

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

**NASIR AHMAD GANAI**

Department of Islamic Studies, Islamic University of Science &  
Technology, Awantipora, Jammu & Kashmir.

Email: [nasirahmad9622@gmail.com](mailto:nasirahmad9622@gmail.com)

**DR. AFROZ AHMAD BISATI**

Department of Islamic Studies, Islamic University of Science &  
Technology, Awantipora, Jammu & Kashmir.

Email: [afrozdaniya@gmail.com](mailto:afrozdaniya@gmail.com)

Received on: 29-07-2025

Accepted on: 18-12-2025

<https://doi.org/10.57144/hi.v49i2.1392>

**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 *Malfūzāt* 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; *Malfūzat*; *Taşawwuf*; Service of Humanity; Historian; Tolerance; Non-Violence

## Introduction

*Taşawwuf* 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 *Ihsān*. From the initial period of Islam, mystical thought and practice developed in conjunction with formal theology (*‘Ilm al-Kalām*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*), not detach from or in disagreement with them. Nevertheless, in the past century, scholarly research on *Taşawwuf* 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 *Taşawwuf* 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 *Taşawwuf* acted as a bridge between the basic beliefs, Communal harmony and Cultural mending particularly in the Indian Sub-Continent. He argued that the *Şūfī* 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 *‘Awārif al Ma‘ārif*. The *Şūfī* orders particularly the Chishtiyyah order stressed on love (*Maḥabbat*), remembrance (*Dhikr*), and moral progress (*Tazkiyah al-Nafs*)<sup>1</sup> 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* (*Şūfī* 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.<sup>2</sup> He has some rare manuscripts in his personal collection which include *Iqtibās-ul-Anwār*, *Jawāhir-i-Farīdi*, *Ma‘ārij-ul-Wilāyat*, *Maṭlūb-ul-Ṭālibīn*, *Mirāt-ul-Asrār*, *Mūnis-ul-Arwāh*,

*Safīnat-ul-Auliya*, *Shajarāt-u'l-Anwār*, *Siyar-u'l-Arifīn*, *Takmilah Siyar-ul-Auliya* and many more. With this approach, he was able to present *Taşawwuf* as the core of Islam especially in the Indian subcontinent<sup>3</sup>, where *Şūfi* orders often provided ethical examples by keeping their doors open for everyone irrespective of any discrimination and shaped the religious thought of local masses.<sup>4</sup>

This paper is the humble attempt to highlight the contribution of Khaliq Ahmad Nizami to *Taşawwuf*. It will provide a detailed study of how Nizami placed *Taşawwuf* in the multi-religious, multi-cultural and multi-lingual country of India.

### **Background, History**

At the outset, Islam in India was guided by political and legal systems as well as the committed attempts of *Şūfi* saints, mystics, and teachers. They explained the Quranic call for spiritual purifying in ways that reverberated culturally. The dissemination of *Şūfi* ideals during the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal periods created enduring spiritual connections. These connections were strongly grounded in Islamic teachings and also open to captivating with the manifold religions around them.<sup>5</sup>

*Taşawwuf* developed in the subcontinent besides the expansion of Muslim rule, but it did not simply assist as a prolongation of political power. It founded its own institutions, language, rituals, and teaching methods. The *khānqāh* system, *sama*' gatherings, *malfūzāt* literature, and *tadhkirahs* provided to a religious group that was based in Islamic metaphysics, ethical reflection, and the remembrance of God. Prominent personalities included Mu'īn al-Din Chishti, Qutb al-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki, Shaikh Nizam al-Din Auliya', and Shaikh Nasir al-Din Chiragh Dehlavi. They laid more stress on service of humanity, tolerance, sympathy, pacifism in their teachings.

The study of *Taşawwuf* in medieval India has unfolded many scholarly approaches. Some scholars in India studied it through sociological lens by focusing on its social functions and institutions. In addition to the mystical phenomenon, they consider it a social movement that influenced the Indian society. While others considered it as a movement that was influenced by Indian culture and rituals and argued that it is not compatible with holy Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. Some others approached it as the political or cultural expression of Islam in India rather than a mystical force. Still, others clarify *Taşawwuf* to only cultural displays or political connections. In this context, Khaliq Ahmad Nizami approached *Taşawwuf* as a living historical force that

shaped the socio-political history of medieval India, which contributed to its communal harmony and cultural synthesis.

