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S.A. SHITTU

A STUDY OF CONTENTS AND STYLES OF
HAYKH IBRAHIM AL-KAWLAKHI'S *NURUL-
BASAR FI MADHI SAYYIDIL-BASHAR*



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A STUDY OF CONTENTS AND STYLES OF SHAYKH IBRAHIM AL-KAWLAKHI'S *NURUL-BASAR FI MADHI SAYYIDIL-BASHAR*

Introduction

This paper examines the contents and styles of *Nurul Basar* of Shaykh Ibrahim Nyas al-Kawlakhi, a *qasidah* that consists of 354 lines of poem on the life history of the Holy Prophet (SAW). Historical background of the author occupies the first part of the paper. A study of the contents and the styles of the work consumes larger part of the study, while the influence of the work on West African Arabic Scholars forms the concluding parts of the paper. The work conforms in styles with *Hamziyyah* of Imam al-Busayri i.e. simplicity of language, same prosodic metre even with the contents. This literal output attains a remarkable position among the adherents of the Tijaniyyah order.

Shaykh Ibrahim Nyas al-Kawlakhi

Shaykh Ibrahim b. 'Abdullahi Nyas al-Kawlakhi was born in 1902¹ to a renowned scholar, al-Hajj Abdullahi Nyas (1845-1922) at Taybah, a village near Kawlakh, Senegal. His mother was 'Aisha Bint Ibrahim. He grew up in a religious atmosphere and a surrounding healthy for learning and scholarship. His father settled down in Kawlakh in 1910. His father was known as a great scholar, a zealous reviver of the Sunnah of the Prophet. Shaykh Ibrahim studied the Qur'an under his father and memorized it. He also studied other various branches of knowledge under him².

Shaykh Ibrahim was a versatile scholar and a prolific writer. As many as seventy works have been attributed to him on various subjects including jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Arabic language and literature, Sufism, (*tasawwuf*), the life history of the Prophet (*Sirah*), etc. He was a poet of high repute who produced many anthologies. His motives for writing were multi-farious. As a *Tijaniyyah* leader³ he wrote to explain the basic tenets of the *Ta-*

1. D.A.A. Tijani (1991): "Sufism in the Arabic Poems of Shaykh Ibrahim Niass al-Kawlakhi", A Ph.D Thesis in the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan, p. 73.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

3. As asserted in one of his poems *فِي جَنَّةِ الْخُلْدِ بِلَا بَهْتَانٍ* (1) *وَمَنْ يَحْبِبُنِي وَمَنْ يَرَانِي #* (2) *إِذْ أَنَّنِي خَلِيفَةُ التَّجَانِي #* *مَمْدَمِنْ سَيِّدِ الْعَدْنَانِ .*

*riqah*⁴ and to defend them. He also wrote to answer questions which were put to him by antagonists on these tenets or to defend his own claims or views as evident in his *Raf 'ul-'Malam 'amman rafa'a wa qabada iqtida'bi Sayiddil-'anam* which he wrote to defend his views on *Qabd* (folding of arms in prayer) and raising hands in different postures in the prayer.

He delivered speeches in many international and local conferences⁵. One of the Shaykh's disciples, Ahmad Barnawi, a native of Maiduguri in Nigeria has compiled many of his speeches and epistles under the titled: *Jawahirul Rasa'il* (Precious Epistles). His first literary work is *Ruhul-Adab*, which was written in 1922 when he was twenty years old⁶. In this poetic work the Shaykh states the expected ethics for a novice, *Tariqah* aspirants and leaders with their spiritual training. In 1931, the Shaykh produced his first extensive work titled *Kashifu al-bas an Faydatil-Khatimi Abil-'Abbas*. In the book, he demonstrated that he possessed a thorough knowledge of *Tasawuf* especially that of the Tijaniyyah order.

Contents of the Work

The copy of the book examined for this research was published in Nigeria by *Allahu Muhammad* Islamic Books and Materials, Agege, Lagos. The date of publication was not indicated⁷.

