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**SOME IMPORTANT TOPICS OF  
*MAKTUBAT-I-SADI* AND THEIR  
PHILOSOPHICO-SPIRITUAL  
SIGNIFICANCE**

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**Abstract**

Hazrat Sharafuddin bin Yahyah Maneri was a scholar and Sufi of the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries. He was a prolific writer. One of his important books is a collection of letters titled *Maktubat-i-Sadi*. The article focuses to bring out the main themes of the book and identified ten topics to discussed. They are: 1. Concept and love of God; 2. Deceiving nature of the world; 3. Sin and repentance; 4. Necessity of a qualified spiritual guide and obedience to his guidance; 5. Origin and need of Sufism; 6. Poverty and its role in the purification of evil soul; 7. Rendering selfless service to others; 8. Fate and predestination; 9. Observance

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of the Shariah; and 10. Acquisition of good qualities and shunning of the evil ones. The philosophical and spiritual significance of these teachings have been pointed out in this article.

**Keywords:** Divine love, Purification of soul, Repentance, Spiritual guide, Poverty, Selfless service, Good and bad qualities.

## Introduction

Makhdum al-Mulk Sharafuddin bin Yahyah Maneri (Rh) (1263-1381) was one of the few great Islamic scholars in the medieval period of Islam who later turned completely to Sufism and contributed substantially to the understanding of the mode of existence and attributes of Allah (SWT) and His relation to human beings, especially the believers. Believer's effort to know Allah (SWT) and follow His commands, he faces many problems both internal and external. Maneri addresses some of these problems in a way that is indicative of his profound knowledge of Islam on the one hand and a deeper understanding of the inner world of human beings on the other.

In this article I have tried to glean from his *Maktubat-i-Sadi* some such topics which are perennially relevant to one's spiritual journey. I have also made an effort to bring out their philosophical import. In his letters Maneri has repeatedly expressed the truth that Allah (SWT) is neither a philosophical concept, nor a creation of human imagination out of his need or nature. He is Source of everything, the Creator and Sustainer of all. He is not indifferent to His creature rather He is concerned with them and loves His creatures very much. Maneri emphasizes the fact that believers can get into an intimate relation with Him

where He reveals His beauties and boundaries of the eyes and minds to them.

*Maktubat-i-Sadi* is full of wisdoms and provides necessary guidance for one who aspires to get the knowledge of the Reality and is eager to establish a close relationship with the only substantive and necessary Existence. Maneri has written on many topics and issues in the *Maktubat*. His guidance on these issues is indispensable for the seeker of Truth and lover of Allah. Keeping in view the importance of his guidance I have chosen the following topics for this research. I have deliberately profusely quoted from the *Maktubat* to allow Maneri to speak for himself mainly for two reasons. Firstly, I sincerely want that the readers of my article be familiar with Maneri's own style of presentation for making a point. Secondly, I believe that if he can speak for his position that will have a tremendous and positive effect on the readers. Condensing or giving a summary of his contentions will not have that much impact or influence. Regarding the philosophico-spiritual significance of the issues discussed or points made I would like to say two things. Firstly, that at times their significance is interspersed and at other times brought out separately. Secondly, significance of some issues was pointed out by Maneri himself. I have also tried to indicate the significance of some other topics or added something to Maneri's points in the changed context of our times.

Now, I shall mention the heading of the topics of the paper then I shall discuss each topic individually in what follows:

1. Concept and love of God
2. Deceiving nature of the world
3. Sin and repentance

4. Necessity of a qualified guide and obedience to his guidance
5. Origin and need of Sufism
6. Poverty and its role in the purification of evil soul
7. Rendering selfless service to others
8. Fate and predestination
9. Observance of the Shariah
10. Acquisition of good qualities and shunning of the evil ones

### **1. Concept and love of God**

Today a large number of people are professedly atheists, skeptics and agnostics. Many among those who claim to be believers are indifferent to the demands that such a belief entails. Still there are others whose beliefs and practices are mixed up with some of the beliefs and practices of the polytheists. A close study of Maneri reveals that his observations arise out of a deep philosophical insight and profound spiritual existence. If we now look at our conditions, we find the reason why we are not getting what Allah (SWT) promised to us to give in this world and I am afraid we might not get what is promised to us as the Ummah of the holy Prophet (Sm) in the world to come.