### **Review of Literature**

The study of *Taşawwuf* in India has developed a manifold body of literature in the past century. At the outset it was approached through devotional lenses focusing exclusively on elder *mashā'ikh* and their teachings. Then with the advent of Orientalists like A. J. Arberry and Margaret Smith it was seen as a mystical phenomenon often depicted as a variation from Islamic fundamental beliefs. Then the indigenous scholars came up with the historical and sociological approaches by focusing on its social institutions and cultural synthesis the most prominent among them were K. A. Nizami and S. A. A. Rizvi.

Unlike other Orientalists, Annemarie Schimmel adopted a more balanced and nuanced approach in her books, such as *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* and *Islam in the Indian Subcontinent*, integrated scholarly analysis with theological perception, providing a view into the inner heart of Muslim reverence. However, Schimmel often inclined towards the poetic and philosophical dimensions of Sufism, missing a profound exploration of the social, political, or institutional dimensions of Indian *Şūfi* life.<sup>6</sup>

In the South Asian context, Aziz Ahmad was one of the first to exhaustively place Sufism within the Indo-Muslim society. His writings discussed the link between Sufism and Hindu ideas, the impact of political powers on *Şūfi* practices, and the theme of religious multiplicity. Yet, Ahmad's tone was often unconvinced he viewed Sufism as a strength that moderated Islam to make it more acceptable to Indian people. His analysis missed the cordiality or theological proximity found in more spiritually connected experts.<sup>7</sup>

*A History of Sufism in India* is the most profound work on *Taşawwuf* in India by S.A.A. Rizvi. It is rich in detail and use of Persian sources but he approached *Taşawwuf* through the secular lens. He presented the *Şūfis* as historical figures and laid stress on their social role while overshadowing their spiritual and religious aspects.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, the approach and methodology of Khaliq Ahmad Nizami is both sound and ethically solid. Although he was committed to historical objectivity and critical analysis but he avoids both the extremes he neither over-exaggerated it nor treats it as a heterogeneous element. Rather he depicts it as the inner dimension of Islam which is based on Holy Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. He presented the figures like Nizam al-Din Auliya' and Shaikh Farid al-Din Ganj-e-

Shakar as the social actors who shaped the society and moral ideals of people according to the teachings of their *Ṣūfī* order while remaining firm to the basic principles of Islam.<sup>9</sup>

Many scholars have admired Nizami in their footnotes or bibliographies but there is hardly any work dealing with his approach and methods which he has employed in his study of *Taṣawwuf* in medieval India. This paper aims to address that gap not through blind admiration, but by reflecting on his contributions critically and appreciatively.

### **Research Questions**

The above survey of literature reveals that there is hardly any significant work treating K.A. Nizami's contribution to *Taṣawwuf* / Sufism in India. This theme is yet to be addressed by the researchers and is, at the same time, of high academic importance in terms of making of history of *Taṣawwuf* in India. Keeping this assumption in view, this exploration is guided by following questions:

1. How did K.A. Nizami conceptualize *Taṣawwuf* in medieval India?
2. How did he integrate *Taṣawwuf* into broader socio-political history?
3. What methodological approaches distinguish his work?

### **Methodology**

This study uses a qualitative, textual-analytical, and historically reflective approach. The concentration is not on accumulating archival data or giving a new timeline of *Ṣūfī* orders but on explaining and appraising how Khaliq Ahmad Nizami understood and wrote about *Taṣawwuf* in Indian Islamic history.

The key sources for this study include Nizami's writings, especially *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century*, *State and Culture in Medieval India*, and *On History and Historians of Medieval India*. In this present study, each key source was explored to discern his understanding of *Taṣawwuf* which include his engagement with Persian primary sources and his methodological approach.

The analysis followed three systematic steps:

**Thematic coding:** in this step, the key themes of his writings which include spiritual orders, divine love, social service, *Ma'rifat*, *Sama'* etc were identified.

**Comparative analysis:** this step involves the analysis of his understanding of *Taşawwuf* with those scholars who over-exaggerated its socio-political aspects.

**Context based historical study:** this step involves the placement of Nizami's arguments within the expansive indo-Islamic historiographical discussions.

