

4th
International



Sufi

CONFERENCE 2014

التصوف



Maizbhandari Academy

সূচীপত্র

A Saint in Society – Responses to Ibn 'Ata' Allah's view of the Founder of the Shadhiliyya Order

Prof. Abu Bakr Sirajuddin Cook ----- ১২

الخطاب الصوفي الاسلامي وأثره في روحنة الانسانية والتقريب بين الأنا والآخر

د. أمين يوسف عودة ----- ২১

التصوف والحرية

د. رضوان ايزولى ----- ৪৭

حاجتنا الى التصوف النقي

د. جمال فاروق جبريل محمود ----- ৬৩

Sufism in Bangladesh : History and Significance

A N M A Momin ----- ৭১

The Spirit of Sufism: A Quest for Peace in Life

Galib A. Khan ----- ৮৩

Believing in Unseen and Perceiving Presence of Allah through His Signs

Dr. Jasim Uddin Ahmed ----- ৯০

Sufism: Bangladesh Context

Dr. Q. M. Ohidul Alam ----- ১১০

লালনগীতি, মাইজভাণ্ডারী ও হাসনরাজার গান একটি তুলনামূলক পর্যবেক্ষণ

ড. সেলিম জাহাঙ্গীর ----- ১১২

সূফি দর্শনে আধ্যাত্মিক সাধনা ও মানব মুক্তি

ড. জিনবোধি ভিক্ষু ----- ১১৬

তাসাউফ : শ্রেণিকৃত শুদ্ধিকরণ

মুহাম্মদ মোরশেদুল হক ----- ১২২

Sufism is the way of freedom and glory: is it still true today? Faqeer Muhammad Muddassir Gualini Chishti -----	১২৭
না সময় না মানসিকতা মুহাম্মদ ওহীদুল আলম -----	১৪৫
সূফি ও সূফিবাদ আবুল ফজল মোহাম্মদ ছাইফুল্লাহ সুলতানপুরী -----	১৫০
তাসাউফ চর্চা ও মৌলভীয়া ত্বরীকা মুহাম্মদ জাফর উল্লাহ -----	১৬১
বাংলার সমাজ ও সংস্কৃতিতে সূফিবাদের প্রভাব (মধ্যযুগ) মোহাম্মদ মীর সাইফুদ্দীন খালেদ চৌধুরী -----	১৭১
সূফিবাদ ও মাইজভাণ্ডারী দর্শন প্রফেসর শাহজাদা সৈয়দ সফিউল গণি চৌধুরী -----	১৭৭
ভারতীয় সংস্কৃতিতে ইসলামের প্রভাব ড. আবদুল করিম -----	১৮৯
সূফি-আধ্যাত্মিকতা ফাদার লেনার্ড সি. রিবেক্স -----	১৯৪
আদব করো, আদব কা মোকাম হ্যায় গাউসুল আ'যম মাইজভাণ্ডারী (কঃ) এর অমীয় কালামঃ একটি পর্যালোচনা ড. মাওলানা মুহাম্মদ আনোয়ার হোসেন -----	১৯৮
Taking shelter of a Kamil Oli Allah for attaining self purification and sanctity of soul" Syed Nur Ahmed Babar -----	২০১

A Saint in Society – Responses to Ibn ‘Ata’ Allah’s view of the Founder of the Shadhiliyya Order

Prof. Abu Bakr Sirajuddin Cook

Ibn ‘Ata’ Allah is renowned, amongst other things, for being the earliest prose writer of the Shadhiliyya. Amongst his works that are currently available is the *Lata’if al-minan*, the earliest known account of the founder of the Shadhiliyya Order, Abu’l Hassan al-Shadhili. This paper will be divided into three sections. The first section will attempt to give a sense of the figure of Abu’l Hassan, as can be gleaned from the writings of Ibn ‘Ata’ Allah. The second section will highlight one particular modern critique of Ibn ‘Ata’ Allah’s presentation and examine what, if any, currency this critique has. Extrapolating from this critique, the third section will conclude this work with some comments on the implications and pitfalls of reading of historically significant Sufi treatises within a contemporary setting.