It is late but not too late to mend our individual and Ummahtic conditions in the light of the suggestions that Maneri instructs. If we can do that, if we can acquire a right belief in Allah (SWT) and are able to establish the right kind of relation to Him the situation here and hereafter will also change to our benefit.

According to Maneri,

... belief in the Unity of God can be divided into four stages. In the first of these a person proclaims, “There is no God!”<sup>1</sup> but his heart is devoid of faith. Such belief is hypocrisy and will prove profitless in the next life. In the second stage a person both proclaims, “There is no God but God” (Q.47:19) and believes in his heart that is this so.... Sufis say that such faith prevents people from falling into crass polytheism and saves them from languishing eternally in hell. It also ensures entrance into Paradise.... The third stage is said to be reached when a person’s soul is illuminated in such a way that he is able to perceive every action following from a single source and deriving from a single agent.... in the fourth stage, such a surfeit of the dazzling divine light becomes manifest to the pilgrim that every single existing particle that lies within his vision becomes concealed in the every luster of that light just as particles in the air are lost to sight on account of the brightness of the light emanating from the sun. This occurs not because of the particles have ceased to exist but rather because the intensity of the sunlight makes it impossible that anything other than this concealment should result. In the same way, it is not true that a person becomes God – for God is infinitely greater than any man – nor has the person really ceased to exist, for ceasing to exist is one thing, becoming lost to view quite another. (Maneri, 1980, pp.12-13)

He speaks of hidden polytheism and this he bases on the tradition of the Prophet saying that: “Among my people polytheism is more hidden than the movement of an ant on a black stone in the dark night.” (Maneri, 1980, p.169) He also spells out the signs of this kind of polytheism: “Whoever is afraid of anything except God, or places his expectations anywhere but in Him – even though there is no question at all

of the fundamentals of the faith – such a person really espouses polytheism.” (Maneri, 1980, p.172)

Knowledge of God cannot be obtained by intellect. Intellect at best can “only indicate where the way lies, for by itself it is ineffectual.” (Maneri, 1980, p.176) Further, “It has been established that knowledge of the Lord is granted only through His guidance.” (Maneri, 1980, p.176)

Maneri also admits that none can know the Almighty completely. In this context he states: “True knowledge consists in finding the way to perceive the Adorable One just as He is, in His essence, His attributes, and His action, without fault, shortcoming, or imperfection.” (Maneri, 1980, p.177)

Al Quran insists utmost love for God from the believers. Maneri makes a distinction between affectionate love and passionate love (Maneri, 1980, pp.192-195). In one’s attempt to love Allah, affectionate love comes first and it culminates in the passionate love of Allah. “... passionate love comes through illumination. The Eternal Friend generates it.” (Maneri, 1980, 195)

Maneri guides the seeker through different grades and eventually takes him reach the level of passionate love. To quote him:

As long as a person worships, he is called a ‘devotee’; as long he knows God, he is called a ‘wise man’; as long he perceives God, he is called a ‘gnostic’; as long as he turns away from all that is not God, he is called an ‘ascetic’; as long as he lives righteously, he is called a ‘sincere one’; as long as he treads the path of friendship, he is called an ‘eager one’; and when he throws away all created beings in order to accept Him, he

is called a 'friend'; and as long as he makes a gift of himself while witnessing Him, he is called a 'lover'; and he becomes such that both his annihilation and his permanence perish in His existence once and for all, he is called a 'passionate lover'. (Maneri, 1980, p.194)

Elsewhere Maneri speaks of four stages in one's advancement towards the final stage of divine love. He says:

A seeker [of Allah] advances by four stages to that of very great revelation. The first is dread; the second is fear; the third, apprehension; and the fourth, fearing. These fears are inspired, in their respective order, by the punishment to come, by separation from creatures, by seeing some deficiency while contemplating God, by fearing that union with God might come to an end. The various fruits of these fears are, in order; keeping one's hands off the world, which is the stage of a devotee; cutting oneself off from all except the Friend, the stage of righteous one; the ability to pass beyond what is not God, the stage of lovers; and finally, being united to the Lord, the stage of perfected Sufis. (Maneri, 1980, 197)

Maneri alongside the love of Allah also speaks of His fear. In fact, the title of his latter # 64 is "The fear of God." He says: "Fear of God is a great possession." (Maneri, 1980, p.260) He also says:

... who fear God will pass beyond the seven stages of hell like fish in water. Hell itself does not possess the strength to give them proper respect. For they are kings, and their royal signet is this: "God loves those who fear Him!" Just as those who fear God cannot be enclosed in hell, neither can they be contained in the eight heavens. (Maneri, 1980, p.259)

Now what is the sign that one has fear of Allah? Maneri replies: "Fear of God means that you do not look down on any

creature with a contemptuous eye. If an ant has pursued your path, you should not have the gall to stomp on it.” (Maneri, 1980, p.261) According to Maneri there are three steps for a disciple towards his journey to Allah: “The first step of a disciple is to observe the Law, with all his strength and energy.” (Maneri, 1980, p.228) The second step is “the way to the heart.” (Maneri, 1980, p.228) The third step comes after this and it is the way to life or the Truth. (Cf., Maneri, p.228) According to him there are four stages of the Way to Allah:

The first stage is the world of humanity; the second, the world of sovereignty; the third, that of power; and the fourth, the world of divinity. Until he has passed through the world of humanity, he cannot reach the one of sovereignty; nor can he arrive at the world of power until he has passed through that of sovereignty. Finally, only after having traversed the world of power, can he reach that of divinity. (Maneri, 1980, p.228)

## **2. Deceiving nature of the world**

Maneri sees the world as a great deceiver. A seeker of love of Allah must be aware of this deceptive nature of the world and must guard him against all kinds of transitory allurements of the world and its contents. To quote him: “When this inner meaning discloses itself to the disciple, he turns his face from all creatures and, in quest of Him, grids up his lions and commits himself to a veritable Holy War against his soul.” (Maneri, 1980, p.225)

If we carefully read and realise what Maneri has to say and in the light of that if we look at ourselves it becomes clear that we have been obsessed with and engrossed in the love of the world rather than the love of Allah and His beloved Prophet Muhammad (Sm). We are also getting what has been promised



for the lovers of the world and forsakes of the way to Allah (SWT). I believe that we sincerely want, we can come out of the deception and consequent evil effect of the love of the world. In this context what we need to believe and do has been articulated by Maneri. We shall now listen to what he says:

When the world of divine Unity has been disclosed to the inner vision of the novice, he finds that any being that has come into existence through creation is “other” and he perceives that the denial of “other” is a precondition for attaining Unity. (Maneri, 1980, p.153)

In this context he further says:

Everyone who has looked with the glance of divine Unity and seen this existence of the universe as something other than God, and found that whatever is other than God is transient and destructible, has then rushed toward the world of divine Unity. (Maneri, 1980, p.154)

But one cannot get rid of the deception of the world unless Allah helps him. He says: “Total understanding can be gained only insofar as the secret is revealed by God, and everything other than God has been left behind. When the might of God’s power is witnessed, all fears about it vanish;” (Maneri, 1980, p.159) A human person wishing to get closer to Allah should submit herself/himself to Divine Will completely and keep herself/himself away from sins. Maneri says in this context:

... God can [also] be reached through both of them. It would mean that a person does not pay attention to his worship but does take heed of his sins. When he does not look at his worship, he notices his wretched cunning! He brings forward lamentation and prayers of petition, but not by way of claim. All his attention is focused on God’s bounty, not on his own worship. (Maneri, 1980, p.162)

Thus, it is seen that man can reach God by: ‘worshipful submission’ or he may be cut off from God by: ‘sinful rebellion’. (Cf., Maneri, 1980, p.162) But to come out of the deception of this world is not an easy task. There are many obstacles as he points out as below:

They say that the real hindrances and veils of the servant are four: the world, creatures, Satan, and one’s ego. This world veils the next; creatures, worship; Satan, religion; our ego, the Lord. When a novice undergoes austerities, he emerges from the veil of this world. When he embraces the life of seclusion and solitude, he emerges from the veil of creatures. When he resolves to follow fully the Tradition of Muhammad [Sm] he emerges from the veil of Satan; and when he engages in austerities and struggle with self and turns away from following his selfish inclinations, he emerges from the veil of his ego. (Maneri, 1980, pp.142-143)

A seeker, however, should not be disappointed from Allah’s Grace and Mercy. His help is there with him. To quote Maneri: “... when the glory and greatness of God become known to a disciple, and the pain of seeking has taken hold of the border of his garment, and he realizes that “all things belong to Him who is designated Lord”, he then sees that he has to flee from everything except God, whereas there is no escape whatsoever from God Himself, ....” (Maneri, 1980, p.250) Now the decisive part that the seeker has to play in this situation is that he will have to secede his relation with the world as Maneri says: “Separation from this world restores union with God.” (Maneri, 1980, p.65)

### 3. Sin and repentance

Believers are in a situation of sinfulness but they too can reach Allah (SWT) by overcoming their sinful state and this is possible by sincere repentance. Therefore, repentance has become an abiding theme in Maneri's letters. Believers should not be distressed and disappointed because of their sins. They should instead be optimistic because of the force of repentance in their lives. The phenomenon of sin is a reality, and repentance is a possibility but this possibility can be made real by the repentant. This is why to despair from Allah (SWT)'s Grace and Mercy is tantamount to *Kufr* (unbelief). What would be happened with humans if the doors of repentance were not open to them? Sinners when become aware of their sins and their consequences, they are always haunted by what is called the *horror of sin* which would eventually make them insane. Without the existence and operation of the phenomenon of repentance the disbelievers could never become believers and sinners pious. It also happens that even after repentance one cannot stick to what one promises to Allah (SWT). What would be one's mental state in such a situation? Maneri also addresses this ever-recurring situation in human condition and his answer is optimistic and pro-life, not pessimistic and consequently life-denying. He consoles the penitents that they should not despair even if they cannot stick to their repentance and again commit sins; they should rather make repeated repentance. (Cf., Maneri, 1980, p.20) In other words, they should frequently renew their repentance and Maneri encourages them to this effect. (Cf., Maneri, 1980, pp.22-25) As already noted, Maneri gives special emphasis on repentance. This becomes more important from the fact that in his *Maktubat* there are eight letters on repentance

alone. The gist of his contention on sin in his own word is: “The actual meaning of repentance is ‘turning back’.” (Maneri, 1980, p.16) There are various forms of repentance depending on the circumstances of the repentant but whatever be one’s circumstances repentance is obligatory for all. (Cf., Maneri, 1980, p.16) He quotes from the Qur’an: “Allah loves those who repent. He loves those who keep themselves pure and clean.” (The Qur’an, 2:222)

Maneri is very optimistic about the role of repentance. He says: “Why do you fix your attention on your own sin? Why do you look at what is but water and dust? Look at the One who is with you! You want to refrain from sinning, but are unable to refrain because you are someone who sins, while He is One who forgives.” (Op. Cit., Maneri, 1980, p.311)<sup>32</sup> Cf. in this connection the letter number 78, the title of which is ‘Hope and Fear’. (Maneri, 1980, pp.319-322)

We are no doubt sinful and have committed uncountable sins of all kinds but the gate of repentance has not been closed, rather it has been kept wide open for us. Now the choice is ours whether to get through the gate of repentance and be among those who have been forgiven or to roam about in the wilderness of sin and forgetfulness. He consoles the seeker that faith is between hope and fear of Allah. A seeker must be completely fearful of Allah, at the same time s/he must not be disappointed at any circumstances. Now the point is that at this state of ours when we are in a spiritually sick condition, we cannot do the needful on our own. We need someone who is experienced and qualified in this respect to catch our hands and guide us through the jungle of darkness of sin. This has briefly been pointed out in the next section.