This multifaceted strategy provides a coherent and structured scheme for comprehending, how Nizami formed his elucidation of *Taşawwuf*. Moreover, his obscure Urdu essays offer understanding into his profound views on *Taşawwuf*. These works are not seen as fixed historical records but as academic representations that disclose the author's approach, theological beliefs, and respect for the Islamic moral tradition.<sup>10</sup>

#### **Discussion: Contribution of Khaliq Ahmad Nizami to *Taşawwuf* in India**

The works of K. A. Nizami on *Taşawwuf* displays several unique features which help to form a strong academic vision of *Taşawwuf* in the Indian context. Prior to K. A. Nizami a lot of literature has been produced on *Taşawwuf* but that was prepared through devotional or hagiographical lenses. What makes Nizami distinct from other scholars is his academic approach as he academicized the study of *Taşawwuf* in india. Nizami argues that the literature of *Taşawwuf* which includes *malfūzāt* and *tadhkirahs* forms an indispensable part of medieval Indian history. He states that it provides us the full detailed information about the socio-political tensions in medieval India in all its fullness and serves as a corrective to the political literature of medieval India which mainly revolves round the courts and camps of kings.

#### **Re-centering Islam in the Study of Indian Sufism**

One major outcome of Nizami's work is the restoration of the Islamic essence of Indian Sufism. In contrast to many post-colonial scholars who often emphasize the syncretic or "Hindu-influenced" nature of Indian *Şūfi* thought, Nizami firmly grounds his study in Islamic knowledge. He points out that the spiritual language of the Chishti and Suhrawardi saints was inherited from the classical Islamic

tradition of figures like Hasan al-Basri, Junayd al-Baghdadi, and Ghazali.<sup>11</sup>

In his work on Shaikh Nizam al-Din Auliya', Nizami stresses that the saint was tolerant and welcoming and his teachings were based on morality and Prophetic ethics. It challenges the perspective that was prevalent among the discourses on Sufism that *Ṣūfīs* were indifferent to Islamic orthodoxy. Nizami states that the saint's focus on love (*muḥabbat*), renunciation (*zuhd*), service (*khidmat*), and remembrance of God (*dhikr*) were not borrowed from Indian traditions but they were core Islamic values, which he applied to the Indian cultural setting.<sup>12</sup>

For instance, in his interpretation of Nizam al-Din's *malḡūzāt*, Nizami stresses how the saint begins every lesson with references to the holy Qur'ān, the sayings of the Prophet (*Ṣal Allah-u-'alaihe wa sallam*), and stories of earlier Muslim ascetics.<sup>13</sup> By doing this, Nizami counters the modern tendency to present Indian *Ṣūfīs* as moral philosophers who moved beyond Islamic beliefs. He argues that faith, not cultural blending, was at the core of their practice.

### Understanding Sufism as an Ethical Movement

Nizami does not see *Taṣawwuf* merely as a system of mystical ideas or personal devotion. He presents it as an ethical and social movement that addressed the moral challenges of its time. In his celebrated work *Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century*, he explains that the *Ṣūfīs* offered a spiritual alternative to both the rigidity of the 'Ulama' and the corruption of the ruling class.<sup>14</sup> In this sense, Sufism was not apolitical. It refused to legitimize tyranny or religious formalism.

He maintains that the silence of Shaikh Nizam al-Din was the moral protest in the face of political injustice not as passivity. By remaining away from state, these saints declared that true spiritual authority came from nearness of God and service of humanity. It presents Sufism as a quiet resistance movement which aims to reform society by focusing on transforming hearts rather than seizing power.<sup>15</sup>

Nizami portrays beautifully the Chishti principle of *fana*, which was not only a mystical idea but a moral responsibility. In a world dominated by pride, wealth, and power, the Chishti saints focused on humility, simplicity, and detachment.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Taṣawwuf* served as a Bridge Between the upper class and lower class**

Another important aspect of his works is exploration of *Ṣūfī* institutions particularly the *khānqāhs*. Nizami shows that they were not only the spiritual centres but the places where everyone was welcomed irrespective of any distinction where everyone was equal before *shaykh*. They served as community halls where everyone sat under the same roof and shared their meals coming from distinct backgrounds. In this way they emerged as the centres of cultural blending and interfaith dialogue where people share their problem with one another and ultimately paved the way for the development of new *lingua franca* like *Hindawi* which became their common language.<sup>17</sup> Nizami argues that *Taṣawwuf* was an important part of society by highlighting the social role of these *Ṣūfī* institutions.<sup>18</sup>

In this way, Nizami avoids both the elitist interpretation of Sufism as a pursuit of abstract ideas and the populist view of Sufism as mere folk religion. His work allows us to see the Chishti tradition as a theology of the people, bringing Islamic spirituality into daily life through the languages, customs, and feelings of ordinary men and women.

