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**Exploring Sufi *Majālis* as a Tradition of Writing *Tafsīr* in the Seventeenth Century Ottoman Caliphate**

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Zehra Gökbulut-Fatmir Shehu

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Zehra Gökbulut<sup>1</sup>, Fatmir Shehu<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract**

This research paper seeks to examine selected writings of the seventeenth century Ottoman Caliphate on Sufi *Majālis* as a traditional way of writing *Tafsīr*, where conversations were held in the form of explanations of verses during the sermons. The aim of this study is to explore the Sufi *Majālis* style of *Tafsīr* as a method of guiding the people and explaining the Qur'anic verses to them during the seventeenth century Ottoman Era. This work is very significant as it deals with the analysis of selected examples of *Majālis* writings produced by Sufis intellectuals, who preached in *Masājid* during the seventeenth century. Brief bibliography of three selected Sufi scholars is provided, description of their writings is presented, and analysis of selected *Majālis* cases from their works are discussed. Descriptive and analytical methods are used in the entire paper. The findings of this study provide new insights about Sufi *Majālis* style of *Tafsīr* according to the original writings of three selected Muslim scholars, 'Azīz Maḥmūd Hūdāī, Niyazī Mīṣrī and Ummī Sinānzāde Ced Hasan Efendi, during the seventeenth century Ottoman Caliphate.

**Keywords:** Ottoman, *Tafsīr*, Sufism, *Majālis*, *Sufi* Lodge.

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### Introduction

Since the establishment of the Ottoman Caliphate, the contribution of dervishes to the Ottoman army and their participation in the wars with the Ottoman Sultans, have ensured the spread of Islam and its teachings to many parts of the world in a very short time. A close relationship between the Caliphate and the *Sufi* Lodges during the establishment period of the Ottoman Caliphate has been established. The Ottoman history clearly shows the closeness and the inclination of the rulers to *Sufism*, which led to its development in many parts of the Ottoman lands. The presence of *Sufi* Lodges during the Ottoman Era has paved the way for the existence of *Sufi Majālis*, which signify a traditional way of writing *Tafsīr*. The *Sufi Shaikhs* of different sects have contributed greatly to the formation of *Majālis* type of *Tafsīr*, which has been widespread in different parts of the Caliphate. In this sense, *Sufi Majālis* way of writing *Tafsīr* have been composed by various Muslim scholars and put in a form of book. The Qur'an and its commentary have formed the basis of their works aiming to guide and reform the people with sermons and advice from the pulpits of *Masājid*. The *Sufi* conversations held in the “majlis-assembly”, were written in the form of a book called “*Majālis*” emphasising the interpretations of certain verses for the major subjects of *Sufism* and the guidance of the common people.

Dawud al-Qaysari is considered as the first official representative of the Ottoman state, who has received an excellent education in the religious and mental sciences. He is known more as a mystic<sup>3</sup> Qaysari especially by adopting the idea of *Wahdat al-Wujūd*, which was developed and systematized by famous mystics, like Ibn Fariḍ, Ibn ‘Arabī and Kāshānī. Al-Qaysari is the first to advocate and systematically explain the idea of *Wahdat al-Wujud* to the Ottomans. After al-Qaysari, there have been other influential names in the recognition and acceptance of this understanding during the Ottoman Period, like Mulla Fanārī (d.834H./1431C.E.), the first Ottoman Sheikh al-Islām. Likewise, Mulla Fenārī read Sadr al-

<sup>3</sup> Mehmet Bayraktar, “Davud-ı Kayseri,” in *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara: TDV İslām Araştırmaları Merkezi, 1994), pp. 34-35.



