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TRAVELLING THROUGH TIME

Essays in honour of Kaj Öhrnberg

Edited by

Sylvia Akar, Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila
& Inka Nokso-Koivisto

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MODERN CONVEYANCES, TRADITIONAL DESTINATIONS: KHVĀJA ḤASAN NIẒĀMĪ'S 1911 TOUR OF THE MIDDLE EAST

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INTRODUCTION

The latter half of the nineteenth century saw a dramatic expansion of global travel through steam-powered ships and trains. Although this infrastructure was largely developed in order to manage global commerce and administer European colonies, it was utilized by colonized peoples as well. Together with the simultaneous onset of printing, it contributed to the formulation and promulgation of varying responses to the social and cultural upheavals instigated by colonial rule. This paper discusses one travel narrative that reflects an amalgamation of these new technologies and an engagement with Sufi tradition. The following discussion questions the long-held perception that Sufis were unequivocal losers in the age of colonialism and modernity. On the contrary, many "entrepreneurial Sufis" – to use Nile Green's term[1] – were highly successful in their projects, and this helped maintain the relevance of Sufism in the face of challenges posed by secular modernism and Islamic reform.

In 1911, a Sufi sheikh and citizen of British India, Khvāja Ḥasan Niẓāmī, travelled to the Middle East for a period of four months. During this journey, his encounters with varying responses to modernity crystallized into a vision of the future of Islam and the role of Sufism therein. Niẓāmī used the printing press to make this vision public by publishing his travel notes in the Urdu newspapers *Ṣūfī, Niẓām al-Mashā'ikh* and *Zamīndār*. Later he reworked the newspaper articles into a literary travelogue that was published in 1913 as *Roznāma-yi Safar: Ḥijāz o Miṣr o Shām* ('Diary of the travel to Hijaz, Egypt, and Syria').[2] The book was recently reissued (with a title acknowledging the modern political map) as

1 See, e.g. Green 2012: 188.
2 Niẓāmī 1913.

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Safarnāma: Ḥijāz, Miṣr, Shām, Filasṭīn o Lubnān ('Travelogue: Hijaz, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and Lebanon').[3]

The author was born in 1878 into a family of hereditary custodians of the shrine of Khvāja Niẓām al-Dīn in Delhi. Orphaned at an early age, he spent his youth in penury. Yet he still became a towering figure in twentieth-century Muslim India: a versatile author, an activist campaigning against the efforts of Ārya Samāj to re-convert Muslims to Hinduism, an outspoken supporter of the most controversial Sufi practices condemned by Muslim reformists,[4] as well as a spiritual guide to myriads of disciples. His training took place in the traditional environment of his home and the Sufi hospice (*khānqāh*) of Pīr Mihr 'Alī Shāh in Golra, as well as in the reformist madrasa of Deoband. In addition to classical Sufism and traditionalist religious learning, progressive modernism was a key element of his thought. This endeared him to Indian Muslims, who were in favour of modern education but at the same time unwilling to reject Sufism.[5]

Niẓāmī was a prolific author. In 1941, fourteen years before passing away in 1955, he claimed to have written about two hundred books in addition to newspaper articles and other short pieces.[6] His writings have received mixed response from literary critics, ranging from appreciation of his flowing, accessible prose to accusations of publishing books written by his associates and disciples as his own.[7] Whatever the critics' opinions on the literary merit of his writing, however, books were Niẓāmī's primary means of engaging in discussions on various topics that pertained to contemporary Indian Muslims. These topics include modern applications of sharia,[8] Sufi practice,[9] and current political issues.[10] He also translated the Qur'ān into Urdu and Hindi.[11] His best-known works include a famous collection of twelve books describing the events of the 1857 uprising and *Niẓāmī Bansurī*, a peculiar text recording the encounters of a Hindu prince with the Sufi sheikh Khvāja Niẓām al-Dīn in fourteenth-century India.[12] He also claims

3 Niẓāmī 2009b.

4 These include listening to music (*samā'*), attending shrines, celebrating the saints' death anniversaries ('*urs*), and prostrating before a Sufi master.

5 For more information on Niẓāmī, see Hermansen 2001 and Ernst & Lawrence 2002: 113–118. For his "official" biography, see Vāḥidī 1957, and for a discussion of his literary activities, see Deobandi 2007.

6 Niẓāmī 2009a: 9.

7 See Hermansen 2001: 328–329; Ernst & Lawrence 2002: 115–116.

8 On taxation, see Niẓāmī 1917.

9 See Niẓāmī 2006 for a lengthy discussion on *Ḥizb al-Baḥr*, the celebrated prayer composed by Abū al-Ḥasan Shādhilī (d. 1258).

10 He usually debated these in the pages of the Urdu newspapers *Ṣūfī*, *Munādī*, and *Zamīndār*.

11 See Niẓāmī 2007a and 2007b, respectively.

12 Niẓāmī 2008; Niẓāmī 2009a.

to have introduced the diary as a genre of Indian literature, and he used one to document the events of his life in India,[13] as well as his journeys to Afghanistan and the Middle East.[14]

The itinerary described in Niẓāmī's Middle Eastern travelogue is fairly typical of the time.[15] Mecca and Medina had always occupied a central place in Islam, with pilgrims wending their way there since the seventh century. After fulfilling the obligation of the *ḥajj*, pilgrims would often prolong their stay in the Middle East and take the opportunity to trade in various commodities, as well as learn from and interact with scholars. Prior to the nineteenth century, however, westward travel from India had been fraught with difficulties. The sea route favoured by the aristocracy with sufficient financial means was rendered hazardous by storms and onslaughts of pirates. The land route passing through territory ruled by the Shia since 1501 was not much better. Moreover, it was infested with bandits.[16] The opening of steamship lines and railway networks, however, led to an increase in the number of Indians travelling to the Middle East. No more did one need to be affluent enough to travel comfortably by sea or daring enough to take the arduous land route.[17]

