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## **LETTERS OF SHEIKH SHARAFUDDINYAHYAMANERI: A STUDY OF SOME SPIRITUAL ASPECTS IN RELEVANCE TO THE MODERN-PERIOD**

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### *Abstract*

*Tasawwuf* refers to the inner cleansing of the body to shape the outer deeds or practical dimension of human being. Spirituality plays a significant role in constructing a positive nature towards the establishment of both worldly and religious ties. Various spiritual writings came into existence throughout the centuries to provide useful lessons on the basis of the primary sources of Islam (Qur'ān and Sunnah) regarding the connection between man and God. One of such contributors in this category was Sheikh Sharafuddin Ahmad YahyaManeri, also famously known as Makhdum al-Mulk or Makhdum-i-Jahan (1263-1381 A.D.), a prominent Indian Sufi Saint of the medieval period, whose letters (*Maktubāt-i-Sadi* and *Maktubāt Do Sadi*) are still held in high regards even today as they are his best collection on spiritual teachings and guidance. They truly reflect his profound knowledge and spiritual enlightenment comprising of outstanding critical expression, exposition of delicate issues and correct comprehension of the true spirit of the religion, thus holding a place of distinction in the Islamic Literature. This paper will highlight some of his spiritual doctrines including righteousness, mental stability, and the eradication of human greed and expiation of sins. It will also depict how the relevant practical aspects of spirituality can prove to be a helping hand in moulding the behaviour and conduct of individuals in a war-ridden world.

**Keywords:** *Tasawwuf, Practical Dimension, Righteousness, Mental Stability, Expiation of Sins.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

India is one among such countries which has produced a number of spiritual Saints and intellectuals and whose names are carved in the annals of the great spiritual contributions in the history of Islam. Their spiritual teachings are not only famous for namesake, but also their practical dimensions are of

massive importance even today as we are living in a world of spiritual turmoil. These steps towards human revivification are mandatory to be taken in order to find the way of exit from the slumber of darkness and move towards the lane of enlightenment. Sheikh Sharafuddin Ahmad YahyaManeri (1263-1381 A.D) can be described as one of the finest

spiritual luminaries whose certain spiritual notions can still be proved to provide a helping hand in curing the detrimental psychological disability, thus engaging man in the true moulding of behavioural reconstruction to shape both his inward and outward executions, especially in this very world of moral declination.

Maulana Syed AbulHasan Ali Nadwi has dedicated the last chapter of his masterpiece *Saviours of Islamic Spirit vol.II (TareekhDawat-o-Azeemat vol.II)* to Sheikh Sharafuddin Ahmad YahyaManeri. Syed AbulHasan Ali Nadwi discussed: The forceful style of Sheikh Sharafuddin Ahmad YahyaManeri's writings, combination of loveliness and sophistication gives a noticeable rank to his letters in the field of the Islamic literature. In these letters, he has illustrated the fruits or influences of higher significance symbolizing the inward intellect of invisible divine content of things. Sheikh Sharafuddin Ahmad YahyaManeri used by the means a solid and effective inspiration and motivated the peoples with a yearning to achieve the position or place of glorious spiritual truthfulness. Due to his writings which are helpful, politeness of expression may be whole in Persian literature something like this.

Besides, to those privileged peoples to whom these spiritual letters were dedicated, also many others have read them with interest, even after the centuries of Sheikh Sharafuddin Ahmad YahyaManeri's era. In the Khanqahs, these spiritual letters have been thoughtfully examined and discussed and they still grasp the consideration of those who think over them in search of the new dimensions of instinctive insight and lightening of heart. It would be difficult to overstate the strength and dynamism of these letters which, nevertheless the interval of many centuries which were written by Sheikh Sharafuddin Ahmad

YahyaManeri, still preserve their freshness and emotional call.