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Din Qonāwī's (d.674H./1274C.E.) mystical work *Miftāh al-Ghayb*<sup>4</sup> and taught it. In addition, he benefited from the *Khalwatiyya* and *Zaydiyya* sects.<sup>5</sup>

In the light of this information, it can be said that most of Muslim scholars had strong ties with *Sufism* during the establishment period of the Ottoman Caliphate. In the seventeenth century, the scholars, who had a close relationship with *Sufism*, were replaced by a group of preachers, who were more hostile to Sufi people than necessary. The scientific struggle against *Sufism* with treatises and books in the previous century turned into an actual struggle in the seventeenth century. After that, the *Qādizadelis* Movement, which influenced for centuries the Ottoman intellectual history, and which occupied many people, emerged as the 'Qādizadelis - Sivas debate'. The preachers of this movement, who use of the work of *Imām Birgivī* (d. 981H./1573C.E.), called *Ṭarīqah al-Muḥammadiyah* as their basis.<sup>6</sup> *Imām Birgivī* was an outspoken scholar who exposed the corrupt aspects of the sects in his time and struggled with what he saw as innovation. The works and treatises of *Birgivī Mehmet Efendi* have been influenced greatly by the approach of *Ibn Taymiyya* and his disciple *Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya*. The writings of *Birgivī* established the intellectual foundations for the group of *Qādizadelis*. The head of *Qādizadelis* was *Mehmed Efendi*, a native of *Balıkesir*, known as the famous *Küçük Qādizāde*, and later, such nickname was given to those who thought like him.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, *Qādizadelis*, who emerged during the reign of *Murad IV.*, *Sultan Ibrahim* and *Mehmed IV.*, have played great role in the state's intervention in social and cultural life.<sup>8</sup> It is noted that their target audience was Sufi groups. In addition, *Qādizāde* at that time

<sup>4</sup> Look for further information: Resat Ongoren, "Miftāhu'l-Gayb," in *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara: TDV Yay., 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Mustafa Aşkar, "Molla Fenari ve Vahdet-i Vücut Meselesi" (Master, Ankara, Ankara Üniversitesi, 1992), pp. 83-85.

<sup>6</sup> The work has more than fifteen editions, the first of which was in 1260/1845 during the Ottoman period. Look for information: Huriye Martı, "et-Tarikatü'l-Muhammadiyah," in *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yay., 2011), pp. 106-108.

<sup>7</sup> İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi: XVI. Yüzyıl Ortalarından XVII. Yüzyıl Sonuna Kadar* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1954), p. 363.

<sup>8</sup> Ali Fuat Bilkan, "XVII. Yüzyılda Medrese ve Tekke Mücadelesinin Osmanlı Şiirine Yansıması," *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 26 (2005), p. 121.



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accused all those who used tobacco and coffee, who drank soup with a spoon, drank water with crystal glass, and wore trousers. They even accused the sultans, who had over one minaret built in their mosques with blasphemy.<sup>9</sup> The seventeenth century is an unfortunate century for *Sufis* and *Shaikhs*. The tension between the scholars and the Sufis leaders, which started in the fifteenth century, reached its peak in the seventeenth century, and this situation brought with it the murder and exile of most of the *Sufi Shaikhs*. As a matter of fact, in this period, Karabash Sheikh 'Ali Efendi (d.1090H./1679C.E.) and Niyāzī Mısrī (d.1088H./1677C.E.) went to the island of Limnī, and in the year 'Osman Fazlı Atpazarī (d.1101H./1690C.E.) to the Famagusta castle in Cyprus. Also, 'Ismā'īl Anqaravī (d.1041H./1631C.E.) was exiled to an unspecified place.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, the dervish lodges, which served as a non-formal education institution in Ottoman society, were engaged in sermons and conversation circles that continued over the centuries. Their *Irshādī* (mentoring) activities were carried out on responding to various issues related to religion and especially against the oppression and violence applied by the *Qādızadelis* in the seventeenth century. Regardless of the tensioned situation, the *Sufis* continued to uphold their *Majālis* activities in *Masājīd* and lodges with great devotion. *Majālis* used primarily among *Sufis* by signifying “gathering for conversation and preaching,” over time, has been used for direct preaching or dialogue. The written-down talks were referred to be *Majlīs*, and when they were collected in the shape of a book, the genre was named as “*Majālis*” in general. It is known in the literature that *Majālis* works were written by a small number of 'Ulamā', mostly *Sufis* scholars, such as Aḥmed ar-Rıfāī (d.578/1182), Mawlānā Jālāladdīn Rūmī (d.672H./1273C.E.), 'Azīz Maḥmūd Hūdāyī (d.1038/1628), and Ali Şīr Nevāī (d.906/1501). Besides, works of poets bearing the name of *Majālis* were composed emphasising subjects ranging from *Tafsīr*, *Ḥadīth*, and mystical issues. It can be said that the language of such works is close to the spoken language because it consists of conversations on the one hand, and to the literary prose genre, on the other hand,

<sup>9</sup> Mehmed Murad, *Tarih-i Ebu'l-Faruk*, vol. 7 (Dersaadet: Matbaa-yi Amedi, 1332), p. 57.