Compared to those associated with pre-modern travel, the inconveniences Niẓāmī encountered during his travels in 1911 were minor: occasionally rough seas, quarantines in some ports, dishonest guides and interpreters, minor delays in travel, and pickpockets. On the whole, Niẓāmī's travel was quite comfortable.[18] He was able to board the ship from Bombay to Suez without any prior reservations or an appropriate passport; after only eights days' wait, such practicalities

13 Niẓāmī 2012.

14 Niẓāmī 1933; Niẓāmī 2009b. When discussing printed texts in early modern and modern India, one should bear in mind the importance of hearers as well as readers. Namely, the texts were often read aloud to audiences with limited literacy.

15 See an account of the journey undertaken by a Hyderabadi Sufi sheikh, 'Abd al-Qadīr Ṣiddīqī Ḥasrat (d. 1962) in 1927 in Ṣiddīqī 2004: 105–126.

16 For a discussion on different types of travel to and from pre-modern India, see Alam & Subramaniam 2008.

17 An increase in the number of travellers is reflected in the copious travel accounts written in Urdu during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Niẓāmī (2009: 19, 47, 174) frequently contrasts his experiences with Shiblī Nu'mānī's travelogue (Nu'mānī 1901). For a further discussion on Indian accounts of the *ḥajj*, see Metcalf 2006: 295–339; for a recent English translation of one such account, see Alawi 2009.

18 The circumstances on the ships transporting poorer pilgrims from Bombay to Medina were different. A maximum number of passengers were crammed into barely seaworthy vessels bought second-hand from European-owned companies. It is telling that *ḥajj* traffic in the late 18th and early 19th centuries was one of the principal vectors of global cholera epidemics. See Green 2011: 109–114.

as tickets and travel documents were taken care of by the Cook Company.[19] Company agents also helped with quarantine formalities, delivered the passengers' post, and sent telegrams on their behalf.[20] The fact that Niẓāmī was able to leisurely visit Cairo, Jerusalem, Beirut, Damascus, and Medina in a period of four months, stretching from 21 May to 20 September, testifies to the efficiency of the travel networks. His expeditious journey contrasts dramatically with the peripatetic wanderings of pre-modern Sufis that took several years.

In addition to people, these routes carried information in the form of printed books, newspapers, letters, and telegrams. The post office was always among the first places visited by Niẓāmī when he came to a new city. Functioning postal services also facilitated publishing of his travel accounts in Indian papers while he himself was still on the road. An incident that took place in Damascus is revealing of Niẓāmī's reliance on the post: letters addressed to him had been given by mistake to an Iranian trader who was his namesake. When Niẓāmī went to finally retrieve them, sitting through tea and making obligatory small-talk with his host, he could barely contain his impatience to open the letters.[21]

Below I will discuss Niẓāmī's travel in further detail, focusing on the formation of his ideas concerning the present state and possible future of Islam. I begin by analysing the literary style of the *Safarnāma* and its intended readership. I then turn to tracing his route from Delhi to the Middle East and back. The culmination of the journey was his stay in Medina, and the prayer (*duʿā*) he read there by the Prophets tomb is among the most impressive passages of the entire work. Furthermore, the *duʿā* contains many of the author's ideas that developed during the journey and for this reason it merits in-depth analysis when discussing the author's sojourn in that city.

LITERARY STYLE AND READERSHIP

Niẓāmī's *Safarnāma* is written as a diary, as the original title *Roznāma-yi Safar* ('Travel journal') suggests. The narrative from Delhi to Damascus consists of entries describing events of one or two days, occasionally dwelling on them in minute detail. The sojourn in Medina and the return journey were recorded only when back in India, as the author was too occupied to polish his writing during the journey itself. This gives the final chapters of the *Safarnāma* a pronouncedly literary flavour.

19 Thomas Cook & Son. Niẓāmī 2009a: 19–21.
20 Niẓāmī 2009b: 46, 168, 237.
21 Niẓāmī 2009a: 189–190.

Diary entries record the prices for tickets and accommodations, and the *Safarnāma* ends with words of general advice, such as to stay alert when dealing with guides and interpreters, to contact the British consul in case of any trouble and to favour Christian-owned hotels since they are clean and, contrary to common belief, pose no difficulties for devout Muslims seeking to engage in their devotions.[22] Despite the inclusion of such practical information, however, the *Safarnāma* is not a guidebook but a travelogue aspiring to literary value.[23] According to the author, in terms of genre it is a work of spiritual literature, and indeed religious reflection occupies a central place in the text.[24]

The *Safarnāma* is among the earlier works of Niẓāmī, but his distinctive literary style has already evolved. He eschews florid parlance and refrains from using complicated Arabic and Persian vocabulary in favour of lucid and accessible Urdu expressions. His narration is straightforward, almost colloquial, and the rhythm of his writing is akin to spoken language. Contrary to prose works by other Urdu authors, poetic interspersions are almost completely absent from Niẓāmī's works.[25]