### **Emphasis on the Moral Character of the Saints**

One of the key approaches of Nizami was that Instead of presenting these saints as miracle performers he highlights their simplicity, honesty, generosity, and self-discipline and presented them as social actors. He was of the opinion that it was not their charm but their ethical example that attracted people to them.<sup>19</sup>

It is particularly remarkable in his monograph about Shaikh Farid, where he describes how baba Farid practised these Islamic virtues throughout his life. Farid's careful attention to prayer, his non-likeness for worldly fame, his patience in calamities and his refusal to retaliate when he was tortured served as key examples.<sup>20</sup> Nizami states that they taught through their actions rather than sermons. Their true greatness lay in their quiet presence, transforming hearts without force.

In this way the works of Nizami stood apart from both the nationalist and Orientalists scholars and avoids both their extremes of oversimplification and romanticism. Rather he presented them as the forbearers of interfaith unity and cultural blending by highlighting their social role.

### **Intellectual Humility and Historical Sensitivity**

Last but not the least it is important to recognize the scholarship of Nizami. He avoids both the preceding approaches and treated *Taşawwuf* as a moral force that was grounded on fundamental principles of Islam. In addition to this, he also acknowledged his spiritual affiliation with the Chishti order while writing about the *Taşawwuf* in medieval India. Despite of his affiliation with *Taşawwuf*, he maintained the critical rigor while reading Persian *malfūzāt*. His wide range of sources particularly the primary Persian sources enhanced the credibility of his scholarship. In this way, he made the primary source accessible for those who are interested in medieval Indian history. His scholarship served as a bridge for the modern scholars who want to explore the history of medieval India and one who wants a comprehensive understanding of medieval Indian history he can't afford to skip his works.

In conclusion, we can say that Nizami reclaimed the position of *Taşawwuf* as an integral part of Islam in India. He challenged all the preconceived notions and misrepresentations which had reduced *Taşawwuf* to a mere mystical phenomenon but through his works he shows that it is a living force which shaped the character and society of medieval India and argues that it is an important element of the Islamic history as well.

### **Khaliq Ahmad Nizami's Interpretation of the Socio-Political Impact of *Taşawwuf* in Medieval India**

Nizami reshaped the academic understanding of *Taşawwuf* in south Asia. He presented it as a living social, moral and cultural force not as a mystical or apolitical phenomenon that was a major trend before him. He not only explored the spiritual teachings of *Şūfi* saints but also presented the practical impact of those teachings on society that include both Muslims and non-Muslims. He also highlighted their role in guiding the character of rulers as they believe that if the character of ruler is sound and balanced then the character of common masses will be sound itself. The principal works of Nizami on *Taşawwuf* which include *Tārīkh-e-Mashā'ikh-e-Chisht*, *The Life and Times of Shaikh Nizam ud din Auliya*, *The Life and Times of Shaikh Farid ud din Ganj-i-Shakar*, *The Life and Times of Shaikh Nasir ud din Charagh*, *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India During the Thirteenth Century*, his research articles both in English and Urdu, his extension lectures, his conference and seminar papers which were later compiled in a book form provide a deep and comprehensive understanding of *Şūfi* state relations which contributed to the social

unity and harmony as they commanded a great respect and reverence from masses. In these writings, Nizami rejects the reduction of Sufism as politically passive and an isolated or detached. Rather, he portrays it as a complex and dynamic force.

### ***Taṣawwuf* as a Living Moral Force**

Nizami believes that *Taṣawwuf* in medieval India was a living moral force that adapted itself to Indian socio-cultural realities. He argues that the saints of Chishti Order laid more stress on the teachings of social service, tolerance, pacifism, equality and sympathy. Their *khānqāhs* served as the spiritual as well as social centres where everyone was welcomed irrespective of any difference.