<sup>10</sup> Mustafa Aşkar, *Niyazî-i Mısrî Hayatı, Eserleri, Görüşleri* (İstanbul: İnsan Yay., 2011), p. 50.



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because it is decorated with poems and representations. *Majālis* were generally offered to the public through *Masājid* and Sufi lodges containing the interpretations of certain verses for the main subjects of *Sufism* and the guidance of the common people.

The *Majālisi* type of works, which are the main subject of this research, can be considered as works that emerged as a reaction to the preacher group of the *Sufis* who lived in this century, when the conjuncture described above is taken into consideration. *Majālis*-style works were created because of interactions between the prominent sheikhs of the sects that proliferated over the Ottoman Rule numerous masses of people. The Qur'an and its *Tafsīr* constituted the basis of these works, which aim to guide and reform the people with sermons and advice from the pulpits of mosques. The language of these works, which can be considered as a kind of *Tafsīr* lesson for the public, is Arabic as it was the language of intellectual writings, research activities, and science during that time.

This research paper is very significant as it deals with the analysis of selected examples of *Majālis* writings produced by *Sufi* scholars, who gave sermons in *Masājid* in the seventeenth century during the Ottoman Era. Brief bibliography of the three selected *Sufi* scholars is provided, description of their writings is presented, and analysis of *Majālis* examples from their works are discussed. Descriptive and analytical methods are used in the entire paper. The findings of this study attempt to provide new insights about *Sufi Majālis* style of *Tafsīr* according to the original writings of 'Azīz Maḥmūd Hūdāī, Niyazī Mıṣrī and Ummī Sinānzāde Ced Hasan Efendi, who are selected for this study and lived during the seventeenth century Ottoman Era.

### Brief Bibliography of the three Sufi Scholars

In this section, a brief information about the early life of the three selected *Sufi* scholars, i.e., 'Azīz Maḥmūd Hūdāī, Niyazī Mıṣrī and Ummī Sinānzāde Ced Hasan Efendi, is provided. It explores the intellectual background of these three scholars and how they developed their *Sufi* oriented approach towards the study of Qur'an and its interpretation.



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### ‘Azīz Maḥmūd Hūdāī: His Life and Personality

He completed his early education from *madrasah* as well as from traditional scholars of that time. After this, he started to work as intern *Qādī* along with his lecturer Nazirzade Ramazan Efendi at Edirne Selimiye Madrasah as well as he served as deputy *Qādī* in Egypt and Damascus. In addition, he served as a lecturer at Farhadiye Madrasah in Bursa and as deputy *Qādī* in Atiq Mosque Court. ‘Azīz Maḥmūd Hūdāī, who was in continuous contact with the *Sufī* groups during his madrasah education and official duties, initiated *Mehmet Muhyiddin Sufī* Lodges. He resigned from all his official duties due to some dreams he saw that were related to the court that he worked after his teacher Nazirzade passed away. He completed his Sayr al-Suluk (journeying and initiation) within three years while having been busy with self-discipline asceticism and disciplining the soul under the supervision of his *Shaikh Uftada* (d.987/1579).<sup>11</sup> He was sent to his hometown as the caliphate by his *Shaikh* and after the death of his shaikh he continued his sermons/speeches and act of showing the true path as a *Shaikh* in Rumelia and Istanbul.<sup>12</sup> Besides, ‘Azīz Maḥmūd Hūdāī was assigned as a *Dā‘i*, *Mufassir* and *Muḥaddith* in *Salatīn Masjid* by ‘Uftada’s words: “We have given you the ministry by Allah ‘Preacher’. It is from the names of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.).”<sup>13</sup>