When writing, Niẓāmī paid careful attention to the respective audiences of his various works. Books detailing the subtleties of Sufi practice were directed to his disciples, who could refer to them in the absence of direct contact with their master, whereas pamphlets discussing the correct performance of Muslim rituals were written for the enlightenment of "new Muslims" (*nau musalmān*) targeted by Ārya Samāj. The *Safarnāma*, on the other hand, is meant for general Urdu readership. Although the text is generally informative and at times even reflective, the narrative is captivating and entertaining – a feature that no doubt contributed to sales of the book.[26] Occasionally the *Safarnāma* reads like an adventure novel. For example, one anecdote relates how an old Moroccan called Bannānī attached himself to Niẓāmī's company at a common friend's house in Cairo. He flattered the author, embarrassed him by effusively kissing the hem of his robe and eventually volunteered to introduce him to the Sufi sheikhs of Cairo. Once the author

22 Niẓāmī 2009b: 240–242.

23 For practical information, Niẓāmī refers his readers to the travel narratives of Khvāja Ghulām Saqalain Vakīl, Munshī Maḥbūb ʿĀlam (ʿĀlam 1893), and Maulavī ʿĀshiq Ilāhī.

24 Niẓāmī 2009b: 240.

25 It is interesting to note that, notwithstanding his varied experiments with prose and contrary to common practice among those professing literary ambitions, Niẓāmī did not try his hand at poetry.

26 An added attraction of the book is the inclusion of picture plates. Most are contemporary commercial postcards, but a few are original photographs, such as the ones commissioned by the governor and Shaikh al-Ḥaram in Jerusalem. For diary entries describing the photographic sessions, see Niẓāmī 2009a: 134, 177.

ran into an uncomfortable situation when Bannānī offered to walk him to his lodgings in the dead of night via a shortcut:

> It was past eleven and I wanted to reach the hotel as soon as possible. However, Bannānī pushed his way into God knows what dark lanes where there was no sign of people. Seeing this intimidating route, I refused to move and wanted to go back. But Bannānī convinced me that the bazaar was just nearby. A moment later he gave a knock at the door of a handsome building. The door opened and a fat, ugly Arab came forward. Bannānī said: "Come, this is the house of a great sheikh; come and meet him." Using the lateness of the hour as an excuse, I refused. Bannānī cut me short with obstinate flattery and I entered, helpless. An electric light illuminated the nicely decorated room, but there was no one to be seen. We sat down on chairs and just then the door was closed behind us. Thus cut off from the street, I was terrified for what might happen but I hid my fear from Bannānī. He inquired from the Arab about the sheikh's whereabouts. Before replying, the Arab inspected me, frowning. Then he said nonchalantly: "He has gone to Alexandria." Bannānī turned to me: "Nearby here lives a man from Marrakesh who can turn a *ta'rifa* [an Egyptian coin worth five paise] into a gold coin by rubbing it between his fingers." I said: "Oh Bannānī, I'm familiar with this skill myself, I don't need to meet anyone. I'm going to my hotel, so stop this useless talk." I got up and so did Bannānī, who started whispering with the Arab. Seeing this, I began walking, opened the door and went outside. After ten or fifteen steps, I heard coins clinking. Turning around, I saw Bannānī giving something to the Arab. Then he came to me and said: "This man is a guest of the sheikh and very dear to him. This is why some service was rendered to him." I gave no response and started walking briskly. After a thousand or so steps, the lights of the bazaar appeared: I had ended up on the street of the prostitutes. Worried to death, I finally managed to flee from that hell and reached the main bazaar. I saw it was already past twelve. In Egypt, this is the time when degenerate fellows go around searching for amusement.[27]

After the incident, Bannānī came several times to the author's hotel, disappearing for good only when threatened with the intervention of the police. Incidents like this contributed to Niẓāmī's distrust of guides and perhaps to his generally grim view of Egypt as well.

Occasionally the anecdotes acquire a humorous tone, such as in the description of a school function in Jerusalem:

> I asked from a small kid, who looked very cute in his natty pantaloons and coat: "What is your name?" He answered: "'Alī Shaukat." I asked: "Who rules the world?" He replied without a second thought: "The Ottomans."

27 Niẓāmī 2009a: 87–89.

> The teacher intervened saying: "Have you not learned in geography class that different people rule in different countries?" The kid blushed and firmly shook his head. He said: "Yes, sir, I know. There are kings among other people. But everywhere it is the Turks who rule, because our crescent gives light to everyone and stays always in the sky, whereas I have never seen the cross rising on the sky." The kid's daring answer gave us all a good laugh.[28]

The engaging narration is interrupted whenever the author visits an important holy site and reads a *duʿā*. These *duʿās* are eloquent passages that verge on verbosity. Far from being spontaneous outbursts, they are carefully composed so as to highlight the solemn atmosphere prevailing in the shrines, and they offer the author an opportunity to elaborate on his ideas in an expressly religious context. The topic of each *duʿā* is related to the shrine in which it is read. Thus, for example, in the *miḥrab* of Zakariyā situated in the al-Aqṣā mosque, Niẓāmī prays for a spiritual son who would continue his work just as Yaḥyā carried on his father's efforts. By Ibn ʿArabī's tomb in Damascus, he seeks to understand and experience the oneness of existence. The longest and most interesting *duʿā* is read by the Prophet's tomb in Medina. I shall return to this passage below.

