

Muẓaffar ‘Alī Shāh: A Ni‘matullāhī Sufi master, Shi’ite philosopher and Akbarian philosopher

The revival of Shi’ite Sufism, after the destruction of Safavid empire, occurred during the Zand dynasty (1163-1209/1750-1794) and continued through the Qājār era. As Zarrīnkub has pointed out, the Qājār era was a time of nostalgia for the noble past. Of course, their mystical philosophy had to fit the theological standards of Shi’ite society. The two leading Sufi orders in this revival movement were the Ni‘matullāhīs and the Dhahabīs. These two orders had much in common, as both of them highly emphasized the importance of following Islamic laws and Shi’ite beliefs. They were known to be the propagators of Akbarian philosophy in Persia. Dhahabīs and Ni‘matullāhīs were strong promoters of the school of “Unity of Being” (*Waḥdat al-wujūd*).

Mīrzā Muḥammad Taqī, with the spiritual title of Muẓaffar ‘Alī Shāh (d.1215/1800) is one of the most influential masters in the history of Ni‘matullāhiyya order. This Shi’ite Sufi master is one of the most active and knowledgeable masters of the Ni‘matullāhīs during this era. He is the first master after the return of the order to Persia who wrote about its cosmological views, based on the philosophy of “Unity of Being”. In his youth, he began studying the rational and traditional seminary sciences (*‘ulūm ‘aqlī wa naqlī*) and became well-versed in them. Muẓaffar was more of a mystic philosopher (*ḥakīm*) than a jurist (*faqīh*), and extremely well-versed in speculative Sufism, following the school of “Unity of Being”.

Muẓaffar ‘Alī Shāh’s mystical poetry had in-depth mystical meanings, with heavy reliance of Ibn ‘Arabī’s philosophy and terminology. Muẓaffar was very influential for the development of the Ni‘matullāhī order and as a propagator of Ibn ‘Arabī’s thoughts. His beliefs about the perfect man, *insān-i kāmīl*, were highly influenced by Akbarian (Ibn ‘Arabī’s) philosophy. Muẓaffar passed away in 1215/1800. He wrote numerous books and literary papers, which are tremendously valuable for a better understanding of Ni‘matullāhī thought.

Muẓaffar ‘Alī Shāh wrote poetry lamenting over his separation from his master, Mushtāq, to whom he dedicated a compendium of his poetry, calling it *Diwān-i Mushtāqīyya*. In this paper, we will examine two of Muẓaffar’s writings: “Sea of the Secrets” (*baḥr al-asrār*) and “Compendium of the Seas” (*majma‘ al-biḥār*) which are both interpretations of the first chapter of Quran. “Sea of the Secrets” (*baḥr al-asrār*) is in verse form of Mathnawī and “Compendium of the Seas” (*majma‘ al-biḥār*) is written in prose. In these two works, Muẓaffar ‘Alī Shāh heavily relied on the chapter of

Prophet Adam in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* of Ibn ‘Arabī. He had numerous references to Ibn ‘Arabī and his writings. Muẓaffar ‘Alī Shāh explains the relationship between *Nubuwwa* (prophethood), *Risāla* (apostleship) and *Wilāya* (sainthood) based on Ibn ‘Arabī’s teachings using his terminology like the disclosure of Attributes of Divine Majesty (*jalāl*) and disclosure of Attributes of Divine Beauty (*jamāl*). This paper investigates the importance of Muẓaffar ‘Alī Shāh for survival of the school of “Unity of Being” among practicing Shi’ite Sufis in general and the Ni‘matullāhī Sufi in particular as one of the most important Shi’ite Sufi orders in Iran.



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