship etc. These things were the general characteristics among the men around Prophet and the early Muslims'. (Ibn Khaldun, 1958)

Regarding the historical context under which Sufism emerged is logically exposed by Ibn Khaldun in the following words, "Then, worldly aspirations increased in the second [eighth] century and after. People now inclined toward worldly affairs. At that time, the special name of Sufis (Sufiyah and Mutasawwifah) was given to those who aspired to divine worship."³

It is clear that Sufism developed in to a distinctive discipline during the third century of Hijrah in which Islamic society and culture was exposed to new challenges internally as well as externally. It was a deliberate attempt on the part of the believers to correct the overindulgence and life of luxury that was characteristic of the age in which Sufism emerged. On a wider perspective, all the Sufi literature in which those books were written had its specific historical context and they tried to address certain relevant issues ahead. The best example is al Gazzali and his works.

Sufism emerged as an internal corrective force against sedentary life to which the Arab polity and society had been exposed itself. The observations of Ibn Khaldun in this respect is noteworthy. 'Sedentary people are much concerned with all kinds of pleasures. They are accustomed to luxury and success in worldly occupations and to indulgence in worldly desires. Therefore, their minds are coloured with all kinds of blameworthy and evil qualities. The more of them they possess, the more remote do the ways and means of goodness become to them and lose all sense of restraint. Many of them are found to use improper language in their gatherings as well as in the presence of their superiors and womenfolk. They are not deterred by any sense of restraint, because the bad custom of behaving openly in an improper manner in both words and deeds has taken hold of them'. (Ibn Khaldun, 1958, p. 165)

'Among the things that corrupt sedentary culture, there is the disposition toward pleasures and indulgence in them, because of the great luxury (that prevails). It leads to diversification of the desires of

the belly for pleasurable food and drink' followed by diversification of the pleasures of sex...such as adultery and homosexuality' (Ibn Khaldun, 1958, p. 470). Similar statements can be seen in Muqaddimah in other contexts.

Ibn Khaldun further explain that the Sufis, once it started to be articulated had their distinctive discipline, which is not debated by scholars of the Fiqh. As a result, the science of the religious law came to comprise of two kinds. One is the distinct field of jurists and muftis [which is the academic area of the masters of the Sharia]. It is related with the common laws governing the acts of worship, day-to-day actions, and mutual transactions. 'The other is the special field of the 'people' (Sufis). It is concerned with pious exertion, self-scrutiny with regard to it, discussion of the different kinds of mystical and ecstatic experience occurring in the course of (self- scrutiny), the mode of ascent from one mystical experience to another, and the interpretation of the technical terminology of mysticism in use among them' (Ibn Khaldun, 1958, pp. 612-13).

Regarding the development of Sufi literature Ibn Khaldun, the observations in Muqaddimah are far more relevant. He observes that in course of time all branches of knowledge/sciences were written down systematically. The jurists [Scholars in Sharia] wrote monumental works on jurisprudence as well as the principles of jurisprudence, and on speculative theology, on Qur'an interpretation, and other subjects. The 'Sufis, too, wrote on their subject. Some Sufis wrote on the laws governing asceticism and self-scrutiny, how to act and not act in imitation of model (saints). That was done by al-Muhasibi, in is Kitab ar-Ri'ayah. Other (Sufi authors) wrote on the behavior of (Sufis) and their different kinds of mystical and ecstatic experience in the "states." Al-Qushayri in his Kitab ar-Risalah, and as-Suhrawardi in the Kitab 'Awarif al-ma'arif, as well as others, did this'. (Ibn Khaldun, 1958, pp. 612-13)

It was not long when scholars started to bring together both Fiqh and Sufism into a common platform and Al-Ghazzali was foremost among such scholars. He combined the two matters [Fiqh and Sufism] in the Kitab al Ihya'. In this monumental work he dealt systematically with the laws governing asceticism and the imitation of Sufi models.

He had clarified the behaviour and customs of the Mystics (Sufis) and remarked on their technical vocabulary. ‘Thus, the science of Sufism became a systematically treated discipline in Islam. Before that, mysticism had merely consisted of divine worship, and its laws had existed in the breasts of men. The same had been the case with all other disciplines, such as Qur’an interpretation, the science of tradition, jurisprudence, the principles of jurisprudence, and other disciplines. (They were only later on) treated systematically’ (Ibn Khaldun, 1958, pp. 612-13). As one can see below, all most all of the major works on Sufism that had been composed in different time by the masters on this particular field of study had their persistent influence on the Poem discussed here.