In his works Nizami often presented *Taṣawwuf* as a state within state. When the rulers fought for political and administrative control, the *Ṣūfīs* sat cool, composed in their huts and spread the teachings of divine love, social service (*khidmat*), and equality. Nizami believed that it stood as a reaction to the self-centered world of power and privilege. It was this role that made *Taṣawwuf* not only a spiritual movement but also a strong form of social criticism.

### **Nizami's Approach to the *Ṣūfī*–Ruler Relationship**

One of the most important elements of his contribution is the study of the relationship between *ṣūfīs* and Sultans. Nizami viewed it through the prism of moral and ethical influence. His exploration displays manifold aspects of this relationship which include withdrawal and occasional confrontation. In *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century*, Nizami argues that the *Ṣūfīs* maintained a deliberate distance from state and sultans because they considered the company of sultans as a biggest hurdle in their spiritual advancement. They confronted the sultans for their wrong behaviour and detachment from Islamic principles. In this way, they were influential over sultans while remaining away from state and politics.

### ***Ṣūfīs* and Muslim Rulers: Influence and Independence**

Nizami asserts that the development of *Ṣūfī* orders coincided with a period of political instability and the consolidation of a new Islamic polity in a predominantly non-Muslim environment during the period of Delhi Sultanate. The *Ṣūfīs* legitimized the new Muslim state in the eyes of the populace by promoting the principles of simplicity,

justice, and brotherhood. They supported the sultans only when they acted with justice (‘*adl*’) and upheld the rights of the oppressed. When these sultans deviated from ethical conduct the *Ṣūfis* distanced themselves.

As Nizami points out that Shaikh Baha ud din Zakariya of Multan maintained cordial relations with Sultan Iltutmish and his successors, but he never became politically active. The wisdom behind his acceptance of royal grants was to sustain the *khānqāh*’s work rather than personal gain. Nizami shows that this pragmatic approach was not as a mean of worldliness for him but as an example of how he used material means for moral ends.

On the contrary the Chishti saints particularly Shaikh Qutb ud din Bakhtiyar Kaki and Nizam ud din Auliya’ used to reject all royal gifts and illustrated an example of complete detachment from temporal power. Through these manifold examples Nizami shows that Sufism did not follow a single political stance. Its response to authority depended upon the ruler’s conduct and the moral needs of the time.

### ***Ṣūfis* and Non-Muslim Rulers: A Spirit of Engagement and Tolerance**

Another important aspect of Nizami’s scholarship is his treatment of the *Ṣūfis*’ relationship with the wider Hindu society. Nizami states that the saints especially the Chishti saints served as a bridge between manifold communities of India by promoting the values of compassion and brotherhood.

Nizami presents various instances of *Ṣūfis*’ interaction with Hindu chiefs and princes. He asserts that the reputation and piety of Shaikh Farid uddin Ganj Shakar attracted both Muslim and Hindu masses. Nizami states that the policy of universal peace of Akbar was directly or indirectly inspired by moral principles of *Taṣawwuf*. He highlighted the devotion and faith of Akbar to the Chishti saint Shaikh Salim Chishti.

### ***Taṣawwuf* as a Challenge to Political Authority**

It has always been a question of hot debate whether *Taṣawwuf* posed any threat to political authority. Nizami’s reaction to this query is subtle. He asserts that *Ṣūfis* never thought of overthrowing rulers and it was also opposite to their spiritual discipline. But their ethical and strong moral stances sometimes pose a symbolic challenge to

tyrannical sultans. Especially the Chishti saints always stood like a rock in front of the sultans whenever they try to violate their spiritual discipline and principles. In this regard Nizami often presented an example of Nizam ud din Auliya' when he was invited to pay homage to Sultan Ghiyathuddin Tughluq, he declined. Nizami maintains such acts earned immense respect to the *Şūfis* among the masses which make them an alternative moral authority.

Furthermore, Nizami's association with the *Malfūzāt* and *Maktūbāt* displays that many saints directly urged rulers for ethical governance especially the letters of Shaikh Hamid uddin Nagauri in which he urged rulers to rule with justice and avoid extravagance. Nizami presented it as an evidence that they were deeply concerned with public morality.

