

***The Life and Times of Shaikh Farid-u'd-din Ganj-i-Shakar* by Khaliq Ahmad Nizami. Aligarh: Muslim University Aligarh Press, 1955. Pp.144.**

**Reviewed by**

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Khaliq Ahmad Nizami is one of the most popular historians of 20th century India. Normally, his works are familiar to everyone who studied Sufism in south Asia, particularly the Chishti Sufi order in Indo-Pak Subcontinent. The author produced a large number of well-known and research oriented works on the Chishti Sufi order including *Studies in Medieval Indian History*, (1956), *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century*, (1961), *The Life and Times of Shaikh Nizam -u'd-din Aulia*, (1991) *The Life and Times of Shaikh Nasir-u'd-din Chiragh-i-Dehli*, (1991) and *Tarikh-i Mashaikh-i Chisht* (1983) and the under reviewed work entitled *The Life and Time of Shaikh Farid -u'd-Din Ganj-i-Shakar* (1955) is, indeed, a stroke of genius of Khaliq Ahmad Nizami.

*The Life and Time of Shaikh Farid-u'd-Din Ganj-i-Shakar* is the first organized and well-researched biography on Hazrat Baba Farid in English language. The Author used very lucid and simple language. The book begins with the classification of sources. Within the contemporary sources about Hazrat Baba Farid, Nizami relied on *Fawaid-ul- Fawad*, *Khair-ul- Majalis* and *Siyar-ul-Auliya*, while in the near contemporary sources he preferred only Shaykh Jamali's *Siyar-ul- Arifin*.

After contemporary sources the author shed light on the seventeenth century's literature. That particular century is proved to be a very rich and important about the *tazikarat* (Sufi biographies). There were a large number of biographies of Sufis which were written in that

period, among them, the most popular are *Akhbar-al Akhiyar*, *Gulzar-i-Abrar*, *Mirat-al Asrar*, *Jawaher-e- Faridi*, *Safinat-al Auliya*, *Siyar-al Aqtab*, *Roza-I Aqtab* and *Iqtabas-al Anwar*. The author had challenged the authority and authenticity of different works particularly the literature belonged the seventeenth century. However, he maintained, *Akhbar-al Akhiyar* of Shaykh Abdul Haq Muhadis Dehlvi, as the best source among the seventeenth century's literature and *Gulzar-i-Abrar* written by Muhammad Ghausi Shattari is the second important work. Although, time and again, Shaykh Abdul Haq consulted the fictional *Malfuzat* (as Nizami understood) that related to Hazrat Baba Farid in his book. The author maintained that the literature in seventeenth century is mostly fabricated. In fact, according to the author, the most unreliable work is *Jawaher-e- Faridi* written by Ali Asghar Chishti.

The book consists of twenty two short and concise chapters and discusses almost every aspect of hazrat Baba Farid's life in detail. In introduction, Nizami discussed the background and early life of hazrat Baba Farid. In his view, from the very beginning of his life hazrat Baba Farid had shown great interest towards meditation and esoteric knowledge. For this purpose, he visited different popular Sufi hospice and saints. However, the author rejected the travelling stories produced by the seventeenth century's writers about hazrat Baba Farid and argued that Baba Farid visited only Kabul and Qandahar and finally came to hazrat Qutb-al din Bakhtiyar Kaki at Delhi. Later on almost all the biographers of seventeenth century and onwards, especially Jamali hold the position that Baba Farid visited Central Asia, Iraq, Palestine and Hijjaz. Contrary to earlier biographers, Nizami believed that the above mentioned three contemporary sources are not only silent about the traveling journey but also unacceptable.

The author also examines the Chishtiyyah and Suharwardiyyah order's influence on the state apparatus. Though the Chishti Sufis had no intentions to brand any association or alliance with the state or the ruling elite but they were given their due respect from the state authorities. Furthermore, the Chishtis were admired and well regarded as compared to other Sufi orders in Subcontinent. Meanwhile Nizami supported his argument by giving an example of Hazrat Qutb al Din Bakhtiyar Kaki who refused to accept the office of *Shaykh-al Islam* by Sultan Iltutmish (r. 1211-36) who himself was a humble disciple and devotee of the Chishti order. Later on, hazrat Baha-ud-din Zakariyy (d.1262), the founder of Suharwardiyyah Sufi order in India, was appointed on this prestigious slot. Afterwards, Nizami explores in his book about Baba Farid's meditational nature, attitude toward the ruling class and non-Muslims, role of his *Jamat Khana* and his poetry. The author has made his opinion that Baba Farid consistently managed his meditational practices and habit till his death. For this purpose, Baba Farid visited his preceptor twice a month as he used to keep himself busy in rigorous meditations, *Chillas* and fasts. In addition, the author accepted that "no saint has exceeded Gunj-i-Shakar in his devotion" (p. 24).

Baba Farid, Nizami argued, was much reluctant and careful from the social admiration and popularity. It was the same social popularity that forced him to leave Delhi and Hansi. Finally he chose a place, according to the author, that was an abode of culprits, thief, criminals, enemy of the saints and full of wild animals and, snakes. As a result, he wanted to go to an unknown place where he would easily continue and concentrate on his *riyazat* or the meditation. Besides all this, Nizami argued that Baba Farid did not remain an unknown for a long time and his fame spread everywhere and far from India.

