



A CONCISE BIOGRAPHY OF

SHAIKH ABDUR RAHMAN JAMI

رحمته الله عليه

Shaikh Mir Asedullah Quadri

**SHAIKH ABDUR RAHMAN
JAMI (رحمته الله عليه)**

Written By

SHAIKH MIR ASEDULLAH QUADRI

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الحمد لله رب العالمين، والصلاة والسلام
على سيدنا محمد وعلى آله وصحبه أجمعين

INTRODUCTION

Shaikh Abdur Rahman Jami (1414-1492) was a Persian Sahih-ul-Aqeedah scholar, poet, theologian, prolific writer, and Sufi Shaikh of Ihsan. His Persian poetry is extremely popular even today. His most famous poetic works are 'The Seven Thrones (بفت اورنگ), consisting of 7 Mathnawis, viz, (i), The Golden Chain (سلسلة الذهب), (ii) Yusuf and Zulaikha (يوسف و زليخا), (iii) The Rosary of the Pious (سبحة الابرار), (iv) Salaman and Absaal (سلامان و ايسال), (v) The Gift of the Nobles (تحفة الاحرار), (vi) Layla Majnun (ليلي مجنون), (vii) Iskander Book of Wisdom (خردنامه اسكندري). His other famous works include his Sufi poetical work like Lawah-e-Jami (لوائح جامي). He belonged to the Naqshbandi Sufi order.

BLESSED BIRTH

Nooruddin Abdur Rahman Ibn Ahmad Jami (نورالدين عبدالرحمن ابن احمد جامي) was born on Monday, Nov. 7, 1414 (Sha'ban 23, 817 AH) in Jam, Khorasan (currently Ghor Province, Afghanistan). His father's name was Nizamuddin Ahmad bin Shamsuddin Mohammad. His grandparents lived in Dast, a small town in the district of Isfahan. Probably his father was born in Dast. Later, they immigrated to Khorasan sometime in 14th Century.

Jami's early pen name was Dasti because his family originally belonged to Dast. Later, he chose his pen name as Jami. He wrote the reasons why he chose the new pen name Jami in one of his poems, as follows.

مولدم جام و رشحهء قلمم

جرعهء جام شيخ الاسلامي است

لاجرم در جریدهء اشعار

به دو معنی تخلص جامی است

My birthplace is Jam, and my pen

Was drunk from (the knowledge of) Shaikh-ul-Islam (Ahmad) Jam

Hence in the books of poetry

My pen name is Jami for these two reasons.

EARLY LIFE

Some reports suggest that Jami was born in a small village Kārjerd which was part of Jam district. This village was midway between Mashad and Herat, where he spent his childhood.

In Jam, Aḥmad (the father of Jami) was a prominent member of the community and his house was frequented by the learned and the pious. It is reported that Naqshbandi Sufi Shaikh Khwaja Mohammad Parsa stopped in the town of Jam on his way to Makka to see the 5-year-old child Jami. The authenticity of this report is disputed but it indicates that his father was famous and had the understanding and resources to provide Jami with his earliest education in Persian and Arabic.

EDUCATION

When Jāmi was in his teens, he and his father moved to Herat where he pursued further education in theology, Arabic grammar, and literature. Young Jami soon established himself as a brilliant student and an upcoming scholar, a reputation he consolidated in Samarkand, the principal center of learning in Khorasan in the first half of the 15th century.

Jami continued his studies in Samarqand and Herat throughout his twenties displaying a remarkable memory and powerful intellect in all fields of learning from the study of Hadith to Astronomy and Mathematics.

It is reported that Jami fell in love with a girl in Herat but could not marry her. Disheartened and saddened, he left Herat and went back to Samarqand.

SHUYOOKH OF JAMI

Around this time, it is reported that Jami went through a spiritual crisis. One night he saw in his dream Sufi Shaikh Sa'aduddin Kashgari, who lived in Herat, asking him to come back to Herat, leave his scholarship pursuit in Samarqand and embark on the Sufi path. After this dream Jami went back to Herat, gave up his scholarly career, and embarked upon the Sufi path under Shaikh Sa'aduddin.

Naqshbandi Sufi order and Timurid dynasty had a great relationship those days. As Jami joined the Naqshbandi Sufi Order, it shaped the rest of Jami's life. Through the influence of Shaikh Sa'aduddin, Jami was introduced to the royal Timuri court. One of his earliest surviving works of Jami, 'The Ornament of Ornaments' (Helya-ye-holal), written in 1452, was dedicated to the Timurid ruler, Abul Qasim Babor.

Jami maintained his affiliation with the Timurid court in Herat when the ruler Abu Sa'id bin Moḥammad came to power in 1457, and he dedicated the first recension of his Divan to this ruler in 1463.

After the death of Sa'aduddin in 1456, Khwaja Obaidullah Ahrar filled the spiritual void in Jami's life. Khwaja Obaidullah Ahrar was the spiritual advisor of Timurid ruler Abu Sa'id. Jami and Shaikh Obaidullah Ahrar maintained a close and mutually beneficial relationship for the following three decades. During this time, Jami played the role of a deputy of Khwaja Obaidullah Ahrar in Herat. Under Khwaja Ahrar, Jami began writing his first major poetical work, the first book of 'The Golden Chain'. (سلسلة الذهب).