### ***Taşawwuf* and Social Transformation**

Apart from the political impact, Nizami also highlighted the social impact of *Taşawwuf*. He asserts that the *Şūfi* institutions particularly, the *khanqāhs* are at par with state. He argued that *Taşawwuf* presents a moral revolution in the age of social injustice and economic inequality. He states that they emerged as the places where people feel spiritual as well as psychological peace. Nizami believed that it is the main reason of the sustenance of Muslim rule in India. He maintains that it were the *Şūfis* who rectified the image of Islam after the harshness of political conquests. They laid emphasis on social service and love, which attracted the larger section of Hindu society who were facing the social inequalities in their religion. Thus, Nizami believes that *Taşawwuf* was not merely a mystical phenomenon but a living force that shaped the Indian society.

### **The Ethical Dialectic: *Sharī'at* and *Ṭarīqat***

The relationship between *Sharī'at* and *Ṭarīqat* is One of the repeated themes of Nizami. He asserts that *Taşawwuf* is based on holy Qur'ān and Hadith. He states that this feature prevented it to degenerate into the unorthodox mysticism.

Nizami maintains that it served as a moral reminder to the state. They used to critique rulers on moral grounds without violating the social order. By this practice, they kept the politics within an ethical framework.

### **The Extent of *Ṣūfī* Influence: Success and Limitations**

Nizami admits that *Ṣūfīs* were not always influential in transforming and reforming rulers and society. He recognized that many rulers remain untouched by *Ṣūfī* ethics and that even some *Ṣūfīs* fell to the temptations of royal patronage. Although it created a spiritual climate that rectified political behaviour promoted cultural synthesis and interfaith dialogue. Nizami states that the Mughal period marked the culmination of this process. He asserts that even when they didn't agree with *Ṣūfī* teachings they could not ignore their moral authority.

In exploring the Nizami's interpretation of *Taṣawwuf*, it becomes clear that his understanding holds a profound contemporary relevance with Islamic studies. His portrayal of *Taṣawwuf* as a living moral and social force provides an alternative to modern perspectives who approached *Taṣawwuf* as purely pacifist.

So, to culminate, it can be said that Nizami's scholarship presents a deep and comprehensive understanding of the influence of *Taṣawwuf* on medieval Indian society. He presented *Taṣawwuf* not merely as a mystical phenomenon but a living moral and social force that shaped the history of medieval India.

### **Arguments**

In order to acknowledge his scholarship on *Taṣawwuf* it is necessary to consider both the content of his works and his approach. His scholarship avoids both prevalent approaches that treated *Taṣawwuf* as either apolitical or merely a spiritual phenomenon. Rather, he writes as an academic historian grounded in the Islamic tradition and committed to historical facts. This approach earns him a unique place among scholars a position that we believe is overshadowed.

### **A Synthesis of Faith and History**

Nizami placed *Taṣawwuf* within the social and political forces of medieval India and this is one of the most unique features of his scholarship. Through his works he displays that how they acted as social actors by actively engaging in moral uplift and ethical upheaval of their times unlike some secular historians who depicted them as apolitical figures.<sup>21</sup> For instance, in his discussion of Shaikh Nizam ud din Auliya's refusal of visiting the sultan

Ghiyas ud din, Nizami justified this instance on the basis of a Quranic view of justice and *tawakkul* (trust in God)<sup>22</sup> rather than framing it as a detachment or resistance. This interpretive approach makes him distinct from others. His power of critique is subtle.<sup>23</sup>

### **Challenging Orientalist and Secular Readings**

His scholarship also served as a critical response to the Orientalists scholarship. They often presented *Taşawwuf* as a mere mystical phenomenon and declare it a product of Hindu-Muslim blending.<sup>24</sup> In his writings he does not dismiss the cultural exchanges that took place in India but he highlights that it is merely based on holy Qur'ān and hadith.<sup>25</sup>

By doing so, he proves that *Taşawwuf* is totally based on Qur'ān and hadith and also challenges the reduction of *Taşawwuf* to a mere mystical phenomenon. This is remarkably significant in the contemporary era where *Taşawwuf* is often misrepresented.