The 65-page book consists of 354 poetic lines which was divided into 35 sub-headings provided by the author to guide the reader on the subject he treated. Below are the contents analyses:

1) Lines 1-17 consist of amatory prelude to the *qasidah*. The author commenced his composition with a fine amatory prelude where he intends to draw attention of the readers to the degree of love and as a rewarding act to have yearning for pious people instead of ordinary human being, male or female. He opened the ode with a *Kayfa* (how) in line 8 of the poem, a rhetorical question which denotes "amazement".

كيف مدحى له وذا الكون طرا
من ثناء وذاك زين الرجال

4. Rules and Regulations that Authenticate Membership of a Persons being in the Tijaniyyah order and What vitiates his/her oath of allegiance.

5. The Writer has a copy of book mentioned which contains many of his speeches, submissions at international meetings and conferences as well as letters to some dignitaries.

6. As mentioned at the end of the work that: try to heed at my admonition; do not under rate it, due to the age of the composer, see *Ruhul-Adab*, p. 11.

7. Shaykh Ibrahim Abdullahi (n.d) *Nurul-Bashar fi Malh Khayril-Bashar fi Siratil-Nabawiyah*, (Allahu Muhammad Islamic Books and Materials, Lagos, Agege). Cover Page.

"How do I praise him when the whole universe emerged from his honour and that he is the ornament of great men"

2) Lines 18-33 titled; 'His Lineage' trace the lineage of the Prophet from his father to his progenitor i.e. Prophet Ibrahim.

He starts thus

قد بدى أفضل الوجود كريما
من كرام أفضل أبطال
تنب فضلوا كراما وكل
محسن لا منافح بالتوال

Meaning: "The best in creation has started from a noble descent from high-born, the best of the valorous. The lineage that was regarded as noble, descent and immune from adultery, none has ever committed adultery or fornication".

This section ends thus:

وصحيح بأنه نجل إبراهيم ## هيم وهم الخليل يا للخال

"It is clear that surely he is a descendant of Ibrahim, the friend (of God), what an epithet!"

3) Lines 34-43, titled "Reachness of His Light to his father and his Pregnancy" explain how the light reached his father and mother, and how his pregnancy was carried by Aminah – the mother of the Prophet and especially some temptations that the Prophet's father, Abdullahi, passed through from other women when they noticed the light and the type of child that would come out of him. He however did not succumb to these temptations.

Series of honour from all the creatures were accorded his mother because she is carrying pregnancy of the last messenger and prophet.

4) Lines 44 - 61, titled "His Noble Birth" discuss his birth and the presence of pious women and pretty ladies of Paradise who served as midwives to the mother as he composes

واتتها قوايل أم عيسى ## ثم آسية أتت للئال

Midwives who attended her included Mariam, mother of Isa and 'Asiyah, wife of Firawn.

Series of miracles occurred during the hours of the day he was born, including the drying up of a sea and the extinguishing of a fire of *Furs* (Persia). This section also outlined how he was born in the month of Rabiul-Awwal and how surgical operation was carried out on his abdomen, how he was circumcised, and so on. Lastly, many women had expected to be the

mother of the Prophet, but Allah really honoured the daughter of Wahab (Amina). What a great honour!

5) Lines 62-68, titled "His Breast Feeding" contain his breast feeding and how Halimat al-Sa'diya became the luckiest woman to take care of the Prophet, amongst many other women who signified interest. The poet explains how the job taken up by Sadiya eventually turned her into a wealthy and recognized woman in the historical reckoning of the entire Muslim world.

6) Lines 69-72, titled "Heart Operation" shed light on the spiritual heart operation carried out by Angel Jibril on the Prophet in order to exercise feelings of hatred and bitterness against anybody.

7) Lines 73-75, titled "Death of His Mother" discuss the death of his mother, Aminah, while the Prophet was just six years old. The poet regards the incident as an unfortunate one for the orphan.

8) Lines 76-83, titled "Prophecies of earlier Prophets and others", dwell on the coming of Prophet Muhammad in the earlier revelations of other prophets.

9) Lines 84-88 titled "His Arrival and Obliteration of false religions before Him" explain the arrival of the Prophet and the destruction of paganism as well as all other false beliefs in Arabia.