#### **4. Necessity of a qualified spiritual guide and obedience to his guidance**

This is not enough that one seeks such a guide and succeeds to get one. He must also try his best to follow his instructions obediently and completely. Journey towards the love of Allah is not a bed of roses. This is, instead, full of thorns. Hence a seeker of God's love must have someone knowledgeable and helpful beside him. Maneri makes this point very clearly:

Remember, too, that an ordinary road is infested with thieves and robbers, so that one cannot travel along it without an escort. As for the mystic Way, the world, one's ego, devils, men, and jinn all infest this Way, thus making it impossible to travel along it without an experienced holy man as one's escort. Remember, further, that there are many slippery places where it is easy to fall. (Maneri, 1980, p.26)

#### **5. Origin and need of Sufism**

Most people think that Sufism is a later phenomenon in Islam. This arose towards the end of the first Islamic century. But Maneri's view is very different. To quote him: "It has been said that the first Sufi in the world was Adam." (Maneri, 1980, p.90) Further, "The beginning of this Way came from Adam, and its completion was found in Muhammad, the Apostle of Allah." (Maneri, 1980, p.91)

In fact, Sufi path or the Way has its basis in the Shariah (Islamic Laws) itself. He says: "The Way is a path that stems from the Law. The Law expounds divine Unity, purity, prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, the holy war, religious tax, together with other obligations and concerns, while the Way seeks the reality behind all these prescribed things." (Maneri, 1980, p.102)

## **6. Poverty and its role in the purification of evil soul**

Maneri puts utmost emphasis on total purification – purification of one’s both aspects – external and internal. He says: “The first step is to see that one’s body, clothes, and food are pure and lawful. All one’s senses should be purified of sin and rebellion. As for one’s heart, it should be cleansed of all blameworthy qualities, such as avarice, jealousy, rancor and other similar things.” (Maneri, 1980, pp.115-116) He further says: “The sheikhs have insisted on the necessity of both external and internal purification and have laid great stress on it.” (Maneri, 1980, p.118) Thus, it is seen that poverty and hunger, when taken positively, play a vital role in the purification of evil soul.

## **7. Rendering selfless service to others**

Helping others in their needs both material and spiritual plays a very important role in the seekers’ progress towards divine love. He quotes the Prophet saying: “Being quick to assist widows or the poverty-stricken is like fighting a holy war on the Way to the Lord, or like observing the fast by day and keeping vigil by night.” (Cf., Maneri, 1980, p.294, also, Cf., p.146, ff.) He further says: “... the progress and salvation of man depends on the grade of service he has attained.” (Maneri, 1980, p.147) To quote from him again: “... there can be no expectation of proper service from anyone who has not weighed himself in the Scales beyond compare and discovered his own vanity.” (Maneri, 1980, p.151) To bring out the importance of the rights of others, we cite a few more quotations from Hazrat Maneri: “With regard to goods, it is necessary, whenever possible, to return anything illegally obtained to its rightful owner.” (Maneri, 1980, p.18) Maneri reminds us of the importance of selfless service in this

way: “O brother, everyone who has the yoke of service around his neck is master of his world!” (Maneri, 1980, p.146) He recounts the benefits of this kinds of service. Thus: “Numerous are the benefits that accrue to the person engaged in service.” (Maneri, 1980, p.293) To qualify for such a service the service giver must have the following mental state. To quote Maneri in this regard: “A precondition of service, however, is to abandon entirely one’s own wishes, desires and control over one’s own affairs ....” (Maneri, 1980, p.294)

## 8. Fate and predestination

Many people are satisfied with their actual spiritual state. They sincerely believe that Allah has ordained everything and that they have nothing to do to the contrary. Maneri is against sitting idle on the plea that everything is preordained. He quotes the Prophet: “Exert yourselves and then will you be granted what has been promised ... Don’t withdraw your hand!” (Maneri, 1980, p.75) He also quotes a Sufi saying: “It was the question of fate and predestination that killed us.” (Maneri, 1980, p.167) It is quite interesting to note in this connection that the title of his letter number 77 is ‘The Secrets of Fate and Predestination.’ (Cf., Maneri, 1980, pp.315-318)