### Niyāzī-i Mısrī: His Life and Personality

Niyāzī-i Mısrī known as co-Sheikh Muhammed Niyāzī-i Mısrī al-Khalwati bin Ali Calabi, was born in Malatya on Friday night of 12 Rabiūlawwal 1618C.E. Most of the researchers think that he was born in the town of Aspozi in Malatya. His father, Soğancızâde Ali Calabi, was a member of the Naqshibandī sect. He refers to himself as “al-Fāqir al-Sheikh Muḥammad Mısrī” both in his works and in the letters he wrote.<sup>14</sup> He started his primary

<sup>11</sup> Nihat Azamat, “Üftade,” in *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yay., 2012), pp. 282-283.

<sup>12</sup> Hasan Kamil Yılmaz, “Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi,” in *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yay., 1991), pp. 383-400.

<sup>13</sup> Hasan Kamil Yılmaz, *Aziz Mahmut Hüdâyi ve Celvetiyye Tarikati*, (İstanbul: Erkam Yayınları, 1982), pp. 57-58, & p. 68.

<sup>14</sup> Mustafa Aşkar, “Niyâzî-i Mısrî,” in *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yay., 2007), p. 166 .



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education in his village, attending *Tafsīr*, *Ḥadīth* and *Fiqh* classes from the famous scholars of Malatya. After completing his education, he started to preach in *Masjid*.<sup>15</sup> Later he joined Hüseyn Efendi, who became the Khalwati Sheikh. Mısrī travelled to various places, like Diyarbakır, Mardin, Azhar, to continue his quest for knowledge especially the knowledge of the *Ṭarīqah* by reaching the *Murshid* level.<sup>16</sup> He went to Istanbul and joined the private cell of the *Sokullu Mehmet Pasha Masjid Madrasah* near Küçükayasofya. Also, he joined Ummi Sinan in Uşak (d.1057H./1647C.E.) and went with him to Elmalı (a town in Antalya Province in the Lycia region of Turkey), where his dervish lodge was located.<sup>17</sup> After serving his sheikh for nine years in Elmalı and being appointed as the Caliph, Mısrī carried out guidance activities in Usak, Cal, and Kütahya. He left the region at the beginning of 1661C.E. and settled in Bursa with a few of his followers. Later rumours against him under the influence of the Qadızâdelis movement started in Istanbul.<sup>18</sup>

Mısrī, was exiled to Rhodes because of the political atmosphere in his sermons. Nine months later, he returned from Rhodes to Bursa. Again, he used the same tempted mood, the political atmosphere in his sermons, especially his claim to be the *Mahdī* and even to be a prophet, such as Hassan and Hussain say that they were prophets. This resulted to his exile to *Limnī* in the month of Safar in 1677 C.E.<sup>19</sup> In addition, he stayed in Bursa for sixteen months and then he joined the army as soon as he heard about the expedition to Austria and gathered with him two or three hundred followers. Mısrī, was instructed by the Sultan to stay in Busra, but he did not listen to the order of the sultan. Therefore, he was exiled to Limni again with three hundred of his followers. After a very short time, Mısrī passed away on 26 March 1694.

Niyāzī-i Mısrī, is known as one of the most colourful figures in the history of *Sufism*, who had great love of science and creativity.<sup>20</sup> He, like other mystics in the history of *Sufism*,

<sup>15</sup> Kenan Erdoğan, *Niyazi Mısrî Hayatı, Edebi Kişiliği, Eserleri ve Divanı(Tenkitli Metin)*, (Ankara: Akçağ Yayınları, 1998), p. 107.

<sup>16</sup> Aşkar, "Niyâzî-i Mısrî.", pp. 166-167, and Erdoğan, *Niyazi Mısrî Hayatı*, p. 110.

<sup>17</sup> Kenan Erdoğan, *Niyazi Mısrî Divanı* (Ankara: Akçağ Yayınları, 2019), pp. 110-11.

<sup>18</sup> Aşkar, "Niyâzî-i Mısrî.", p. 167.

<sup>19</sup> Erdoğan, *Niyazi Mısrî Divanı*, p. 128.

<sup>20</sup> Aşkar, *Niyâzî-i Mısrî Hayatı, Eserleri, Görüşleri*, p. 139.