### **Relevance to the Study of Sufism Today**

Nizami's approach remains relatively relevant to contemporary discourses on *Taşawwuf* which include themes on interfaith dialogue, peacebuilding, and cultural pluralism. Unlike many contemporary writers who presented *Taşawwuf* primarily for its openness while ignoring its Islamic foundations, Nizami presents an approach that integrates both dimensions.<sup>26</sup> This approach makes his scholarship not just academically but also spiritually and culturally significant and rich.

Through his scholarship Nizami presents a model by which one can explore *Taşawwuf* without disregarding its religious boundaries. Such balance of this harmony is rare and this is exactly what makes his scholarship so valuable.

### **Conclusion**

This paper is the exploration of the scholarship of Khaliq Ahmad Nizami by highlighting his contribution to the *Taşawwuf* in the Indian subcontinent. Through this study it becomes clear that he was an exceptional historian as well as an academician who presented *Taşawwuf* as an integral part of Islamic history in India. His scholarship is essential for any serious academic discussion in this field.<sup>27</sup>

A key finding of this study is that Nizami holds a special position in the academic history of *Taşawwuf* in India. He was the first who presented *Taşawwuf* as an academic discipline. Prior to him, *Taşawwuf* was studied as a form of religious literature which deals mainly with the figures by focusing on their miraculous activities. Nizami revolutionized the whole history of *Şūfi* literature by considering it as the main source of medieval Indian history. He believes that the *Şūfi* literature carries back into the serenity of medieval India where we see the facts and reactions of common people in all its fullness.<sup>28</sup> This approach allowed him to present *Şūfi* personalities like Khwaja Mu‘in u‘d din Chishti and Nizam u‘d din Auliya’ as more than saints. He presented them as social actors of historical change, ethical reform, and social unity.<sup>29</sup>

This study is particularly important in present times where *Taşawwuf* often has been misrepresented. The study of *Taşawwuf* in South Asia has always been screened through Orientalist, Marxist, or post-structural perspectives.<sup>30</sup> By revisiting scholarship of Nizami we are reminded that Islamic historiography can remain rooted in tradition while also being reliable and objective.

We can say that in the contemporary era where sectarianism is on the peak, his approach seems highly relevant. He presented *Taşawwuf* as a moral and social force based on key Islamic principles.<sup>31</sup> Among his writings he stressed on the Chishti principles of openness, tolerance, and social service. In an age of heightened social tensions, these principles can help reform policies regarding communal conflict, cultural change, and ethical dilemmas.

However, this study claim to encompass all aspects of Nizami’s scholarship. A significant limitation of the present work is its insufficient engagement with his Urdu writings, which deserve separate and dedicated scholarly attention. Texts like *Hayāt-e-Sheikh Nizam u‘d din Auliya’* and the multi-volume *Tārīkh-e-Mashā’ikh-e-Chisht* offer valuable historical and cultural understandings of *Şūfis* in India.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, this study deals mainly with thematic content without a detailed comparison between Nizami and his contemporary scholars like S.A.A. Rizvi, Aziz Ahmad, or contemporary Western authors like Carl Ernst. Another limitation is the absence of fieldwork to observe how his depiction of Sufism is illustrated in today’s South Asian religious communities.

The findings of this research have multiple applications. The first and foremost is the that in South Asian universities especially in the departments of Islamic studies, his studies provides a way to teach Sufism that is both historically sound and spiritually meaningful. His writings can become the key readings in subjects on Indo-Islamic history, and *Taşawwuf*. In conferences and seminars on interfaith dialogue, his depiction of Sufism as a force for social unity can lead to more genuine conversations on religious pluralism. Lastly, for the contemporary Muslims who are facing questions about spirituality and modernity, his writings offer an approach for remaining connected with spirituality without becoming rigid.

The south Asian universities, majorly the departments of History and Islamic Studies should incorporate Nizami's selected writings as recommended/required readings in papers/courses on *Taşawwuf* and medieval Indian history. This will affirm that *Taşawwuf* is imparted as a historically anchored and a socially applicable tradition.