The author in his book also gives a comparative analysis between Baba Farid, as a head of Chishti order, and Shaykh Baha-ud-din Zakariyya, as head of Suhrawardiyyah order in India. As both Shaykhs were best friends, they followed entirely opposite policies and life style. The former, frequently faced starvation and lived in unbaked brick house while the later had available humongous wealth and riches at every time and lived like king or noble, in fact, enjoyed very high-status of social life. The *Khanqah* of Shaykh Baha-ud-din Zakariyya was like a palace and a large number of rooms were built for their disciples. Furthermore, only those disciples were entered who got permission of Shaykh Baha-ud-din Zakariyya, Meanwhile, “common people were not allowed to visit his *khanqah*” (p. 55) or to meet the Shaykh. In addition, the Suhrawardi *khanqah* had stocks of grains and numerous *jagirs* or agricultural lands. Paradoxically, the Chishti *Jamat Khana* of Shaykh Farid neither had any *jagir*, nor any stocks of grains. Unlike the Suhrawardi *khanqah*, it was opened for everyone. There was not any need of Shaykh’s permission for any person. Furthermore, all the people slept in a big hall of *Jamat Khana* and there was not any separate room for the devotee. There was not any distinction and discrimination in his *Jamat Khana*. However, the *Jamat Khana* of Shaykh Farid played an imperative role in involvement and expansion of the Chishti order. The author maintained that the Shaykh trained his spiritual successors in this *Jamat Khana*. On the other hand, the responsibility of earning food was also on the shoulder of his disciples who collect woods in the jungle for fuel and used wild fruits as vegetables.

The book also provides a comprehensive detail about the descendants and spiritual successors of hazrat Baba Farid. The author again relied heavily on the above mentioned three contemporary sources while discussing the offspring and major khulafa of the Shaykh and that is why he provides much information about hazrat Nizam-al din Auliya. Contrary to this, he did not

mention hazrat Ala-al din Ali Ahamd Sabir, the second most popular Khalifa of hazrat Baba Farid after hazrat Nimaz-al din Auliya, in detail. It is due to all these three sources that are almost silent or provide very minor information for the later khalifa.

The author also maintained Baba Farid as a great scholar and intellectual as well as great Sufi poet. Not only founder of Punjabi poetry, Nizami argued that the *khanqah* of Shaykh Farid proved to be the very first platform for Urdu language. Talking about the attitudes towards state, Nizami argued that hazrat Baba Farid like his predecessors Shaykhs did not make any contact with the state. Although sultan Nasir-al din Mahmud (r.1246-66) and more importantly, his prime minister Ghiyas-al din Balban (r. 1266-87) were devotees of hazrat Baba Farid but he did not accept any *jagir* from the state. Occasionally he accepted the gifts of cash but on the very same time distributed it among the poor and needy. In the end the author presented a detailed note on the Chishti *malfuzat* including *Fawaid-al Salakin*, *Asrar-al Auliya* and *Rahat-al Qulub*. He maintained that all these *malfuzat* are invented and fabricated.

There is no doubt that Nizami achieved his target while producing such a quality research work. It is one of the great contributions in the history of Islamic mysticism. The author on one hand relied on the best authentic sources while on the other hand also applied the reason, logical and secular approach.

Besides, there are certain major and minor mistakes which can be traced out in this prominent work. For example, on the very first page the author described that Baba Farid was in his nineties when Balban ascended the throne of Delhi (p.1) Balban nominated as sultan or emperor in 1266 A.D, on the other hand, paradoxically, Nizami mentioned that Baba Farid died in 1265 A.D (p.56, p. 110). Furthermore Nizami argued that In Jamadi 1, 664 A.H./1265 A.D.,

ShaykhNizam-ud-din Auliya visited his master for the lasttime (p.75).While on the very next paragraph he argued that On Ramadan 13, 664 A.H./1265 A.D., ShaykhFarid granted his KhalifatNamah to ShaykhNizam-ud-din Auliya (p.75).HazratBabaFarid, according to the author died in Muharam 5, 664/October 15, 1265. Muharam is the first month in Islamic calendar while Jamadi-al awal is the fifth and Ramadan is the ninth month. How it possible is that ShaykhNizam-al din Auliya visited his Shaykh and also received KhalifatNamahafter his death?

The author also failed to provide accurate information about the SajjadahNashins of hazratBabaFarid. He mentioned only twenty five SajjadahNashins, while the twenty eight SajjadahNashinnamed PirFateh Muhammad was appointed in December, 25, 1934, almost twenty years before the compilation of his book. Moreover, the names he mentioned are also not correct. For instance, he mentioned the name of three SajjadahNashinsas Shaykh Muhammad while their names wereShaykh Muhammad Younas, Shaykh Muhammad Shahab-al din, and Shaykh Muhammad Hamid respectively.

As a historian,researcher and at the very same time a descendant of hazrat Baba Farid,it wasnecessary for the author to make a visit on the shrine of his predecessor, while he was going to produce an authentic and research oriented biography.More surprisingly, Nizami, while discussing the BihishtiDarwazah, relied on Captain C. M. Wade who declared the eastern door of the apartment of the shrine Baba Faridas a BihishtiDarwazah (p. 124). The fact is that theeastern door is the door of entrance in the apartment and it is opened all the year, while the southern door is known as BihishtiDarwazah which is only openedfrom Muharam 5<sup>th</sup> to Muharam 10<sup>th</sup>.