The Image

For the existing biographies of Abu’l Hassan al-Shadhili, there are three primary sources. These are Ibn ‘Ata’ Allah’s *Lata’if al-minan*, al-Sabbagh’s *Durrat al-asrar*, and ‘Abd al-Nur al-‘Imrani’s *Manaqid Abul-Hassan al-Shadhili*.¹ While there is much agreement between these works, each relates aspects of Abu’l Hassan not found in the others. Of these three works, Ibn ‘Ata’ Allah’s would generally be given precedence due to it being the earliest of these works, though the other two works do contain a wealth of material that is not found within the *Lata’if al-minan*. Furthermore, given that Ibn ‘Ata’ Allah is generally accepted as one of the spiritual inheritors of Abu’l Abbas al-Mursi,² whom was one of the spiritual inheritors of Abu’l Hassan al-Shadhili,³ there is a traceable lineage and generally accepted source for the content of the *Lata’if al-minan*. This in no way negates the work of Ibn Sabbagh and ‘Abd al-Nur al-‘Imrani, both of whom utilised the disciples of Abu’l Hassan al-Shadhili, particularly in Tunisia.⁴

From the outset, it should be acknowledged that the *Lata’if al-minan* is not intended to be a strictly biographical account of either Abu’l

Hassan al-Shadhili or Abu'l Abbas al-Mursi. Of Abu'l Hassan's biographical information there are clues strewn throughout the Lata'if al-minan. Ibn 'Ata' Allah states that Abu'l Hassan "was born and raised in Morocco and first appeared [as a teacher] in Shadhilah, a town near Tunisia from which his appellation as al-Shadhili is derived."⁵ His teacher (shaykh) was 'Abd al-Salam Ibn Mashish.⁶ Before setting up in Egypt he spent time in Tunisia, where Abu'l Abbas became his student (murid).⁷ At some point Abu'l Hassan completed the pilgrimage (hajj).⁸ Finally, he came to rest and "was buried at Humaythira and his body was washed in its water."⁹

For Ibn 'Ata' Allah, one of the qualities of the saints (wali) is the development of a God-centred consciousness. The acquisition of a worldview that accords God primacy is one that Abu'l Hassan al-Shadhili is presented as possessing. He would supplicate "cast a divide between me and concern for both this earthly life and the life to come ... cause my sole concern to be Thee,"¹⁰ illustrating Abu'l Hassan's desire to turn away from the world as an end-in-itself. This in no way implies that Abu'l Hassan renounced and negated the world, for "God, may he be praised, only revealed the kingdom in order that He might be seen therein" and, as a result, "if someone is absent to the created universe, he will likewise be absent to the vision of the Truth therein."¹¹ Interestingly, it is through one's engagement with the world that one's standing with Allah can, to a degree, be known. Abu'l Hassan recounts an example of this where he experienced a high degree of intimate companionship despite being surrounded by lions which "walked in circles around me," though later some partridges "became aware of my presence, they suddenly flew away and my heart fluttered in alarm."¹² Abu'l Hassan al-Shadhili is chided by this for his response to the creation is indicative of his presence with God, which is confirmed by his hearing the following comment on these events, "yesterday you were in Us, while now you are in yourself."¹³

While the development of a God-centred consciousness could be said to be common amongst all Sufi orders, the Shadhiliyya method for doing so has some distinct qualities. This may be traced back to Abu'l Hassan's teacher Ibn Mashish, who is recorded to have supplicated "O God, as for me, I ask you to cause people to act perversely towards me lest I take refuge in any but You."¹⁴ Creations, then, are to be seen as a means of drawing near to the Creator. Thus, rather than dispensing

with the creations, they can be utilised for soteriological development. Yet, in order for this to be possible, it is necessary that the creations be engaged only in accordance with their function. For this reason Abu'l Hassan said "listening to the creation is rudeness [to the Creator]."¹⁵ While he did not shy away from interacting with the creations, Abu'l Hassan can be seen to have been pragmatic in his approach, always acknowledging the root cause of creation, namely God. This can also be seen in his advice to others. For instance, in requesting a particular judge to increase a student's allowance he stated "do not deem it excessive to increase a believer's allowance" for "God is not content with Paradise as the believer's reward until, in addition, He has allowed him to behold His noble face therein."¹⁶ In addition to this he advised Abu'l Abbas al-Mursi to ""ask nothing of anyone" and "accept nothing from anyone,"¹⁷ which can be read as relegating creation to its proper rank as intermediary, directing all petitions to God, and realising that all sustenance (rizq) comes only from God.