Hazrat Maneri encourages a seeker of Allah (SWT) in an attractive way. Let us listen to him and be inspired:

... you are now but an ant, yet you can become a Solomon. Do not be preoccupied with your sinfulness. Though you might now be fainthearted, you can develop great courage. Do not lay stress on your present impure and mean condition, but rather on what it is possible for you to achieve. For many long years there have been followers of the Way. Consider Adam;

he came from mud and water. Though an orphan raised by Abu Talib, Muhammad [Sm] became the Messenger of God. From Azar the idol-maker – came Abraham, the Friend of God. Consider also how polytheists have become monotheists; unbelievers, believers; sinners, followers of the Way; and mischief-makers, peacemakers! (Maneri, 1980, p.15)

Maneri's position on fate and predestination becomes clearer from what he says. To quote him: "Neither is God's might dependent on man's obedience, nor is His Grace determined by man's sin." (Maneri, 1980, p.15)

## 9. Observance of the Shariah

Many people who claim themselves to be Sufi think that Shariah is for the beginners, not for the advanced ones. There are still others who believe that there are other roads than Shariah to get closer to Allah. Maneri totally rejects both these positions. He says that Muhammad [Sm] is the master and the leader of the Sufis and there is no alternative to have a firm belief in his Shariah and follow it with one's heart and soul. Let us listen to his own words on the importance of ritually ordained prayer: "He should never seek to escape from any prayer. Let him perform the five prayers along with the congregation. When one prayer is over let him prepare for the next ...." (Maneri, 1980, p.111) In this connection his letter number 32, the title of which is 'Ritual Prayer' may profitably be read for understanding the importance of the observance of the Shariah. (Maneri, 1980, pp.123-127)

Maneri gives much importance to the remembrance of Allah (SWT), meditation and recitation from the Qur'an. (Cf., Letter No., 36, Maneri, 1980, pp.137-141) He also emphasises the need for supererogatory prayer as well as fasting (saum),



Cf. letter no.33, the title of which is ‘Fasting’; (Maneri, 1980, pp.127-130), almsgiving, Cf. letter no.34, the title of which is ‘Almsgiving’; (Maneri, 1980, pp.131-133), and pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj), Cf. letter no.35, the title of which is ‘Pilgrimage to Mecca.’ (Maneri, 1980, pp.133-137) Hazrat Maneri discovers the basic objective behind divine commands. Divine commands are meant not to give troubles to us rather they are for our benefit and enjoyment. He says in this context: “Allah does not give man orders for the sake of work, but for the sake of the joy of what is commanded.” (Maneri, 1980, p.157)

### **10. Acquisition of good qualities and shunning of the evil ones**

Maneri gives much emphasis on the acquisition of good qualities and the shunning of the evil ones. Thus, he strongly condemns the practice of backbiting, blaming, troubling others, avarice, jealousy, anger etc. and asks the seeker to cultivate the qualities of speaking the truth, helping others, treating well of women and slave girls, providing food to the needy etc. In this context what Maneri says is very relevant: “... backbiting, blaming or troubling others in various ways [are very bad; so] it is necessary for you to admit your backbiting to the person concerned and to seek his forgiveness.” (Maneri, 1980, p.19) In providing service to others, one should not consider the caste or creed of the needy. And on the top of everything we must remember that every good action must be performed only for the satisfaction of Allah (SWT). This is right intention and right intention is a prerequisite for an action to be acceptable to Allah (SWT). (Cf., Maneri, 1980, p.120) A quotation from Maneri in this connection is very important. He says: “Each person is weighed in the scale

of his intention, which is dependent on his sincerity.” (Maneri, 1980, p.121) Similarly, sincerity of purpose is very important; it was important in the past and it is all the more important now – in our present time when not only temporal deeds are being performed for name and fame but also the religious ones are being done for worldly gain or reputation.

In the light of our above discussion, we can claim that the topics we have chosen in this article have profound and far-reaching impact upon lives and actions of the seekers of truth and lovers of Allah (SWT).

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