In 1459, he wrote his Arabic commentary titled 'Criticism of the texts in explaining the meanings of Fusus Al-Hikam (نقدالنصوص في شرح نقش الفصوص). Fusus Al-Hikam was written by Shaikh Ibn Arabi whose writings played prominent role in Naqshbandi Sufi Order.

Khwaja Ahrar was active primarily in central Asia, and he and Jami did not have the close relationship such as that of a Sufi master and disciple, but Jami did travel north from Herat on several occasions to meet his Shaikh in Samarqand, Merv, and Tashkent.

JAMI'S ASSOCIATION WITH RULING ELITE

When Sultan Ḥussain Baiqara seized power in Herat in 1470, Jami was a respected teacher and spiritual leader in the city and had already established close ties with Sultan Ḥussain's powerful advisor and Vizier, Alisir Nava'i.

When Jami was setting out to go on pilgrimage to Makka in 1472, Sultan Ḥussain equipped Jāmi's entourage and provided him with letters of introduction to the local rulers he would encounter on his way. Traveling west through Nishapur, Semnan, and Qazvin, Jami received a warm welcome from Shah Manucehr, the governor of Hamdan, to whom he dedicated his famous Sufi poetry 'Jami's Flashes' (لوائح جامي).

From Hamdan, Jami proceeded to Baghdad, where he resided for six months in 1472-73. Later he traveled to Makka for Hajj. After performing the Hajj in May 1473, Jami began his return trip to Khorasan, stopping at Damascus and Aleppo.

While in Aleppo, he received an invitation from the Ottoman Sultan Moḥammad II to join his court in Istanbul. Not swayed by the money and gifts that accompanied this invitation, Jami moved quickly to avoid these golden shackles and arrived in Herat in January 1474. In addition to its religious purposes, Jami's pilgrimage served to enhance his reputation and establish a network of political and scholarly connections that extended across the Persianate world.

Shortly after his return to Herat, an event took place that helped consolidate his standing with Sultan Ḥussain and his Vizier Alisir.

The sons of Abu Sa'id in Central Asia regarded Herat as part of their patrimony and planned a campaign against Sultan Ḥussain who had earlier seized power in Herat. Despite the rumor that his Shaikh Khwaja Ahrar had given his blessing to this campaign, Jami stood in defense of Sultan Ḥussain. His position with the court was further strengthened when 'Alisir joined the Naqshbandi order, with Jami as his spiritual Shaikh. For the last fifteen years of Jami's life, he, Sultan Ḥussain, and Alisir constituted a religious, military, and administrative set up governing Khorasan.

JAMI AS A SUFI SHAIKH OF IHSAN

Jami's life can be divided into three periods; the first covering his early years, education and establishment as a scholar, up until the age of 36. The second, a period when he abandoned his scholarly pursuits and became a Sufi and a follower of the Naqshandi order in Herat. The third, when he withdrew more and more from public life and became a virtual recluse, concentrating upon his writing and his spiritual life.

There is no doubt that Jami's adoption of the Sufi path was sincere and life-long, going deeper than a mere attachment to his Shuyookh.

Jami was highly respected and renowned figure in the Timurid dynasty, because, besides his status as the poet laureate of the era, he was affiliated with the Naqshbandi Sufi order, the most prominent order in that region at the time. Jami's literary reputation in the Timurid court and his connection with the Naqshbandi Sufis granted him a celebrity status in Central Asia during that time. By becoming the poet laureate of the rulers, he wrote a few eulogies in praise of the rulers, a thing which was not liked by many Sufi Shuyookh of Ihsan. It seems Jami was aware of it, therefore he wrote about his association with Timurid Sultans, as follows.

'Closeness to virtuous and just kings, as is well-known to the intelligent and enlightened, is the best means for attaining goals pertaining both to religion and to the life of this world for the perfection of outer and inner felicity. It renders possible aid to the unfortunate and facilitates taking the voice of the wretched to the Sultans.

Jami regarded the Sultans he associated with were virtuous and just kings.

It is reported that he was never a paid member of the court, rather acted as an adviser of the Sultans. This practice was common among the Naqshbandi Shuyookh of his time and it is believed that they did it consciously as it helped them in spreading Islamic Sufism among the masses. This observation is based on the fact that while Jami was returning from Hajj, he traveled through Syria. During his stay in Aleppo, he received an invitation from the Ottoman Sultan Moḥammad II to join his court in Istanbul. But Jami did not get swayed by the money and gifts that accompanied the invitation and moved quickly to avoid the golden shackles and arrived in Herat in January 1474.

Towards the end of his life Jami withdrew more and more from worldly concerns and was overtly critical of the spiritual standards of his day, despairing both the teachers and the pupils.