The poem ‘Hidayat al-Adhkiya’ilaTariq al-Awliya’ is composed of 188 verses in the metre kamil. Its content may be summarized as follows: The lines 1 to16 is an introduction to the subject matter of the Poem and deals with the meaning of Shari’a, Tariqa and Haqiqa and their inter connectedness. The lines 17 to 77 deals with 9 admonitions to those Seafarers in the sea of Tariqa in search of the path of the friendship with God (Tariq al-awliya’). Out of these nine admonitions, lines 17 to 22 deals with Repentance; 23 to 24 deals with Satisfaction; 25 to 30 deals with Asceticism; 31 to 32 deals with Learning the Islamic sciences; 33 to 41 deals with Observing the Prophet’s Tradition ; lines 42 to 44 deals with Trust in God ;45 to 52 deals with Purity of intention; 53 to 61 deals with Isolation; 62 to 75 deals with Preserving the moment (i. e. using every moment for a religious purpose); Verses 76 to 77 deals with Five ways to cure the heart which are reciting the Qur’an, fasting, performing the night prayer, performing the prayer at sahr time, and gathering with good people. (Verankutty Moulavi, 2015)

From Verses 78 – 165 a number of themes are discussed in loose sequence; On the virtues required of a Qur’anic reader; remembering death; On learning and study (during the morning); The importance of religious learning; the status of the Scholar compared to that of the Worshipper; Five signs denoting the seeker of knowledge with wrong intentions; Seven characteristics of the knower of the Hereafter; Six inner natural good qualities of a Spiritual leader ‘; The importance of beneficial knowledge for happiness in the present world

and in the Hereafter; Teaching (the beneficial knowledge) as the best worship Worship ('ibada), the best successorship (khilafa) and inheritance of the prophet; Advice on how to study eight branches of knowledge of the Arabic language; A warning that one should not be fooled by logic and theology and study of al-Ghaziili instead; Adab regarding eating, drinking, free time for prayer or study and sleeping; Night Prayer; The harmfulness of thinking of the worldly life; What one can and cannot do between the prayer after sunset (maghrib) and the evening prayer ('isha'); Tadhkira , on prayer, Qur'an reading and dhikr; Important note in which two concepts are discussed; Guarding one's breath in dhikr; Concerning silent invocation (dhikr khafi); Concerning mujahada (serious effort) as a pre-condition for achievement of the special high knowledge. Also mentioned is the struggle against one's ego i. e. the process of purifying the soul from vice and decorating it with Light.; Concerning the status of the gnostic, compared to that of the scholar ; discusses the ways to achieve the highest goal of Sufism, i. e. contemplation (mushiihada) according to Suhrawardi; Conclusion of the mystical treatise with Hamd and salawat on the Prophet. (Muhammed P, 1991, p. 153)

Sharia, Tariqa and Haqika.(The Law, The Way and The Actualisation)

The content of the first 16 verses as a preface to the Poem can be summarised thus, 'Devotion or honesty in worship is the centre and base of all delight. Following the selfish passion is root cause of all evil deceptions. The path [of a true believer consists sequentially] Shariah, Tariqah and then Haqiqah. [So] attend carefully to the parable [made here]. Sharia is like a ship and Tariqah is like the sea and Tariqah is the pearl in the sea. [What is] Sharia is to stick by the [rules of] Islam and to obey is commands and avoid his proscriptions. Haqiqah is to realise the desired destination and to see the Distinct Light of the Devine. Whoever hungers pearl should go on board, dive in the sea, and then he will get the pearl. Also, Tariqah and Haqiqah could not be attained unless you are bound by Sharia. Therefore, he has to embellish himself with Sharia, so as to illuminate his heart clearly and to eliminate the darkness out of it. [In that state] Tariqah can stay in his heart unvaryingly. Among the many Tariqahs available, each one selects

his own [preferred] Tariqah, and thus he reaches the goal through that Tariqah [i.e. the Way]. [This include activities] Like sitting midst the people as educator, increasing the number of wurd (voluntary worships) such as fasting and prayer; and (like) service of people; carrying wood so he can earn money and then give in charity. Whoever desires to come in this path of the Pious, let him keep the following instructions' (Zainuddin Makhdum, 2021, p. 5).