The letters of Makhdum Sharafuddin Yahya Maneri reflect this deep knowledge and spiritual enlightenment. In the depth of his vision, wonderful critical arguments, elucidation on delicate issues, sharp observation, suitable understanding of the spirit of religion, elaboration on the revealed reality and light of divine knowledge, comprising of the total concentration of Allah. The letters of Sheikh Sharafuddin Ahmad YahyaManeri holds a special as well as a unique position in the Islamic literature. These letters depict the inspirational and spiritual magnificence thus planting the living seed of faith in Allah, instinctively grasped thoughts, the procedures of self-cleansing, and the methods of motivating and ameliorating the spiritual life

#### Letters

The most renowned among the collection of Sheikh YahyaManeri's letters is the one published under the title of *Maktubat Sheikh Sharafuddin Ahmad YahyaManeri*, which is also known as *Maklubat-E-Sadi* or *SehSadi Maklubat*. This collection comprises of one hundred letters addressed to Qazi Shamsuddin compiled by the chief disciple of Makhdum YahyaManeri, Sheikh Zain Badr Arabi. In its introduction Sheikh Zain Badr Arabi writes: Sheikh Shamsuddin of Chausa (a place where Sheikh Shamsuddin Ahmad Maneri lived), a disciple of the Sheikh, continuously appealed to Sheikh Sharafuddin Ahmad YahyaManeri in his letters that since he had to stay at a place far away from him and was forbidden from attending his discourses, something to guide him on his spiritual journey might be committed into written form.

Sheikh Shamsuddin pleaded Makhdum Yahya Maneri so sincerely that his appeal eventually met the approval of

the Sheikh who started writing about the various stages and states underwent by the seekers of truth in their quest of perfection of divine knowledge. Only then that numerous thoughtful yet enigmatic details relating to spiritual repentance and enlightenment, Unity of Allah and knowledge of Divine Attributes, Essential and enthusiasm of love, stages of attraction and endeavor, separation and loneliness, bliss and blemish, preceptor-ship and discipleship along with the accounts of earlier followers of the path of purity were penned. These letters were sent on different occasions during the year 747 A.H. (1369 A.D.) from Bihar to the town of Chausa. Numerous followers and inmates of the convent kept copies of these letters and compiled them for the spiritual purification searchers.

#### Subject Matters

Anybody who goes through these letters would not fail to identify that the marvelous details and essence of truths not visible to the external eye, illustrated by MakhdumSharafuddin Ahmad YahyaManeri, are neither the efforts of his sharp intelligence nor could these be had by profound learning or cultivation of knowledge, but could only be lived by a heart in its loftiest stage of spiritual acclamation. What Makhdum says about the sublime majesty and excellence of Divine Being, His Might and Omnipotence? His Beauty and Perfection, the feelings of awe, hope and ardent love taking root in the heart of true believers and Gnostics, the need for alternate states of effulgence and contrition experienced by the travellers of the spiritual path and repentance on one's sin which opens the floodgates of Divine compassion point out that the writer, soaring in higher domains of spirituality, is familiar with the inner content of profound realities.

The high position occupied by man among the beings, his greedy desires, his wish to acquire the impossible, his certitude and firmness of

mind, the status and beauty of his heart and the unsounded essence and nature of love described in a wonderful and dynamic language by MakhdumYahyaManeri deserves to be praised by all. Likewise, the immoral kinds of natural tendencies of the human mind, his own self-deceptions and the whispers of Satan, transgressions that often take the form of vices hindering the path of the devotees explained by Makhdum speak of his deep observation and knowledge of practical morals.

Sheikh Sharafuddin Ahmad YahyaManeri appreciated and at the same time warned spiritual seekers from the dangers coming from the ways of the Sufi Saints. Appreciation of that is they believe in the Shari'ah and the treatment of the highest position of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). It is also important to know and understand the religious thought and different ways of Sufi Saints of the time when these letters were written down by Sheikh SharafuddinYahyaManeri. Here, it is an attempt to evaluate some letters of MakhdumSharafuddinYahyaManeri which deal with some of the issues which have to quite a large extent, similarity with the modern problems.

Sheikh Sharafuddin Ahmad YahyaManeri has addressed most of his letters to one of his closest disciples Sheikh Shamsuddin for the spiritual guidance whose content can still be considered to be of great significance and relevance in solving a number of spiritual malaise. The spiritual teachings in his letters indicate its formulation to be on the basis of the primary sources of Islam (Qur'ān and Sunnah). This shows us that any individual who wishes to tread or embark on the spiritual path can opt to study the letters of Sheikh Sharafuddin Yahya Maneri as they do not consist of any such element which will make a man fall into the trap of contrariness. The following are some of his spiritual aspects discussed in his letters which can

still be held in high esteem and offer fruitful spiritual and practical remedies of various modern-day detrimental issues.