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learned an art to make a living, i.e., making and selling candles in Bursa, especially in the years when he was not in exile. He did not accept the help from outside, even if he accepted it, he used it for the construction of schools and madrasahs and did not spend it for his personal works. He always preached to the public in the Ulu Mosque when he was in Bursa.<sup>21</sup> It is remarked that Mişrī made great efforts to solve the problems of many people in addition to the spiritual education he gave in the lodge he built in Bursa. The *Sufi* Lodges during this time served as a rehabilitation centre supporting people morally and financially.

#### Ummī Sinanzāde Ced Hasan Efendi: His Life and Personality

Ced Hasan Efendi, a Khalwatī Sheikh, who was known as *Ummī Sinanzāde*, was born in Istanbul. It is said that Ced Hassan Efendi did not receive sect training from his father, Sharif Mehmed Efendi. After the death of his father in 1614C.E., he moved to the caliphate of Ummī Sinan Asitānesi.<sup>22</sup> He received the caliphate from *Abdulahad Nūrī Efendi* (d.1651C.E.) with the unity of sect. Because Hasan Efendi wanted to be the caliph from his own lineage, he received the caliphate from Cuhādār Mehmet Efendi (d.1651C.E.), who was a member of the Ummī Sinan sect. After the death of Harīrī Mehmed Efendi, the son-in-law of Ummī Sinān, who was the first caliph of Pazar Tekke, another Sinanī lodge was established in the same neighbourhood, and Hassan Efendi also assumed the *Shaikhship* of this lodge. Various works, poems and compositions with a Sufi tone were produced by him before he died in 1677C.E. and was buried in the Shehremīnī Ummī Sinān Lodge.<sup>23</sup>

The abovementioned information about the life and personality of the three selected Sufi scholars, have shown their family background as well as their early intellectual development. They travelled to different places to acquire knowledge. Also, they were assigned various positions in relation to their profession. The most significant thing to be remarked is their attachment to the Sufi lodge, where they used to teach and guide people

<sup>21</sup> Hüseyin Vassaf, *Sefine-i Evliya*, vol. 5 (İstanbul: Kitabevi Yay., 2015), p. 83.

<sup>22</sup> Necdet Yılmaz, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Tasavvuf* (İstanbul: OSAV, 2007), pp. 141-42.

<sup>23</sup> Mehmet Tahir Bursalı, *Osmanlı Müellifleri*, vol. III (İstanbul: Meral Yayınevi, n.d.), p. 140.





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through the sermons to do what is commanded by Allah S.W.T. in His Book, *al-Qur'an*. Sufi Lodges were built by them too.

#### **Majālisi Writings on *Tafsīr*: Brief Description**

The main discussion in this section will focus on the description of *Majālis* writings composed by the three selected Sufi Muslim scholars, 'Azīz Maḥmūd Hūdāī, Niyāzī Mıṣrī and Ummī Sinānzāde Ced Hasan Efendi, who lived during the seventeenth century in Ottoman Caliphate. The researchers would like to visit the contents of *Majālis* writings on *Tafsīr* as presented by these three scholars emphasising their contributions to the Muslim community and humanity.

#### **'Azīz Maḥmūd Hūdāī's Nafāis al-Majālis Work**

Hūdāyī wrote treatises for each assembly of conversation by taking the verses as the subject in this work. Besides the hunch of his heart, the stories of Muslim saints and wise words have been mentioned in this assembly conversation. As a matter of fact, before the *Sufi* scholar explains the verses from the mystical aspect, he focused on grammar, the explanations, the extraordinary vocabularies of the Qur'an, different recitations, and the reasons for the revelation. Besides, he referred to the sayings of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.), Companions, and other scholars, if those selected verses were explained by them.