10) Lines 89-108, titled "His marriage with Khadijah with her permission, her belief in the Prophet before anybody, for the signs of Prophethood she noticed and after several tries", explicitly discuss his marriage with Khadijah on her permission, after she had noticed unsurpassable character in the Prophet when he was serving under her. Khadijah's role on the first day of his Prophethood was also discussed including how she removed her veil on the first day of the revelation to confirm whether what the Prophet saw was Angel Jibril or a demon. The poet explained how Khadijah supported the Prophet with her wealth and wisdom. He also mentioned names of those who believed in the Prophet after Khadijah such as Abubakri, Umar, Uthman, AbdulRahman bn 'Awf. He narrated years of seclusion and other victimizations the Prophet received for merely delivering the message of Allah.

11) Lines 109-115, titled "His Nocturnal Journey", narrated a spiritual journey made by the Prophet to the seven heavens in the company of Angel Jibril. This was explicitly discussed. The poet opined that the state he met the Almighty Allah was indescribable. The limit and rank of the Angels cannot be compared with the status of the Prophet in the sight of Allah. This was evidenced when at a point Angel Jibril could no longer accompany the Prophet on his nocturnal journey until the fathom of the epithet - the first Caliph Abu Bakri replaced the angel. His people refused to believe him but Abubakr was the first to believe him in this journey.

12) Lines 116-117, titled "The Split of Moon" explain the splitting of the moon into two as requested by the unbelievers from the Prophet was described in a concise and clear language.

13) Lines 118-125, titled "His Dignity and People Response" discuss the response of the people on the Prophethood of Prophet Muhammad. He was tempted to withdraw from the services of Allah with huge amount, of many beautiful women and other worldly material but he was steady and firm on his mission.

14) Lines 126-128, titled "Year of Besiege", describe the year of siege which the family of the Prophet witnessed from the Makkans simply because their son was preaching against idol worshipping.

15) Line 129-133, titled "The Death of His Wife and Uncle", dwell on the Death of the Prophet's wife, Khadijah. The year was described as a year of catastrophe for the progress of his mission since those who protected him and through whom he receives comfort had departed, more so Khadijah, the mother of all his children by that time.

16) Lines 134-136, titled "His Migration to Thaqif", describe his first migration to Ta'if and how he was driven back by the hired kids who pelted him with stone. In fact, he returned barefooted and with a wounded body.

17) Lines 137-175, titled "The mighty migration and the yearning of the poet to that pure place" treat his migration to Madinah the place described by the poet as *al-Buq'atul-Mubarakah* (the blessed spot/place). He described the role of the people of al-Madinah in welcoming him. He also narrated the experience of the agonizing draught and the prayer for rain which was immediately granted by Allah. It rained for seven consecutive days. The same people also lodged their complaint about the excess of the rain for which the Prophet also prayed before it stopped. The poet also praised the Prophet on his noble conduct and how he persevered before Islam got a sound foundation firmly rooted among his followers. He devoted the last ten lines in the section the pouring encomium on the place where Prophet was received and his yearning to be in the place all the time being the fountain of knowledge, wisdom and source of human happiness. He concluded the section by marking that nothing could satisfy one unless someone touched his cheeks with this pure ground.

18) Lines 176-189, titled "Battles and Captives and letters to the King" outline the battles in Islam and the Prophet's epistles to Kings and Emperors. The poet described the first battle in Islam i.e. Battle of Badr in which the large numbers of unbelievers participated. At last, Allah strengthened the Prophet by using the angels to assist the Muslims, and the battle was won with many captives gained. The battle of Badr served as the greatest victory to the mission of the Prophet.

19) Lines 187-196, titled "Battle of Uhud" describe the battle of Uhud, especially how the Muslims suffered, as well as the purported death of the Prophet by unbelievers. It also described and how their assumed victory was turned to a blessing for Muslims who learnt never to disobey the Prophet. It was battle in which the Prophet lost his teeth and his beloved uncle, Hamzah, whose death was mourned by heaven and earth. The author ends the section with a prayer for the victory and support of Allah in both Badr and Uhud may Allah increase his (poet) progress.