The Critique

From one perspective it is understandable that the image of Abu'l Hassan painted by Ibn 'Ata' Allah is a reverent one. It is understandably so, given the relation between teacher (shaykh) and student (murid) within a Sufi order (tariqa). Nevertheless, this respectfulness and care in Ibn 'Ata' Allah's writing on his teacher and his teacher's teacher hides subtle subterfuge. Rather than being seen as an account of the founder of the Shadhiliyya and one of his successors, one view is that the *Lata'if al-Minan* "is mitigated by the fact that it was written as an apologia for the Egyptian branch of the Shadhiliyya."¹⁸ Central to this critique of Ibn 'Ata' Allah's work is a challenge to Abu'l Abbas al-Mursi's inheritance of the Shadhiliyya. Against the commonly held view that the *Lata'if al-minan* captures the teachings of the founder and first successor of the Shadhiliyya, this critique holds that it was written "to legitimize the leadership of Abu'l-'Abbas al-Mursi ... and, by extension, his successor, Ibn 'Ata'illah."¹⁹

It would appear, from this perspective, that the composition of the *Lata'if al-minan* is a purely self-serving task. Yet, implicit in this critique is a claim of exclusiveness. In implicit in the view that the *Lata'if al-minan* is "an apologia for the Egyptian branch of the Shadhiliyya" is the claim that it is not only a negation of other Sufi orders, but a dismissal of other non-Egyptian branches of the Shadhiliyya. Similarly, the

critique implicitly asserts that in as far as the work attempts to "legitimize the leadership of Abu'l-'Abbas al-Mursi," it does so to the exclusion of all other successors, whether past, present, Egyptian, or non-Egyptian. If Ibn 'Ata' Allah is guilty as charged, then he would be seen as having a self-centred consciousness, rather than a God-centred consciousness, for "bragging or showing fanaticism about one's order is a sign of the ascendancy of one's ego."²⁰ However, if this were so, then, not only would this directly contradict the above image of Abu'l Hassan al-Shadhili, the *Lata'if al-minan* would be an irregularity within Ibn 'Ata' Allah's oeuvre for his other works explicitly promote the development of a God-centred consciousness.

If the political motivation of the *Lata'if al-minan* was for the benefit of Abu'l Abbas al-Mursi, then there must be someone or some group to whom it is a detriment. Yet, there is no contention that Abu'l Abbas al-Mursi inherited the Shadhiliyya from Abu'l Hassan al-Shadhili.²¹ So, within the Egyptian Shadhiliyya, there seems little need to "legitimize the leadership of Abu'l-'Abbas al-Mursi." However, with comments such as "through the circulation of Ibn 'Ata' Allah's works the Shadhili Way began to spread in the Maghrib, which had rejected the master [i.e. Abu'l Hassan ash-Shadhili]"²² and with book titles such as *Ibn 'Ata' Allah and the Birth of the Shadhiliyya*²³ it would seem, within the scholarly literature at least, that anything other than the Egyptian branch of the Shadhiliyya has been, at best, treated as being of little consequence or, at worst, completely discounted. To view the *Lata'if al-minan* as legitimising Abu'l Abbas al-Mursi as the inheritor of the Egyptian Shadhiliyya is, to a degree, framing it as a text that dismisses and discounts the Tunisian, pre-Egyptian, branch of the Shadhiliyya.

Yet, the view that the *Lata'if al-minan* is a document that supposedly undermines the Tunisian Shadhiliyya cannot be upheld for several reasons. Firstly, while it is true that Ibn al-Sabbagh "follows a more anecdotal style" than Ibn 'Ata' Allah,²⁴ Ibn 'Ata' Allah is not attempting to write a standard biography of either Abu'l Hassan or Abu'l Abbas. Thus, Ibn 'Ata' Allah would naturally be, to an extent, "devoid of most historical data."²⁵ Rather he can be seen to attempt to illustrate, as the title suggests, the subtle manner within which the blessings or grace of God can be seen to be at work within the lives of these two Sufi teachers, and the manner in which they attempted to alert others to its existence. Secondly, as the above image of Abu'l Hassan shows, rather

than appearing "more as a trope than as a living saint,"²⁶ Furthermore, Ibn 'Ata' Allah explicitly recognises the number and diversity of Abu'l Hassan's students "some who resided in al-Maghrib," "some who came with him and emigrated to Egypt," while others "came to be his companions in Egypt."²⁷ Ibn 'Ata' Allah paints a picture of an astute Sufi master who should be esteemed, not only for his grasp of soteriological psychology, but also for the practical application of his teaching methods within a social setting.