This summary of the first part clearly illustrate what is Sufism and its relation with Islamic Law. Regarding Sufism Makhdum has made it clear that it is nothing but Adab or to mould ones character in the stipulated path of Sharia. (Verse 34). The most striking statement is that the Sufi path is to be bound by the Law always and his path is closely attached to the worldly life of public. Regarding his connection with regard to wealth, the poem has clearly stated that Sufism is not to destroy wealth, but to constrain his undue attachment to wealth (Verse 25). Personal etiquette and decorum are the marked distinctive character of a Sufi (Verse 135-37). Tariqah is the systematic action plan for implementing the Sharia/Law in each and every moment of life. As such, there is constant check-up of whether the traveller is on his preferred path or astray from it. Constant self-appraisal is applied at every turn of the moment so that the Goal is always ahead of him. His Adab/ Character is finally fixed to suit him befit for any walk of life who will illuminate like a lamp giving light to others. Thus the poem Adhkiya becomes a true Traveller's Guide.

Ibn Khaldun had differentiated the primary level of having the knowledge of Sharia and the stage of having imbibed the knowledge into one's life in the following words. There is a good deal of difference between states of having knowledge and having it practical life. For example, it is well known that mercy to the orphans and the poor brings (a human being) close to God and is recommendable.... Scholars can quote the sources for it from the religious law. But if someone were to see an orphan or a poor person of the destitute classes, and he would run away from him and disdain to touch him, let alone show mercy to him. He might not show any of the higher 'stations' of sympathy, affection, and charity. Their mercy for the orphan was the result of having reached the station of knowledge alone. But there

are people who, in addition to the station of knowledge and the realization of the fact that mercy to the poor brings (a human being) close to God, have attained another, higher ‘station’: they have attained the attribute and habit of mercy. When they see an orphan or a poor person, they approach him and show him (mercy). They wish to receive the (heavenly) reward for the compassion they show him. They are hardly able to refrain from (showing compassion), even if they are repulsed. They give as charity whatever they have available from their own property.” (Ibn Khaldun, 1958, p. 593). Sufism as Adab systematically leads man from that primary state of knowledge to that stage of acquiring the higher state of knowledge.

And what are the courses of a journey headed towards a clear destination (Haqika/Actualisation), and what perils are there in course of it, what precautions are to be taken into account; all these details are there in ‘Traveller’s Guide’(that is Adhkiya) Tariqa provides the guidance to follow the safest way, as if one is crossing a torrent of river, such as piety (al-wara’), and ascetic practice. Once the traveller is heading along with the right path, it will lead in due course to the ultimate destination which is Haqika. Practising what has been commanded and avoiding what has been forbidden in Sharia is Tariqa, which is following the acts and ways of the Prophet and living by them. Shari’a, as a boat, is a means by which one can achieve one’s goal, yet at the same time remain in a secure and safe haven. Travelling through Tariqa, the sea, one reaches the place wherein the pearl is lodged and the goal is located. The Haqika is like a great pearl of the highest price. The pearl can be found only in the sea, and one cannot navigate that sea without a boat. Practising Sharia in real life is Tariqa and it is not an easy task. One have to strive hard to be steadfast in his well-defined goal. The traveller has to fight with himself in order not to be tempted by the lure of worldly gains and keep his attention on the goal to be reached. And thus Adhkiya gives a systematic exposition of a Traveller’s Guide towards Haqiqat.

References of Hidayathul Adhkiya

Even though, the poem is a small one in appearance with only 188 lines, the subject matter is rich enough and the references made to it is rich in content consisting almost all of the classical authors in

the subject of Sufism. The most important among these are those mentioned by Makhdum himself, i. e. *Ihya Ulumuddin* by al-Ghazali; 'Awarif al-Ma'ariuf by Shihabuddin al-Suhrawardi; *Riyadhu Salihin* and *Al Adhkar* by al-Nawawi. He had made references to great authors on Sufism like Al-Qushayri, 'Abdul Qadir Jilani, Ibn Arabi, Ibn Ataullah al-Iskandari, Abu Madyan, Abdul Wahhab Sha'rani, Aydarus Abd Allah, Jalaluddin Suyuti, Abdul Ghani al-Nabulusi. Thus the poem serves the purpose of providing guidance in mystic path to a believer in an authentic way through the medium of poetry that can be put to memory easily. If it were written in prose, the subject matter would have been put to powerful exposition by the prolific writer, but transmission of the content to the common people, considering the limitations of the age in which it was composed, would not have been no so easily achieved. It is noteworthy that these works along with Shafi School of Jurisprudence and Sufism having Yamani origin had made a lasting imprint on the crystallisation of Muslim life in the shores of Indian Ocean. (Anne K Bang, 2003, pp. 13-16)