FROM DELHI TO CAIRO

Niẓāmī had made plans to travel to the Middle East even before the journey described in the *Safarnāma*. However, since he was compelled to return to Delhi after reaching Bombay, they never materialized. He was more optimistic in 1911, after receiving what he considered an auspicious sign when attending a wedding in Meerut in early May. He was lost in thought, contemplating travelling, when a young scholar began reciting a Qur'ānic passage describing the sailing of ships so that God might reveal his signs.[29] The incident encouraged Niẓāmī to make arrangements for a new trip.[30]

The travel account begins on 21 May 1911 with the author's arrival in Ajmer, a natural first stop on his journey. Not only was it situated by the railway line connecting Delhi and Bombay, but it also housed the shrine of Khvāja Muʿīn al-Dīn, the first Indian master of the Chishti brotherhood to which also Niẓāmī belonged. After obtaining blessings from the head of the shrine, the author boarded a train for Bombay.[31] By the early twentieth century, Bombay had grown into one of the most important ports and centres of commerce in the

28 Niẓāmī 2009b: 138.
29 Verses from the sura of Luqman [31:31–32].
30 Niẓāmī 2009b: 9–10.
31 Niẓāmī 2009b: 13, 16.

British Empire. There the author had to wait eight days for the next Egypt-bound steamer to depart. He languished in the humid weather and was vexed by the locals who, in his view, were always after their own vested interests.[32] He was relieved when on 1 June he was able to finally board the ship *Africa* of the Austrian Company.[33] On board, his mood oscillated between fear of storms and an intense desire to reach Medina. Eventually adapting to the maritime life, however, he dwelled on amused observations of his fellow first-class travellers, like a decadent Parsi who spent most of his time in bed making good use of the button that summoned the steward and Europeans who had a habit of relaxing in their nightgowns on the deck and raised their brows when the author went for a stroll in his habitual Indian dress.[34]

On its way to Suez, the *Africa* halted in Aden, where Niẓāmī established the routine he would follow in all his destinations. Having a keen interest in developing his homeland, he wanted to observe local educational institutions. In Aden, he visited Arabic and English medium schools. Perhaps surprisingly, there was also an Urdu medium school that was attended by the Indian population, Arabs and members of the significant Somalian community. Equally important were his Sufi activities: he initiated disciples among the Indian community and performed pilgrimage (*ziyārat*) to the tombs of local saintly personages. Even during the brief halt, he managed to visit nine shrines.[35]

The final port of the sea voyage was Suez, where Niẓāmī stayed long enough to visit ten shrines before boarding a train. Yet even before that a negative notion of the Egyptians had started to form. He agreed with the view of Ḥāfiẓ ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, the Indian author of a guidebook to the Middle East, that they were the enemies of travellers, cheating and routinely siding with their compatriots whenever a dispute would arise. The situation was made all the worse since the author could not manage without an interpreter, as the local dialect of Arabic was beyond his comprehension. Once in Cairo, seeing the congested lanes where the filthy lodgings favoured by Muslim travellers were located, he fled to Azbakiya and settled in an English-owned hotel.[36]

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32 This despite the significance of Bombay for religious developments around the West Indian Ocean in during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. For a detailed discussion on the topic, see Green 2011.

33 Apparently a ship of the Austrian Lloyd Company operating the Bombay–Port Said–Trieste route.

34 Niẓāmī 2009b: 18–19, 22, 25, 29.

35 Niẓāmī 2009b: 35–36, 38.

36 Niẓāmī 2009b: 47–50.

Niẓāmī's sentiments towards Egypt and Egyptians remained ambiguous throughout his three-week stay. When he visited the modern districts of Cairo built by Khedive Ismael (r. 1863–1879), he did not hide his admiration for the impressive buildings and wide boulevards. Yet he also felt disappointed that along with the modernization of the infrastructure, the people had become like Europeans and forgotten their religion.[37] In al-Azhar, he had a sense of impending upheaval. The number of old teachers was fast dwindling and students were on the lookout for new methods of learning. They were avid readers of newspapers and well-informed about the world around them. The author did not perceive this as a threat, but as an opportunity to ultimately turn al-Azhar into an educational institute on par with the European universities.[38]

The author also visited places frequented by European tourists. While the pyramids and the sphinx failed to impress him, the mummy of Minfitāḥ[39] showcased in the Egyptian museum caught his imagination and inspired one of the longest continuous passages of the travelogue. The Sufi in Niẓāmī came to the fore when he reflected upon the Egyptologists' discoveries and the Qur'ānic story of Moses and the Pharaoh who, in his view, was the embalmed ruler lying before him. He was captivated by the anguished expression on the mummy's face, which inspired in him disquietude and fear of God.[40]

In addition to observations about the Egyptians' encounter with modernity and descriptions of sights both historical and religious, Niẓāmī parades in front of his readers a cavalcade of individuals met on his travels. For although the *Safarnāma* is essentially a personal pilgrimage account, the journey had an official side to it as well. In 1908, Niẓāmī had founded an association called Ḥalqa-yi Niẓām al-Mashā'ikh, which aimed to unite Sufi sheikhs in order to protect their rights in British India and reform the customs at the Sufi shrines and hospices.[41] The author's status as a representative of Indian Sufis is reflected in his meetings with high-profile figures. Such meetings increased dramatically when his presence in Cairo was reported in local newspapers.[42] He spent time with Sayyid Taufīq al-Bakrī, the officially recognized leader of Egyptian Sufi sheikhs. Additionally, he met Dr Naṣūḥī, the famous physician; Zubair Pāshā, a notable of pre-Mahdi Sudan; Sayyid Aḥmad Bakk Ḥusainī, a prince-scholar; and 'Abbās Afandī, also known as 'Abd al-Bahā', son of Bahā' Allāh and head at that time of the Babi

37 Niẓāmī 2009b: 94–95.
38 Niẓāmī 2009b: 60.
39 Merneptah (r. 1213–1203 BC).
40 Niẓāmī 2009b: 65, 67, 72–82.
41 Hermansen 2001: 337–338.
42 Niẓāmī 2009b: 91.