Moreover, the historical evidence does not lend weight to the view that the Lata'if al-minan is an "apologia for the Egyptian branch of the Shadhiliyya." Regarding the pre-Egyptian history of the Shadhiliyya, it is widely attested that Abu'l Hassan al-Shadhili's position as a Sufi teacher of repute started in Tunisia. It was here that Abu'l Abbas al-Mursi became his student.²⁸ Whether or not it existed in name, the Tunisian branch of the Shadhiliyya formed and continued to exist after Abu'l Hassan al-Shadhili moved to Egypt, for "those who stayed back in Tunis when their leader [Abu'l Hassan] journeyed to Egypt maintained their allegiance to him having formed themselves into a compact body."²⁹ Regarding the post-Egyptian history of the Shadhiliyya, there is little, if any, evidence of animosity between the Tunisian and Egyptian branches of this Sufi order. It has been noted that "Ibn Abbad [of Rhonda] appears to have played an axial role between [the] Tunisian and Egyptian Shadhili Orders" given, amongst other things, his popularisation of the works of Ibn 'Ata' Allah in Fez.³⁰ Thus, historical evidence for any sort of animosity between the various branches of the Shadhiliyya is lacking. Rather than dividing the Shadhiliyya up it should be remembered that, irrespective of their physical or temporal location, they share a lineage (silsila) which unites them, as Abu'l Abbas al-Mursi stated "this path of ours is not associated with those of the East, nor with those of the West."³¹

The Concern

While the above critique of Ibn 'Ata' Allah's Lata'if al-minan have been shown to be largely baseless, concerns arise from it that have a wider significance for the reading of traditional Sufi texts within a modern scholarly setting. Of these concerns only one will be discussed here, namely contextualisation. For it can be seen that the miscontextualisation of the Lata'if al-minan as primarily a political document, rather than a soteriological one, is what gives rise to the

pre
the
the
valu
bee
bra
is t
dive

If w
be f
A p
pot
of tl
pre:
hist
accu
chai
a re:
prog
chal
para

Corr
accu
of sa
has
that
such
solel
is th
som
intin
conc
oper
man

Bibli

Corn
Sufis

previously mentioned, highly critical comments. Despite the bulk of the existent scholarly literature giving precedence to Abu'l Hassan and the Shadhiliyya from the time they settled in Egypt,³² the historical value and spiritual legacy of the Tunisian branch of the Shadhiliyya has been largely overlooked. Nevertheless, to find discord between two branches of a Sufi order, particularly when no such disharmony exists, is to fail to understand the grater context which gave rise to the diversification and branching in the first place.

If we may set aside from the preceding case study, many examples can be found where a figure, group, or event have been miscontextualised. A problem arises when this miscontextualisation obscures other potential perspectives on that figure, group or event. A prime example of this is the figure of Ibn Sab'in.³³ For almost 150 years scholars have presented Ibn Sab'in as the most controversial philosopher in the history of Islam. In conformation of this view there have been accusations of political dissention, heterodoxy, suicide, and an implicit charge of apostasy. Yet, these accusations are rarely challenged and as a result this Islamic thinker is seen as increasingly controversial as time progresses. Yet, the previous preclusion of Ibn Sab'in's orthodoxy is challenged in his comments and actions are seen within an Islamic paradigm and given context.

Correctly contextualising the content of one's work is vital for an accurate presentation of the content. For instance, if a Christian notion of sainthood is utilised to evaluate the status of a Muslim who is, and has been, revered as a saint, then the conclusions that are drawn from that study are liable to misrepresent its content. To do this to a figure such as Ibrahim al-Dasuqi can result in a narrative that seems set up solely to show how his sainthood was "invented."³⁴ One reason for this is that Christian and Islamic conceptualisations of sainthood are somewhat incongruous. Each conceptualisation of sainthood is intimately connected to a conceptual framework. To apply one conceptualisation out of context disrupts the conceptual matrix, thus opening the possibility that particular data can be devalued in a manner that is inconsistent with its context.