The teachers of *Taşawwuf* in academic institutions should adopt Nizami's approach by merging historical scrutiny with spiritual elucidation. They should be emboldened to present *Şūfis* as social reformers and transcend the legend based historical accounts. The organizers of seminars and conferences on religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue should follow his elucidation of *Taşawwuf* as a guiding framework. In which the paper presenters should be motivated to highlight the role of *Taşawwuf* in service of humanity, tolerance, peace building and religious pluralism. The universities should preserve and make accessible the Persian primary sources of *Taşawwuf* used by Nizami, so that the future academicians can explore *Taşawwuf* using credible and authentic sources.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

This study has many suggestions for future research. First, there is an urgent need to upload all the Nizami's writings on internet and making them accessible to a broader audience. Because his writings are not easily available in the market and if anyone have to study him, he needs to visit the AMU library. Second, there is a need of a comparative analysis of his writings and those of Western scholars of Sufism who have misrepresented Sufism. Third, international seminars and conferences on pluralism and peacebuilding could use Nizami's framework to address modern

issues like Sufism's role in peacebuilding, gender, and urban spirituality.<sup>33</sup> Finally, a systematic biography examining Nizami's background, influences, and intellectual engagements particularly within the Aligarh Muslim University should be prepared although there is a one but that is more of a list of his books and seminars. To conclude, going back to Nizami's scholarship is not just an academic attempt. It assists as a way to restore an important approach that can guide scholars in understanding *Tasawwuf* as an Islamic path of wisdom, love, and responsibility.

### Notes and References

<sup>1</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 12–15.

<sup>2</sup> Mohd Yaseen Mazhar Siddiqui, "Ustaad-i-Girami Nizami," *Mahana Tehzeeb ul Ikhlāq*, March 3, 2013, 213.

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Iqbal Mujaddidi also holds an eminent place in the historiography of *Tasawwuf* in South Asia. Muhammad Iqbal Mujaddidi's contribution is marked not only by producing a profound literature on *Tasawwuf* but he also donated his personal library to university of Punjab, Lahore. In this way he played a great role in preserving the rare manuscripts for future scholarship.

<sup>4</sup> Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *On History and Historians of Medieval India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1983), 92–94.

<sup>5</sup> Bruce B. Lawrence, *Notes from a Distant Flute: Islamic Mysticism in South Asia* (Delhi: Yoda Press, 2010), 9–12.

<sup>6</sup> Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, xi–xiii.

<sup>7</sup> Aziz Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 96–101.

<sup>8</sup> S. A. A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1978), xiii–xvi.

<sup>9</sup> Nizami, *On History and Historians of Medieval India*, 88–92.

<sup>10</sup> Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *State and Culture in Medieval India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1985), 61–64.

<sup>11</sup> Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century* (Aligarh: Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University, 1961), 45–47.

<sup>12</sup> Nizami, *State and Culture in Medieval India*, 77–80.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 83–85.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 103–105.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 106–110.

<sup>16</sup> Nizami, *On History and Historians of Medieval India*, 90–92.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 95–98.

<sup>18</sup> Nizami, *State and Culture in Medieval India*, 120–123.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 135–138.

<sup>20</sup> Nizami, *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics*, 117–121.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 202–209.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 145–146.

<sup>23</sup> Nizami, *On History and Historians of Medieval India*, 88–93.

<sup>24</sup> Carl W. Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism* (Boston: Shambhala, 1997), 12–16.

<sup>25</sup> Nizami, *State and Culture in Medieval India*, 41–47.

<sup>26</sup> Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Tarikh-e-Mashaikh-e-Chisht*, vol. 1 (Delhi: Idara-e-Adabiyat-e-Delli, 1955), 19–22.

<sup>27</sup> Nizami, *On History and Historians of Medieval India*, 3–5.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 22–24.

<sup>29</sup> Nizami, *Tarikh-e-Mashaikh-e-Chisht*, vol. 1, 65–69.

<sup>30</sup> Carl, W, Ernst, *Sufism: An Introduction to the Mystical Tradition of Islam* (Boston: Shambhala, 2011), 12–16.

<sup>31</sup> Nizami, *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century*, 90–93.

<sup>32</sup> Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Hayat-e-Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya* (Urdu) (Delhi: Idara-e-Adabiyat-e-Delli, 1957), 33–36.

<sup>33</sup> Bruce B. Lawrence, *Notes from a Distant Flute: Islamic Mysticism in South Asia* (Delhi: Yoda Press, 2010), 23–26.