sect,[43] who was probably embarking on one of his European tours. It is interesting that Niẓāmī does not comment on the contested claims of the followers of Bahā' Allāh, but merely lauds 'Abd al-Bahā"s erudition and good manners; he escorted him personally to the Hilwan station and presented him with a gold coin on departure.[44]

Niẓāmī had a keen interest in newspaper publishing, and in Cairo he sought the company of local journalists. The unnamed editor of *al-Livā'* was interested in speaking about Sufism, unlike other Egyptians who were interested only in politics. The editor-in-chief of *al-'Ilm*, 'Abd al-'Azīz Shavish, was also good company, and the founder of *al-Ḥilāl*, Jūrjī Zaidān (d. 1914), received only praise from the author for his history of Islam. The author's feelings towards the editor of *al-Manār*, Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935), were more ambivalent. Although the man was considered vain and proud in Egypt, Niẓāmī did not find anything in his behaviour to criticize. However, his general anti-Sufi stance made Niẓāmī somewhat reserved towards him.[45]

Apparently Niẓāmī was not entirely happy being in the limelight, and he left Egypt secretly in order to avoid farewell ceremonies.[46] He boarded a train bound for Alexandria on 30 June. En route, he stopped for one day in Tanta where he found himself in a familiar setting, in the shrine of Aḥmad al-Badavī. The head of the shrine and Niẓāmī hit it off immediately. Initiation into multiple Sufi orders was the norm in early twentieth-century Muslim India, and it facilitated networking between Sufis hailing from different corners of the world. In Tanta, Niẓāmī's affiliations with the Ahmadiyya[47] and Shadhiliyya orders smoothed the interaction between the two sheikhs. Niẓāmī praised the head of the shrine for his adherence to sharia and his affiliation with a Sufi brotherhood, something that was lacking in the case of most Egyptian religious figures. In Tanta, the author attended a *ẕikr* ceremony and was feasted with coffee and sherbet. The pinnacle of the visit was the granting of a deputyship (*ḵẖilāfat*) to Niẓāmī, together with permission to initiate the people of India into this Sufi lineage. Niẓāmī's regret knew no bounds when he was forced to leave to Alexandria the same evening.[48]

43 Niẓāmī refers to this sect as *Firqa-yi Bābī*, 'The Babi sect', instead of Baha'ism.
44 Niẓāmī 2009b: 54, 84, 96, 98–99.
45 Niẓāmī 2009b: 92–93, 100–101.
46 Niẓāmī 2009b: 101.
47 Badawiyya, not to be confused with the movement initiated by Mīrzā Ghulām Aḥmad in late 19th-century Punjab.
48 Niẓāmī 2009b: 102–104.

JERUSALEM TO DAMASCUS

From Alexandria, Niẓāmī's trip continued by boat via Port Said to Jaffa and then onwards to the Ottoman-ruled Jerusalem. Niẓāmī found Jerusalem to be a much more comfortable environment. He took a room in the Takiyya of Bābā Farīd, a Sufi lodge named after the Indian Sufi master Bābā Farīd al-Dīn Ganj-Shakkar (d. 1265). Representing the Chishti brotherhood in the holy city, the Takiyya offered accommodations for Indian pilgrims. It was built in the immediate vicinity of the al-Aqṣā complex and the author could visit the shrine frequently.[49] Now able to manage Arabic discussions with the locals, he could also dispense with the services of interpreters, such as those who had harried him in Egypt.[50]

The days spent in Jerusalem revolved around the al-Aqṣā complex. The author always returned there after pilgrimage tours outside the city, and many official meetings took place in the sanctum. Here, like in Cairo, Niẓāmī was recognized as a high-ranking religious dignitary and he rubbed shoulders with the religious and administrative elites of the city. Among his hosts were the mufti of Jerusalem and the Shaikh al-Ḥaram of the al-Aqṣā complex. Furthermore, as his stay coincided with the nomination of the new Ottoman governor, he was drawn into a whirlwind of official functions that at times were excruciatingly tedious. On one occasion he was compelled to sit through a graduation ceremony that included a distribution of prizes among the students:

> Prize-giving takes place as follows: Books are gathered on a table and each has a number and name written on it. The secretary stands up and announces that such and such boy will receive such and such book as a reward for success in an exam taken in such and such subject. The boy then comes, takes the book and goes to the podium to salaam the governor. He then returns to his place circling the table, and another boy is summoned. After that the first boy may be called again and he gets rewarded in some other subject or field of knowledge which the secretary will explain. Certain boys were called again and again, some up to twenty times. And every time they would greet the governor and circle the table. This spectacle of repeated rounds was such a distress for the poor governor that he was becoming exhausted due to returning the student's salaams. There were 150 boys and some were called several times; the salaams must have summed to the thousands. An orphan called Yūsuf Rajā'ī collected the maximum number of prizes. When he had already come forward eighteen times and was called for the nineteenth time, words escaped from my mouth: "*Va'llāh Rajā'ī*! By God, my hope is intense!" Those present started to laugh. The mufti said: "Your words carry more subtlety than hope." Finally, Shaikh

49 Niẓāmī 2009b: 111.
50 Niẓāmī 2009b: 132.

> ʻAbd al-Qādir, who had spoken before the governor the previous day, gave a speech admonishing the school secretary for putting his sons in the American School. This would make the teaching in his own institution seem defective. The secretary wanted to defend himself, but the governor stopped him, because the assembly was becoming restless. Then, the general commotion began.[51]