20) Lines 197-199, titled "Battle of Muraysi'i", briefly discuss the battle of *Muraysi'i* which was initiated by unbelievers. The Muslims were however victorious and captured many unbelievers especially their warriors and leaders.

21) Lines 200-207, titled "Battle of Khandaq", explain the battle of *Kandaq* especially the tricks employed by Muslims before they could win the battle and the support of Almighty Allah to the Muslims by sending winds which uprooted the unbelievers and their treacherous plans.

22) Lines 203-212, titled "Treaty of Hdaybiyyah" explain the treaty of *Hdaybiyyah*. All the agreements and reactions of Muslims were stated in a concise manner.

23) Lines 211-212, titled "Jungle Justice" concisely described the jungle justice meted out on the Prophet by a tribe who hid under a mountain at night to kill the Prophet whenever he passes by their way but Allah perished them with the mountain on that very night.

24) Lines 213-215, titled "Victory of the Prophet", discuss the futile plan of the Jews at Khaybar and bani Qaynaqa^c, and how Allah made the Prophet the king and leader of the community as a whole.

25) Lines 216-226, titled "Conquest of Makkah" outline the conquest of Makkah and how the large number of migrated Muslims was overwhelmed with joy for returning to their home (Makkah) with the religion that the Holy Prophet preached for ten years without comfort or acceptance. These lines also explain how things were put in their proper places and the Prophet's forgiveness of the Prophet unbelievers who were afraid of vengeance.

26) Lines 227-232, titled "Battle of Hunayn" discuss the siege lead by the unbelievers for the Prophet, and, how the Almighty frightened them. In spite of their large number, the prophet became victorious.

27) Lines 232-235, titled "Restriction of Thaqif", contain the poet's description of the incident at Hdaybiyyah. The Prophet asked his companions to drop their ammunition and return with their large number but they thought their return was inappropriate due to their large number. However, the Prophet insisted, and the unbelievers actually voluntarily submitted to the will of Allah.

28) Lines 236-241, titled "Battle of Tabuk" describe the site of this battle as a very hot desert without a hiding place. The prophet prayed unto Allah and Allah instilled fear into the minds of the unbelievers. They eventually ran away without drawing their swords on the battle field.

29) Lines 242-245, titled "Conquest of Dawmah Jandal, Azdahu and 'Aylata villages of Rome" discuss concisely how the Prophet became victorious over these villages. Tax was demanded from Jews who needed Muslim protection. The companions of the Prophet returned home victorious with a lot of booties.

30) Lines 246-250, titled "Battles won without Fighting" enumerate the battles namely, Dhat Riqqa, Buwat Dawmatun, Ghat Afan, Sulaym, Abu Harara' and Ghaba Sawiq on which historian differ on the number of the captives. The poet said some claim 40 captives while others claim seventy.

31) Lines 251-252, titled "Epistles to the Kings", discuss how the Prophet acquainted the great Kings about his mission.

32) Lines 253-254, titled "His Delegation", discuss the various groups which visited the Prophet to register their loyalty and covenant.

33) Lines 255-264, titled "Farewell Pilgrimage" describe the farewell pilgrimage as the period when Allah perfected the religion, completed His blessings and pleasure on the religion of Islam. It mentioned how the Prophet performed the obligatory steps of Hajj and immediately after the completion he climbed the mountain where he delivered his last speech.

34) Lines 265-295, titled "Some of His Miracles", describe different miracles performed by the Prophet during his lifetime such as how Almighty Allah returned the sun from its orbit at the request of the Prophet, the glorification (*Tasbih*) of the pebbles he held in his hands, how he commanded the mountain of Uhud to be stable when he and his friend Abu Bakri were sitting on it, and so on. He then concluded with a line of poem which says:

فقلت يكفي ذكر من الله أعجا ## ذا تدبر في الغدو والأصوال

Meaning: "The Qur'an is enough as miracle on which people reflect upon in the day and night. That is the word of God which every Muslim is expected to ponder on it in day and night for guidance".