The Meaning of Sufism and Types of Sufi Life

In the text of *HidayataJ-Adhkiya*', Makhdum says that Sufism is synonymous with Adab (good behaviour-education), and that this should be learned from a study of Suhrawardi's Classical work *al Awarif al Maarif* because the only way to approach God is by following the Prophet completely in his inner state, his actions and his sayings. According to Suhrawardi's definitions: "adab is the refinement of the exterior and the interior; if one purifies one's outer and inner life he will become a Sufi of true education. Behaviour/education (adab) will be perfect only through moral perfection, i. e. betterment of character." And all behaviour or customs are learned from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), for he unites in himself all Adab, internally and externally."

Zuhd/ Asceticism

Another concern of the Sufi is that of Zuhd/ Asceticism. A Sufi is discredited for having renounced the worldly pleasures, but Makhdum categorically correct this false notion by stating that the Sufi is not to destroy wealth, but to destroy the preoccupation of the mind with wealth that leads to negligence in remembering God. Great

many Sufi leaders were the wealthiest people of their time, but their wealth never overpowered their morale.

“Renounce (the world) and turn to Allah. This does not mean to destroy the wealth itself, but to destroy the relations of your mind towards wealth and you will become intelligent. Asceticism is the best of the positions next to piety and a believer can reach the supreme position by adopting *zuhd* in his life. The lover of worldly pleasures, as if intoxicated drinker would clamour where is the way? where is the salvation? Quit the all allegiances that does not help in obedience to Allah, and (then) you select the celibate which is better. Follow the following four qualities for the safety of this world, firstly forgive the ignorant people who have done you harm , secondly protect yourself from being ignorant, thirdly do not aspire for the wealth of other people and lastly be generous with regard to your wealth to the people” (Verankutty Moulavi, 2015, pp. Verses 25-30)

Practical Ways to the Path of God.

Makhdum’s poem classify Muslim believers according to the following scheme: the Worshipper, the Scholar and the Gnostic. In the poem verse 93, it is stated to the effect that: “An Scholar is superior to the one Worshipper and is like the moon over the stars.” This verse is based on a Prophetic tradition and it is obvious that a Worshipper without knowledge is in a lower rank than a Scholar. A good deed (*‘amal*), even if it is small, if done unconsciously and knowingly is better than a great deal of worship without knowledge. Regarding the status of *‘arif* occupies a higher level than an *‘alim*. In the poem lines 179-180 the author stated that the status of gnostics (*arif*) is superior to that of the “people of the derived and fundamental sciences”.

It’s no wonder that the poem arrested the attention of the scholars in the succeeding ages, a number of commentaries were written on it including by eminent scholars including his own son, Abdul Azeez al Makhdum. In this context it is more important to note that one commentary was composed in Masjid al Haram in Makkh and that was by an eminent and erudite scholars of Jawanese origin, Syekh Muhammad Nawawi al-Jawi al-Bantani (born in Indonesia in 1813 AD and died in Mecca , in 1897 AD) He was in the City of Makkah

from 1830 onwards till his death earnestly pursuing knowledge and teaching. He had written a number of books and the famous Commentary on Adhkiya named Salalim al Fudhla. An Indonesian Jawanise scholar wring a commentary on a poem composed in Ponnani attest to the high academic quality of the work as well as the international out-reach of scholarship.

End Notes:

- 1 Major works of Makhdum I included Murshid Tullab, Siraj al Qulub, Shamsul Huda, Tuhfathul Ahibbau, Irshadul Qasidin, Shuabul Iman Kifayathul Faraid.
- 2 The poem takes its Title from Quran -Surah 8 Al-Anfal, vrese 65 (Yusuf Ali, 1934)
- 3 Al- Qushayri says: “No etymology or analogy can be found for this term in the Arabic language. It is obvious that it is a nickname. Theories deriving the word from as- safa’ (purity, sincerity), or from as-suffah (bench), or from as-saff (row) are improbable from the point of view of linguistic analogy.” (Al-Qushayri) continued: “The same applies to the derivation from as-suf (wool), because the Sufis were not the only ones who wore Wool.” (Ibn Khaldun, 1958, p. 611)

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