On another occasion, he was half-willingly forced to attend the court of the new governor, even though he was still exhausted from the previous night's activities of watching students enact a play on Richard the Lionheart and Saladin. Such socializing, however, was not without its rewards; the governor granted the author the privilege of visiting excavations under the two mosques of the al-Aqṣā complex.[52]

When Niẓāmī travelled in the Ottoman territory, political foment was beginning to show among the Arab population. In Jerusalem, he attended the meetings of the Society for Unity and Development, which constituted of Arabs interested in furthering the national cause. When the new governor arrived in Jerusalem, a scholar chastised him, telling him to fulfil his duties and develop the city. The author also evidenced the gradual easing of traces of the unpopular Sultan ʻAbd al-Ḥamīd II, who was deposed in 1909 following the Young Turk Revolution.[53]

In respect to religion, Palestine was the most pluralistic region visited by the author during his tour. In addition to local varieties of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, the number of European spiritual tourists visiting the Holy Land was on the increase. Several of Niẓāmī's diary entries written in Jerusalem and its environs mention Christians. In the Church of Nativity, the author was struck by Christian sectarianism, which appeared much more violent and deep-penetrating than the Sunni–Shia divide. He relates how the Turkish government was forced to station soldiers by the church in order to prevent any untoward incidents and how, in spite of precautions, violence would erupt every year during celebrations.[54] At the tomb of Mary, he marvelled at the dilapidated condition and murkiness of the shrine. He found the local Christians generally backward, and he disapproved of their rituals that verged on idolatry. They compared poorly with the Christians he had met in India: "When we see Englishmen and Christians from other countries [in India], we think that before they too were uncouth, ignorant, and unrefined like us. However, it became obvious in Jerusalem that even in this enlightened time countless Christians stick to ancient ideas and they are a thousand times more backward than us."[55] He learned that the local priests,

51 Niẓāmī 2009b: 154–155.
52 Niẓāmī 2009b: 168–169, 175–176.
53 Niẓāmī 2009b: 135, 150–151, 214.
54 Niẓāmī 2009b: 132.
55 Niẓāmī 2009b: 155–156.

in turn, considered English Christians as heretics; their beliefs were deviant and they came to Jerusalem as travellers and tourists, not as pilgrims. Niẓāmī closed this entry by wryly thanking God that it is at least the Englishmen, not the idolaters, who rule India.[56]

Departing from Jerusalem, Niẓāmī did not manage to escape farewell formalities as he had in Cairo. Both Muslims and Christians met during his visit flocked to the station in order to see him off. From Jerusalem, he travelled back to Jaffa, where he contacted the British deputy consul in order to speak on behalf of Indian pilgrims who had been quarantined there by the Turkish government.[57] He then boarded a Beirut-bound ship of the Austrian Company. From Beirut he continued almost immediately to Damascus, where he arrived on 28 July. Entries written there are brief and deal mainly with his pilgrimage to the tombs of some members of Ahl-i Bait, Ibn ʿArabī, and a Kurdish sheikh whose feet had curiously emerged from his tomb. In Damascus, he was joined by an Indian merchant, Ḥājjī ʿAbd al-Karīm Sulaimān, and his family who were also on their way to Medina.[58]

TO MEDINA AND BACK TO DELHI

On 1 August, Niẓāmī set forth on the most significant leg of his journey. He boarded a train running on the Hijaz railway, which was scheduled to reach Medina in three days. However, an accident further down the rail doubled the travelling time, and spending nights stuck in the middle of the wilderness drove the passengers mad with terror of bandits. Fortunately, however, nothing happened.[59] The literary style of the *Safarnāma* changes as the Hijaz railway carries the passengers towards Medina. Niẓāmī wrote the final chapters of the travelogue only after his return to India and, instead of diary entries, they constitute a continuous narrative. The dates disappear and the readers are only informed that the author stayed in Medina for fifteen days. Information on prices and distances is dispensed with, and passages revolve around the green dome of the Prophet Muhammad's tomb. This shift in writing style adds to a sense of being outside of time when in Medina.

It is noteworthy that Niẓāmī did not intend to visit Mecca during this trip, even if the distance between the Two Shrines (*al-Ḥaramain*) is nominal in comparison with the lengths covered during the entire tour. But it was more important for him to visit Medina first and Mecca only later, because, after all,

56 Niẓāmī 2009b: 115–116.
57 Niẓāmī 2009b: 178, 180.
58 Niẓāmī 2009b: 190–200.
59 Niẓāmī 2009b: 206–208.

"it is [the one dwelling in] Medina on whose account the greatness of Mecca has been revealed".[60]

When the train was approaching Medina after six days, the passengers became restless with anticipation. Finally, the green dome became visible from the train window:

> That there. Now it's clearly visible. Yes, it's the green dome. And a high minaret. We have arrived in Medina; we have arrived. Let me also see where it is, what it is, why it is. What is it saying? I heard something, the dwellers of heaven playing a tune. The engine stopped. Why should he exit first? Materialized spirit, subtler than material body. He is the noblest among the created. Here is the noblest community of the noblest prophet. He can see and he can understand. Oh, it stopped. [...] The heart is racing. Control it. Hands and feet tremble. The body refuses to obey. What should I do? People! Hold my hand. I took a step. Give me support, I'm falling.[61]

In Medina, Niẓāmī settled in a house opposite the shrine complex. He made his first visit to the tomb in the company of a dishonest guide who showed him around.[62] During subsequent visits, he went alone and spent considerable time meditating by the tomb. He describes the place in detail and praises its luminosity, both spiritual and physical. In contrast to the stuffy, gloomy churches of Palestine, both oil lamps and electric light were used here.[63]

Faithful to his habit, the author performed pilgrimage to the surrounding sites. Back in Medina, he argued with Shaikh al-Ḥaram that the Turkish government was neglecting its caliphal duties by failing to improve the infrastructure in Medina. A little later, he was overjoyed to learn that the parliament would actually institute a municipal committee to supervise infrastructural work. On the whole, however, contacts with government officials were far fewer in Medina than in Cairo and Jerusalem and the author sought the company of Sufis who were still (prior to the Wahhabi takeover of the city in 1924) very much present.[64] The culmination of the entire travel is the *duʿā* read by the Prophet's tomb.