### 1. Righteousness in Faith

According to Sheikh Sharafuddin Ahmad YahyaManeri, righteousness in faith refers to longing for nothing except Allah. If we intent or reflect about anything not in consonant with Qur'ānic injunctions this becomes a proof of weaker faith. Inner purification leads to the erasure of filthy desires thus projecting an impactful effervescence on the outer personality. This includes behavioural rectification, correction of deeds and improvement of manners. Faith no doubt plays an important role in the redressing of the inner dimension of man which helps to control the outer practices in the most convenient way. Sheikh Sharafuddin Ahmad YahyaManeri further discussed about the genuineness of faith, he divided peoples into two categories or groups. The first group is those who do anything in the name of Allah but for the sake of their own interest. The second one is those who perform good deeds without even thinking of the reward that Allah has promised them. Their main interest is to achieve the love of Allah through the fulfilment of the command of Allah. These peoples are also known as *Muttaqi (God-fearing)*.

### 2. Mental Attitude

Psychological stability is the foundation for developing a good thinking process. A good mental attitude is of optimum importance so as to shape the behaviour of man. One of the qualities pointed out by SharafuddinYahyaManeri for a positive conduct is generosity. Through generosity, we can improve our mental attitude and develop an affirmative approach toward the people as well as Allah. This helps to design a harmonious atmosphere and strengthens our social as well as personal relationships. Where generosity prevails trust is also maintained. On this basis people develop

good opinions towards each other thus upholding positivity and eschew wickedness, Allah says in the Qur'ān. Regarding good opinion, Sheikh SharafuddinYahyaManeri says that it is a must for every individual and more than that respect and commitment to Allah is incumbent as He is our Lord, and that the Creator is always above the creatures. In a nutshell, the following points can be derived-

- i. Those who opine positively about Allah will have their inner-self enlightened by Him.
- ii. Good opinion leads to incipient love.
- iii. Love creates social unity.

### 3. The eradication of human greed

The very next letter of Sheikh Sharafuddin Ahmad YahyaManeri's spiritual writings in which he discussed about the eradication of human greed, which is an important and compulsory subject. Without the eradication of the human greed, our intentions and everything that we do will be null and void. So, Sheikh Sharafuddin Ahmad YahyaManeri shared his ideas with his closest disciple QaziSheikh Shamsuddin and strictly warned him to remove greed from your route because Allah does not like greedy people. Greed very often leads to arrogance, "*Assuredly, Allah knows what they conceal and what they declare. Indeed, He does not like the arrogant*", (Qur'ān S16: V23). Sheikh Sharafuddin Ahmad YahyaManeri further expresses his opinion that Allah gives us anything anytime without any reason and no limit And another thing is that today whatever we take from Allah is free and after this world whatever we will receive also will be free from Allah. So it clear that our intentions should be free from greed and show-off, it must be only for the sake of Allah.

### 4. Expiation of Sins

In this letter, Sheikh Sharafuddin Ahmad YahyaManeri stated that the compensation from the wickedness is

compulsory for the formulation of a good mental attitude and behaviour towards the society as well as the Allah. This shows us Sheikh YahyaManeri divided peoples into three categories are as follows-

- i. They are in both presence and truth, which relates only to the world, which means there is no intention and purpose for the sake of Allah. They do everything for the sake of the world only.
- ii. This type of people also in both look and reality is directed toward the Allah, but in the inner side and the purpose is for the sake of the world.
- iii. In this category, Sheikh SharafuddinAhmad YahyaManeri talking about those people whose appearances are concerned is directly toward the world, but in purpose and intention for the sake of Allah only.

### Conclusion

*Tasawwuf* is one of the most important components in Islam, which helps to clarify both the inward and outward aspects of man. Sheikh Sharafuddin Ahmad Yahya Maneri has highlighted some very important points which play a very significant role in the development of a good personality. The above-discussed ideas help one to realize that vices only cause harm to one's life and that man becomes victims of various other social issues. Therefore, to be on the safer side, one needs to develop a practical dimension of the points discussed by Sheikh Sharafuddin Maneri, which can prove to be fruitful as well as productive a better lifestyle and most importantly the objective must be free from ostentatious factors. It must be executed to seek the pleasure and satisfaction of Allah. With a world full of innumerable and catastrophic vices, a return to the true spirit of Islam is the only solution for the betterment of the whole community.

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