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Description

Khwa?ja Hasan Niz?m?'s (1873-1955) Mundane and Spiritual Sufi Autobiographies

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Abstract:

Niz?m? experimented with various biographical and autobiographical genres, most famously in his long-running diary known as the Rozn?mcha. In this popular diary that was serialized and published over a period of some 40 years, he commented on the well-known personalities and dramatic political events of his time, as well as on his own health and views. Niz?m? also composed travel accounts (siy?hn?me) in similar diary form, a number of which were published as separate volumes. For example, one such book chronicles Niz?m?'s travels just before World War One to Egypt, Syria, and the Hijaz. Late in life, during in the 1950s, he traveled to Pakistan and a diary of this trip was also published separately in book form. At a relatively early point in Niz?m?'s career, in 1919 when he was only 41 years old, he composed an autobiography that has been declared a pioneering work in this genre of Urdu literature. This work resembles Western models of a life story in that it begins with the author's formative childhood experiences and then moves to his youthful spiritual seeking and his gradual success as a journalist, writer, and Sufi guide with thousands of disciples. The final section of the work was termed by Niz?m? to be a "Spiritual Autobiography" (I?h?t? ?p b?t?). This brief "spiritual autobiography" was omitted from later editions of the text, although it was subsequently issued separately. In the preface to the stand alone edition, which is ultimately a pamphlet of some 20 pages, Niz?m? explains in a preface entitled "An? al-Kull" (I am everything), that readers of the earlier edition might have considered it overly ecstatic "majdh?b?na" or even heretical, thus he found it preferable to preserve it from the eyes of those who would not understand and thereby be perplexed or worse.

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Works cited / Notes:

1 An earlier version of this article was published as "Sufi Autobiography in the 20th Century: Worldly and Spiritual Journeys of Khwaja Hasan Nizami" in Tales of God's Friends: Sufi Hagiography ed. John Renard (Berkeley: University of California, 2009), 286-300.

2 For a list of Niz?m?'s publications see <https://www.academia.edu/43424963/>

Khwaja_Hasan_Nizami_bibliography_2020_Update. A number of Niz?m?'s works can now be read

online at <https://www.rekhta.org/authors/khwaja-hasannizami/ebooks> 3 This travelogue has been considered in Daniel Joseph Majchrowicz, "Travel, Travel Writing and the 'Means to Victory' in Modern South Asia." Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 2015.

4 Khw?ja Hasan Niz?m?, L?h?ti ?p B?t?. (Gurdasp?: Niz?miyya Book Depot, 1922) also (Delhi: Halqa-e-Mash?'ikh Book Depot, 1925).

5 Khw?ja Hasan Niz?m?, L?h?ti ?p B?t?. (Delhi: Halqa-e-Mash?'ikh Book Depot, 1925), 2. 6 Khw?ja

Hasan Nizāmī, ʿaṣṣūfī, (Delhi: Halqa-i-mashʿikh Book Depot, 1922), iv. 7 Ibid, iv-v.
8 Mullā Wāhidī, ʿawānī ʿUmrī Khwāja Ḥasan Nizāmī. (New Delhi: Dargah ʿaṣṣūfī Niẓāmī muddaʿn Auliyaʿ, 1957).
9 The Gulistan or “Rose Garden” is a work by the classical Persian poet, Saʿdī comprised of moral tales in poetic form.
10 Khwāja Ḥasan Nizāmī, ʿaṣṣūfī, vi-vii. 11 The term used for “autobiography” in the title of this work- “ʿaṣṣūfī” is an Urdu coinage that literally means “what has happened to ones-self”. 12 ʿaṣṣūfī, 1-8.
13 Probably the commentary on a work about logic al-Taḥdhīb by al-Taftāzānī that is often part of a madrasa curriculum,
14 A work on Hanafī fiqh by al-Nasafī.
15 ʿaṣṣūfī, 13-14 16 This individual, “Mullā” Wāhidī, later composed his own biography of Nizāmī: Sawānīh ʿUmrī Khwāja Ḥasan Nizāmī (New Delhi: Dargah Hazrat Nizāmī muddaʿn Auliyaʿ, 1957).
17 ʿaṣṣūfī, 12-13.
18 Dargah, literally means “court” and it refers to a Sufi shrine.
19 Khatm means sealing or closing. It is the conclusion of an ʿUrs or dhikr ritual at which time the names of the founders of the Sufi Order are invoked.
20 ʿaṣṣūfī, 18. 21 ʿaṣṣūfī, 24
22 ʿaṣṣūfī, 21-24. 23 The practice of “blowing” to communicate blessings or healing is based on the practice of the Prophet Muhammad. 24 The name of a colleague.
25 ʿaṣṣūfī, 60. On these works see Marcia Hermansen, “An Early 20th Century Indian Sufi (Khwaja Hasan Nizami’ d. 1955) Views Hinduism,” Comparative Islamic Studies 4, (1-2: 2010): 157-179 26 Here, rather boldly, Nizāmī identifies with episodes from the life of the Prophet Muhammad, such as the angel announcing to him the command “Recite!” and his being wounded at the battle of Uhud. Abū Jahl was a Meccan enemy of the Prophet.
27 Ibn Wālīd, an early Islamic military leader and hero.
28 Tamerlane (d. 1405), the Central Asian conqueror.
29 Nāḍir Shāh, the Persian ruler who sacked Delhi in 1739, therefore a negative military example.
30 Mahmūd of Ghazna is known as an early Muslim conqueror of North India. The temple of Somnath was destroyed by his troops, therefore this pairing again suggests contrasting experiences.
31 Sir Sidney Arthur Taylor Rowlatt (d. 1945) A British lawyer and judge who in 1918 chaired the inquiry into “Criminal conspiracies connected with revolutionary movements in India”, known as the Rowlatt Committee. The inquiry led to the controversial Rowlatt Act in 1919. This unpopular legislation provided for stricter control of the press, arrests without warrant, indefinite detention without trial, and juryless in camera trials for proscribed political acts 32 An event in Islamic eschatology when the souls are gathered for judgment after Resurrection.

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