In this *duʿā,* Niẓāmī envisages the future of Islam. He begins with an expression of gratitude for the opportunity to be present in Medina, and he then voices his conviction that the Prophet is still present and seeing (*ḥāẓir o nāẓir*) and has access to the knowledge normally hidden from humans (*'ilm-i ghaib*). Thus he distances himself from the '*ulamā*' of Deoband and the Ahl-i Hadis movement, which had

60 Niẓāmī 2009b: 217.
61 Niẓāmī 2009b: 209–210.
62 Niẓāmī 2009b: 211.
63 Niẓāmī 2009b: 215.
64 Niẓāmī 2009b: 228–236.

denied any such possibilities in a theological dispute dividing South Asian Muslims since the mid-nineteenth century.[65] Addressed to a living person rather than a deceased founder of a religion, the *duʿā* takes on a pronounced dramatic flavour.

> O messenger of God! This useless and ignoble son of yours, Ḥasan Niẓāmī, wants to reveal the state of his heart. His faith is that by the grace of the Living and Everlasting you are still present, clothed in the garb of life. That you can see and you can achieve things no one else can.

After the prologue, the author laments the present state of Muslims. Using potent and often modern metaphors, he lists Muslim-majority regions becoming destabilized under the influence of European powers. Among them, he believes that India is slightly better off; although ruled by the British, Muslims may practice their religion freely.

> Islam. Your dear Islam! Islam accepted by your God. Islam that your blessed ancestor, our master Abraham – peace be upon him – was fond of. That Islam is caught amidst hunters. Enemies have surrounded it. It is alone, with no friend or helper in sight. The Arabs, the fountain head of the river of Islam, are sinking lower and lower each day. The enemy is planning to subdue them under its rule. The Arabs that once ruled the entire world.
>
> The protector of the Arabs, the Ottomans' sword. It has rusted. Its holder wanted to polish it with the whetstone of freedom. But there lies a danger in that whetstone; it is saturated with foreign acid and it may render the edge of the sharpened sword useless. [...]
>
> Sovereignty is slipping from our hands. We are being ruled in China; we are being ruled in Java. We are being ruled in the lands of the Tatars and in Bukhara. Even in India our status is to be among the ruled although, thank God, the king of India does not interfere with our religion and he has given us many liberties. The boat of Iran is tossing in the storm. The neck of Morocco has been cut and the blood is flowing. In the end, even that will cease. I have just seen Egypt with my own eyes. Muslims drink openly in the bazaar and have no interest in any aspect of religion. In Afghanistan, there is still some hope for religion and worldly success. But the poor country is in between two railway engines, colliding here and colliding there.

However, Niẓāmī does not content himself with passive lamenting. The seeds of change have been sown and the prerequisites for building a bright future for Muslims are there to be built on: loyalty to the Prophet, an increasing number of Muslims, and the modern education available in the Aligarh Muslim University

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65 For a detailed discussion on the early decades of the madrasa of Deoband, see Metcalf 2005. On Ahl-i Hadis, see Metcalf 2005: 268–296.

founded in 1875 by Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān (d. 1898) and organized along the lines of a European university.[66]

> Support of the world! After the exposition of the pitiable state of affairs, kindly listen to a few propitious sentences as well. We are not dead. Our number is increasing throughout the world like the railway network. Every year, our number increases by lacs.
>
> Also our willingness to be sacrificed for the sake of your celebrated name testifies to our eternal life. Our hearts share in your love and are caught in your love. Not one of our feet has stepped out of this divine circle. This is why I am sure that a modicum of your divine knowledge can drive away all the present tribulations.
>
> My country, India, is awake. It wants to rise. Nay, it is rising. Individual people are starting to stir. The star of an Islamic higher education (Muslim University) has risen to the horizon of hope. We shall make it a moon. And we shall progress. In its cool light, we shall move forward and turn the stars into suns. In that effort, our fortune, resources, even ourselves can be sacrificed. And we shall all do something for you.
>
> Let us see, if the highway of progress will be clear or blocked. If there are hindrances, we shall make every effort to remove them.

The passage includes the key elements of Niẓāmī's vision. According to him, the best remedy for the crisis caused by colonialism and the consequent loss of Muslim political power would be to combine the benefits of modernity with adherence to Islam and loyalty to the Prophet. In this respect, Niẓāmī differed from the conservative ethos of the Deobandi 'ulamā' and the followers of Aḥmad Riẓā Khān Barelvī (d. 1921). Niẓāmī's vision is also India-centric to the extreme,[67] something that again distinguishes him from contemporaries like the poet-philosopher Muḥammad Iqbāl (d. 1938), who advocated emulating the alleged heroic manliness of early Arab Islam as the solution for twentieth-century problems. In the process, Iqbāl managed to downplay the achievements of the centuries between the golden era of the Prophet's Arabia and the lived reality of