35) Lines 296-304, titled "The Death of the Prophet", explain the death of the Prophet, and the establishment of the true religion. He concludes the section by describing the scholars as the heirs of the Prophet:

إنما العالمون وارث طه ## إرثه العلم دونما الأموال

Meaning: We scholars are the heirs of Taha (the Prophet; His legacy) knowledge not wealth.

36) Lines 305-352, is titled "Poem of Plea" The conclusion of the poem was done with a section which depicts that the poet is a great scholar and a

great Sufi leader. Uncountable request was made in a beautiful fascinating style.

37) Lines 353-354, end his poetic lines with the invocation of divine blessings on the Prophet, his household and the Companions in a style the West African sufi scholars usually end their composition:

وصلاة كذا تضاعف دأباً ## وعلى صحبك الرضى والآل

Meaning: May the multiple blessings of Allah persist (on him the prophet) and his pleasant companions and his household.

A STUDY OF THE STYLE

The author adopted New Historicism in the presentation of his facts⁸. The contextualizations of the work were superstructural. This made the work to be a very straight forward analysis with synchronic analyses of language and literature.

Nurul-Bashar fi Madh Khayril-Bashar was the best product of the Shaykh in the field of *sirah*[the history of the prophet]. The author spelt it out in his preface thus⁹:

ولم أسلك فيه مسلك أهل السيرة من استيفاء الآثار
وتتبع القصص والتواريخ بل أنا لم أذكر قصة إلا
بتلميح غالباً غير أنى رتبت أطواره صلى الله عليه
وسلكت تبعاً للعلامة النبھانى فى طيبة .

Meaning: I did not follow the method of the historians in retrieving information and records or style of story narration neither on events. But I did not mention any event unless I make a substantive reference to it. The accounts are serially arranged regarding the Prophet to conform to Shaykh Nabahani's sequential order of his legend on the Prophet.

The author acknowledged that he followed the style of *al-Hamziyyah* of *al-Busayri*. The style of the work is elegant and smooth. The author chose *Bahrul-Khafif* in his *Lamiyyah* rhyme with an elision which is known as *al-Khabn* that affects the metre; that is, an elision of *sukun* of the first *sabab* which turned to *Wataḍ Majmu'* and this is permissible. The scanning runs thus:

كيف مدحى له وذا الكون طرا
من ثناء وذاك زين الرجال

8. Read more on New Historicism.

9. p. 1.

Al-Busayri also applied the same prosodic meter in his composition of *al-Hamziyyah*¹⁰. Although Imam Busayri did not classify his own work into sections and sub-sections, the simplicity of the language could lead someone with ease to the subject he was discussing.

To be precise, the language of the poem is simple, rhetorical and concise in description. The author fulfilled the two conditions of an erudite scholar cum poet. It is one thing to know what to say and another thing is to know how to say it in order to gain the full attention of one's audience.

Rhetorical Devices

The author in line 48 used a complex simile (التشبيه البليغ) to compare the Prophet to a sun, which dispel the darkness at its rising¹¹.

كروشمس تيزغت إن شمس الـ
مطقت شععت ظلام الضلال

Sunlight that rised, surely the sun of the Prophet rise and made the darkness of ignominy disappeared.

The birth of the Prophet to the world was likened to the sun and the situation of the Arab and the world in general was likened to people who had gone astray because of darkness. His birth thus signified which directed them to the righteous path. He also used a direct simile as he said in line 108.

فدعا الله فاستجاب دعاءه ## صار كل العدى له كالعيال

Meaning: He prayed unto Allah, and the prayer requested was granted. All his enemies turned to His family (blossom friend) as the kind of love wife, children husband has to his husband, parent and wife respectively¹².

Grammatical Conformity

قلت يكفى ذكر من الله أعجا ## زا تدبر فى الغدو والأصا

It is quite enough to mention a miracle that comes from Allah

On which (every mankind) ponders on it Day and Night (al-Qur'an)¹³.

The grammatical arrangement in the context was made to conform to prosodic rule, the author used in his composition. The object (أعجازا) came after (من الله) with grammatical rule, The sentence is (يكفى ذكر إعجازا من الله).