Bibliography

Cornell, V. J. 1998, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism*, University of Texas Press, Austin.

- Danner, V. 1973, *Sufi Aphorisms*, E. J. Brill, Leiden.
- Douglas, E. H. 1948, 'Al-Shadhili, a North African Sufi, according to Ibn Sabbagh', *The Muslim World*, vol. 38, pp. 257 – 279.
- Geoffroy, E. (ed.) 2005, *Une voie soufie dans le monde: la Shâdhiliyya*, Maisonneuve & Larose, Paris.
- Guezzou, M. 2009, *Shaykh Muhammad al-Hashimi His Life and Works*, Viator Books, Leicester.
- Halenberg, H. 2005 *Ibrahim al-Dasuqi (1255 – 1296): A Saint Invented*, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, Helsinki.
- Honerkamp, K., 'A Biography of Abû I-Hasan al-Shâdhilî dating from the Fourteenth Century', in E. Geoffroy (ed.) 2005, pp. 73 – 87.
- Ibn 'Ata' Allah, *The Subtle Blessings in the Saintly Lives of Abu al-Abbas al-Mursi & His Master Abu al-Hasan*, trans. Roberts, N. 2005, Fons Vitae, Louisville.
- Istrabadi, Z. S. 1988, *The Principles of Sufism*, unpublished PhD Thesis, Indiana University.
- Mackeen, A. M. 1971a, 'The Early History of Sufism in the Maghrib Prior to Al-Shadhili (d. 656/1258)', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 91, pp. 398 - 408.
- 1971b, 'The Rise of al-Shadhili (d. 656/1258)', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 91, pp. 477 – 486.
- Nwyia, P. 1991, *Ibn 'Ata' Allah (m. 709/1309) et la naissance de la confrerie sadilite*, Dar el-Machreq, Beyrouth.
- Al-Sabbagh, I., *The Mystical Teachings of al-Shadhili*, trans. Douglas, E. H. 1993, State University of New York Press, Albany.
- Trimingham, J. S. 1998, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, Oxford University Press, New York.

(Footnotes)

1 The translation of the *Lata'if al-minan* used here is Roberts (2005). For further information on the other two texts see al-Sabbagh (1993) and Honerkamp (2005), respectively.

2 Durkee (2005: 57). Also see Geoffroy (2005: 521).

3 C
exi:
is e
4 I
Ha:
5 lk
6 lk
7 lk
8 lk
9 lk
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
(19
wa
22
23

3 Caution must be exercised here to not exclude the possibility of the existence of inheritors other than Abu'l Abbas al-Mursi as this possibility is exactly the point of contention that is raised in the second section.

4 Honerkamp (2005: 85). For further information regarding Abu'l Hassan's earlier, pre-Egyptian, exploits see Mackeen (1971a and b).

5 Ibn 'Ata' Allah (2005: 89)

6 Ibid, 134.

7 Ibid, 97 – 98.

8 Ibid, 92.

9 Ibid, 96.

10 Ibid, 334.

11 Ibid, 48.

12 Ibid, 107.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid, 108.

15 Ibid, 109.

16 Ibid, 110.

17 Ibid, 94.

18 Cornell (1998: 147).

19 Ibid.

20 Guezzou (2009: 48 – 49).

21 Durkee (2005: I – II). Danner (1973: 80). Geoffroy (2005: 521). Istrabadi (1988: 162). Even Cornell (1998: 172) acknowledges that Abu'l Abbas was an inheritor of the Shadhiliyya.

22 Trimingham (1998: 50).

23 Nwyia (1991).

24 Cornell (1998: 147).

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibn 'Ata' Allah (2005: 113).

28 Mackeen (1971b: 484).

29 Ibid.

30 Honerkamp (2005: 86).

31 Ibn 'Ata' Allah (2005: 114).

32 Exceptions to this include Mackeen (1971a & b) and, to a lesser extent, Douglas (1948).

33 For greater detail see my forthcoming article 'Ibn Sab'in and Islamic Orthodoxy' in the Journal of Islamic Philosophy.

34 Halenberg (2005).

Writer: Doctoral Candidate, University of Tasmania, Australia.

ة
ة
اسية
مَلَك
ذه
اليوم
مل
يَ أَوْ
به
تَل
نَأَقْتُ
أكلوا
ان
كريم
تبه
ات.