66 On Sayyid Aḥmad Khān and the Aligarh Muslim University, see Troll 1978 and Metcalf 2005: 315–335.

67 Over the course of his journey, he commends several times the exemplary piety of Indian Muslims. For example, Indian trains had separate prayer-coaches, unlike the Hijaz railway (Niẓāmī 2009b: 204). The *miʿrāj* celebrations in Jerusalem were lackluster, whereas in India the occasion was marked with great pomp (despite the fact that the heavenward journey began in Jerusalem, not India) (Niẓāmī 2009b: 172). The tombs of Ahl-i Bait in Damascus were in ruins, something that would never happen in India (Niẓāmī 2009b: 191). In Medina, many tasks in the upkeep of the Prophet's mosque were performed by Indians because the locals neglected them (Niẓāmī 2009b: 214).

present-day Muslims.[68] Being more than a political visionary, Niẓāmī was a Sufi sheikh preoccupied with mystical practice and guiding disciples. For him, Sufi Islam denoted true and genuine Islam. However, during his journey he received the impression that the Arab lands had turned their backs on Sufis. This came out dramatically in a discussion between Niẓāmī and an Indian dervish who had taken the traditional land route by foot from India to Jerusalem. When the author inquired if the dervish had met fakirs and sheikhs in the countries he had passed through, he answered: "These people are not like in India. Contrary to sharia, no fakirs live there. Up to Basra people would ask amulets from me. After that, no one spoke to me."[69] Encounters like this probably contributed to the author's determination to channel his energies to promulgating his ideas of modernist Sufi Islam.

Regarding Niẓāmī's background in Sufism, it is not surprising that at the end of the *duʿā* he reverts to stock Sufi motifs of passionate divine love and mystical states:

> Lovers with burned hearts long for repose. A Lailā-like beloved pleads for the liberation of lovers who have become like the Qais of tales, acting like madmen, staining the hem of reputation and dignity with infamy. I am in search of stillness. I ask for total effacement. I ask repose for the heart, tears, happy times. Bestow me a corner of well-being, let me reach the room of annihilation in remaining and remaining in annihilation so that this lattice, these veils in between, would not hinder the road and I could reach the flourishing destination of repose. Amen.

Leaving Medina, Niẓāmī traced his route back to Port Said. He spent five days in Damascus, meeting with the local governor and learning different *ẕikr*s from local Sufis. He was also bestowed deputyship in the Shadhili order.[70] From Damascus he travelled to Port Said, only to notice that he had exceeded his travel budget. He sent a telegram to India requesting funds. Receiving no reply, he was able to borrow enough money for the return ticket from a Damascene friend. Eventually he boarded *China*, a steamer of the Austrian Company.[71] Niẓāmī managed to arrive in Delhi in secret, returning home without any of the pompous ceremonies that he so much disliked.[72]

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68 On Iqbāl, see Schimmel 1963.
69 Niẓāmī 2009b: 144.
70 Niẓāmī 2009b: 236.
71 Niẓāmī 2009b: 237.
72 Niẓāmī 2009b: 239.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The expansion of steam-powered travel following the mid-eighteenth century was essentially a response to the needs of European colonial powers, yet this infrastructure was utilized by colonized peoples as well. In the case of Muslim South Asia, the new conveyances led to an increase in travel that was often oriented towards the pilgrimage sites and urban centres of the Middle East.

The global spread of travel networks coincided with the enthusiastic adaptation of printing technology in India, facilitating an unprecedented production of printed books that could be purchased at a fraction of the price of a handwritten manuscript. As such printing enabled authors to expand their reading (and listening) audiences, it also facilitated communication with a wider number of people without direct one-on-one interaction.

Khvāja Ḥasan Niẓāmī's Middle Eastern tour is an excellent illustration of his ability to use modern technology to further his career as a highly successful Sufi sheikh and mystical/political author. During his tour that spanned four months, he accomplished visits of the major Middle Eastern urban centres (like Cairo, Damascus, and Beirut), as well as pilgrimage sites like Jerusalem and Medina, at a pace that appears to have been rather leisurely. He also made travel a part of his public career by sharing it with his Urdu-speaking readership. He first published his travel accounts in Urdu newspapers and then reworked them into a highly readable travelogue, whose passages range from solemn religious soliloquy to humorous anecdotes.

The travelogue describes the events and meetings that took place over the course of the journey. These incidents, however, provoked the author to reflect on the future of Islam. Regretting that modernized Egyptians had lost their interest in religion, he criticizes the Ottoman rule for not paying enough attention to developing the infrastructure of the holy sites it was supposed to protect, and on several occasions he voices his conviction that Indians are the most devout of Muslims. His vision is crystallized in the *duʿā* read by the Prophet's tomb in Medina. Lamenting the present state of regions previously ruled by Muslims but now overtaken by European colonial powers, he proposes a combination of Sufi Islam and progressive modernism as a solution for the problematic situation. His vision is outstandingly India-centric. In his view, the remedy could best be realized there: the Indians had not lost sight of Sufi Islam, yet they might also benefit from the beacon of modern education, the Aligarh Muslim University.

Niẓāmī's travel-account offers an intriguing glimpse into the ways in which Sufis hailing from traditional brotherhoods were coping with modern developments. Instead of turning his back on them and ensconcing himself in a tradi-

tional world, Niẓāmī embraced the new technologies and ideas inasmuch as he deemed them necessary for his project of elevating Muslims from their abasement and restoring their agency in a global context. His travel account records one instance of the Sufis' endeavours to adapt their tradition to the challenges posed by modernity, colonialism, and Islamic reformism. In the case of Niẓāmī, the endeavour paid off; his books are still being reissued, and his ideas find resonance among new generations of Sufi disciples.

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