The last 12 years of his life, when he was in relative solitude, were the most productive in terms of writing. It was during the 1480's he completed the seven epic Mathnawis for which he is now most famous as a poet and compiled his Divan as well as some of his other prose works.

JAMI'S FAMILY

Despite his status, wealth, and influence, Jami lived a simple life, without any public display of wealth and prosperity, in the district of Kiyaban, outside of the city of Herat.

After his return from the pilgrimage, he married the granddaughter of his first Shaikh, Sa'aduddin Kashgari. Of the four children born of this marriage, only one survived the infancy.

Jami composed a strophic elegy on the death of his second child, Safiuddin Mohammad in 1475 which was included in his Divan. His third and surviving son, Ziauddin Yusuf was born in 1477, and it is reported that Jami wrote the book 'Baharistan' (بهارستان) in 1487 and a treatise on Arabic grammar, 'Al-Fawa'ed al-Ziya'iyah' (الفوائد الضيائية) in 1492, as manuals for his education.

DEATH OF ABDUR RAHMAN JAMI

Jami traveled to Samarqand in early 1480s and met with his Shaikh and wrote many of his works during this period.

In 1490, his Shaikh Ahrar died in Samarqand. Jami went through the mourning period for 2 years after the death of his Shaikh. Later, after a brief illness, he died on November 9, 1492.



He was buried in Herat. At the time of his death, he was the most renowned writer in the Persian-speaking world, receiving appreciation for his works all the way from India to Istanbul.

JAMI'S WORKS

Jami's career, as a writer, extended more than fifty years during which he wrote about 45 works in prose and poetry in Arabic and Persian. A few of his works are mentioned below.

(i) Divan-e-Jami

Jami first compiled his poetry titled 'Divan' in 1463. Then revised it in 1468 and 1475 adding his new kalam in between. The final version of his Divan was published in 1479 for which he wrote a new introduction dedicating it to Sultan Husain Baiqara.

(ii) The Seven Thrones (بفت اورنگ)

His most famous poetical works are 'Seven thrones' (بفت اورنگ), consisting of 7 long Mathnawis, viz, (a), Silsila Ad-Dhahab (سلسلة الذهب), (b) Yusuf and Zulaikha (يوسف و زليخا), (c) Subha-tul-Abrar (سبحة الابرار), (d) Salaman and Absaal (سلامان و ابسال), (e) Tohfa-tul-Ahrar (تحفة الاحرار), (f) Layla Majnun (ليلی مجنون), (g) Khurd Nama-e-Iskandari (خردنامه اسکندری).

Six of the above Mathnawis were written in Herat during 1480-1485. Two poems were written in response to the famous philosophical poem from Nizami's poem titled 'The Storehouse of Mysteries'. These are 'The Gift of the Nobles' (تحفة الاحرار), written in 1482 and 'The Rosary of the Pious' (سبحة الابرار) in 1483.

His other three Mathnawis were love tales, into which he embedded a hidden religious-sufi message. These are (i) Salaman and Absaal (سلامان و ابسال), (ii) Yusuf and Zulaikha (يوسف و زليخا), and (iii) Layla Majnun (ليلی مجنون).

Following the legend of Nizami, Jami used the Muslim version of the story of Alexander the Great and, in 1485, wrote 'Iskandar Book of Wisdom' (خردنامه اسکندری) which narrates how Alexander met various sages and philosophers.

'The Golden Chain' (سلسلة الذهب) is the largest of the seven Mathnawis. This was written in line with the poem titled 'The Garden of Truth' by Sanai of Ghazna, a Sufi poet of the 12th century who also lived in Herat. It consists of three parts and was written by Jami over several years from 1468 to 1485. It depicts the Shuyookh of Naqshbandi order described as the transmitters of divine grace, connecting to the Prophet Mohammad (صلی الله علیه و آله وسلم).

(iii) Prose works

Jami wrote over 30 prose works that include Baharistan, which was written as an imitation of Sa'adi's Gulistan.

(iv) Religious works

(a) His work 'The Flashes' (لوائح) is an imitation of Ahmad Ghazali's Sawaneh (1060-1126). Ahmad Al-Ghazali was the brother of famous Islamic scholar [Abu Hamed Al-Ghazali](#). The Flashes (لوائح) was written in 1466 and was dedicated to the ruler of Jahansah, named Qara Qoyunlu. It consists of several Sufi meditations, mixed in prose and poetry.

(b) The book titled 'Breaths of intimacy from the presences of sanctified Shuyookh (نفحات الأنس من حضرات القدس) is a large collection of biographies composed by Jami. He wrote it after his return from Hajj.

(d) Many of Jami's Sufi writings take the form of commentaries on earlier works. In 1459, he wrote his Arabic commentary titled 'Criticism of the texts in explaining the meanings of Fusus Al-Hikam (نقدالنصوص في شرح نقش الفصوص). In 1491 towards the end of his life, Jami wrote another Arabic commentary on the full text of the Fusus entitled 'The Commentary of Fusus al-Hikam (شرح فصوص الحكيم) which was his last major Sufi work.