10. Sharafud-din al-Busayri, *Al-Hamziyyah Ummul Qira fi Madh Khayril Wata* contains 458 lines. It consists of Medieval legend of the Prophet and the figure of Prophet Muhammad which were also enumerated in a concise way. The Metre used by the poet is also the same.

11. p. 6 كيف ترقى رقيق الأنبياء يا سماء طاولتها السماء

12. p. 10 كيف مدحى له وذا الكون ط ايلا من ثناء وذاك زين الرجل

13. p. 28.

Elements in Sufi Style of Composition

Mystical way of supplication was not left out in the work as he says in line 308.

بكم ثم منكم وإليكم ## دعوتى ثم مطلبى وسؤالى

Meaning: With you then from you and to you

I focused my prayer on, then my requests and my needs¹⁴.

It is a mystical method of supplication when a sufist sees that nothing was left out from the love he or she has for something. As the author confirmed thus in line 312, He says:

حبيكم قد يرى كبودى وأضنى ## جسدى أهل البيت أهل النوال

Meaning: Your love has healed the wound of my lever also made my body restless (to join) the family of the Prophet and what a magnanimous family¹⁵.

He said the love he has for the Prophet has really cured the wound he was nursing for not ^{being} able to attain the highest position which he eventually attained. But being Black in complexion really debarred him to be among the noble household of the Prophet. This made his body restless or lean.

Impact of the Work on West African Sufi Orders

Nurul Basar plays a significant role among West Africa Sufi orders, especially during Mawlidul-Nabiyyi celebration. This was also witnessed in June 2006 at Madinatul Kawlakh Senegal¹⁶ as well as in July 2006 at Ilorin, August at Offa, Kwara State and July at Lagos State of Nigeria during their Mawlidul Nabiyyi celebrations¹⁷. At these celebrations, a scholar will recite the lines of *Nurul Basar* while the audience responds with the opening verse of the poem (*Matla'il-Bayt*)¹⁸. According to the interview conducted¹⁹, people assumed that the spirit of the Prophet would be present; therefore, due attention is concentrated on the chanting. *Nurul Basar* has now gained acceptance among West African scholars in general and Sufi orders in parti-

14. p. 29.

15. *Ibid*.

16. "Hamziyyah recitation was led by the eldest son of the Shaykh – Nadhir Ibrahim Nyas on an occasion witnessed by the writer on 22/06/2006.

17. A personal observation during the Maolud Nabiyyi Celebrations of the mentioned branches of Tijaniyyah group in Nigeria.

18. *Matla'il Bayt* means the first line of the Poem which depict the degree of poet's competence and with which people use to chant the remaining lines of the poem.

19. An interview granted by Shaykh Nurul Faydan age 53 years. Leader, Jamā'at Zawiyah Shaykh Tijani Mazankore: July 17, 2007 during his Maolud Nabiyyi Celebration at Mazankore Compound – Balogun Gambari, Ilorin, Nigeria.

cular especially the *Tawassul*²⁰, which ended the *Qasidah* in an emotional plain, elegant with impressive language and style.

In conclusion, the author demonstrated his academic and poetic competence in the composition of his poem. (He also adopted a modern approach to his narration in a chronological arrangement with a sub-heading that made it easier for the reader to understand the subject matter). He was able to drive his point's home to his receptors. *Nurul-Basar* is also enough for any researcher who intends an in-depth study of the work especially its translation. There is no doubt that Shaykh Ibrahim Nyas, the author of many works, had a great impact on numerous West Africa Arabic scholars.

SUMMARY

Nurul Basar fi Madhi Sayyidil Basar of Shaykh Ibrahim Nyas of Senegal is a *qasidah* of 354 lines of poetry on *Sirah* [Historical Life of Prophet Muhammad]. The study opens its discussion with a biographical account of the author and his literary contributions to Arabic and Islamic branches of learning. The analysis of contents forms the first main focus of the paper; the appraisal of styles follows as the second main discussion. The influence of the poem on African history writers, Arabic scholars and how it attains a remarkable position among the Tijaniyyah order ends the discussion.

20. *Tawassul* – means Poem composed as a plea for certain requests.