Filibeli Sheikh Ismail Efendi, a student of 'Azīz Maḥmūd Hūdāī, published the treatise *Nafāis al-Majālis*, by complying the handwritten notes of his sheikh and summaries related to the explanation of selected *surahs* and *verses* from the Qur'an according to the Qur'anic order. Ismail Efendi has mentioned why and how he compiled this treatise. He asserts that when Hudāyī (may Allah bless him) passed away, his booklet had not been compiled by any of his students. Therefore, being afraid of losing his booklets, I collected and compiled them



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according to the Qur'anic order. I have written the repeated (interpreted more than once) verses with the intention of making it easier for others to understand.<sup>24</sup>

There are various copies of *Nafāis al-Majālis*, in both of their complete and incomplete forms as well as with or without a known copy date. Also, some verses have been interpreted repeatedly. Such repetitive interpretations of the same verse are listed one after the other in the work. However, thirty-three Qur'anic Chapters have never been interpreted. The research shows that there are two complete manuscripts of *Nafāis al-Majālis*. One of them is a two-volume copy in the 'Atif Efendi Library. The other one, which is the complete copy of the manuscript in four volumes, is placed in the Topkapı Palace Museum Manuscripts Library Trust Treasure.<sup>25</sup>

### Niyāzī Mısrī's *Majālis* Work

This work of Niyāzī Mısrī was revealed for the first time by Kenan Erdogan. The work is registered at the Süleymaniye Library, Hājī Mahmūd Efendi, number 1758. At the beginning of *Majālis* work, there is an index about the content as well as the *Ishārī* interpretation method is mentioned. *Al-Tafsīr al-'Ishārī* (indicative interpretation) of the Qur'anic Chapters, such as *Māidah*, *En'ām* and *Nisā*, have been made. As a result of the examinations, it has been found that the beginning of *Sura al-Nisā* has been added later. It has been determined that *Māidah*, *En'ām* and *Qadr* were written in his own handwriting, which Niyāzī Mısrī wrote daily while he was on the island of Limnī.<sup>26</sup> In addition, information about the completion of his work, which was in 1076H., has been given by him. Besides, he describes what he went through during the cruise in *Mawā'id al-'Irfān* confirms the view that the work was written by Niyāzī Mısrī himself. His *Majālis* writing shows that pages 1a-59b contain the interpretation of *Māidah* and pages 60a and 130a include the explanation of *En'ām*. At the end of the last

<sup>24</sup> Aziz Mahmud Hüdāyī, "Nefāisü'l-Mecālis" (book, Süleymaniye Ktp. Şehit Ali Paşa, n.d.).

<sup>25</sup> Ali Fuat Namlı, *Nasihāt, Vaaz ve Mev'iza Meclislerinden Tam Bir Kur'an Tefsirine Doğru Celvetiyye'de Tefsir Dersleri Geleneği* (İstanbul: Kuran ve Tefsir Akademisi İlim Yayma Vakfı, 2016), pp. 52-53.

<sup>26</sup> Look for further information: Erdogan, *Niyazi Mısrī Divanı*, CLXIII.



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surah, there is a record showing that the work was completed in 1076H. Pages 35b-151bb deal with the commentary of *al-Qadr*.

#### Ummī Sinanzāde's *Majālis al-Sināniyya al-Kabira* work

The speech letters of Ummī Sinanzāde, which can be considered as sermon notes, consists of one hundred and seventy-two assemblies and forty chapters. A verse was discussed and interpreted in each speech and the language of the work is Arabic. Also, there were quotations from Mawlana's *Mathnawi* at the end of the explained verse. It is remarked that a certain sorting criterion was not observed by Sinanzāde in choosing the verses. However, when the selected verses are carefully examined, it is noteworthy that those related to *dhikr*, gratitude, worship, prayer, and awe, which are the main subjects of *Sufism*, are interpreted. The written text in these sermon assemblies, which is regarded as a kind of *Tafsīr* lesson, contains many features related to the unique methods of the narration. Besides, it gives the impression that the work was prepared by the *Shaikh* with the intention to preach to the public from the dervish lodge or *Masjid* podium. Therefore, the words of the *Sufis*, their stories, tales, and the mystical interpretations provided a colourful sermon for the audiences.

Since *Majālis al-Sināniyya* is mostly accepted as a speech book. It is observed that the treatment of the subjects is not done in a systematic form. The content of this book reveals that *Hadīth* sources are more than *Tafsīr* sources making it to resemble a hadith commentary book, instead of a book of morality and advice. It is understood that the target audience is not related to those who are considered the Islamic knowledge seeker candidates, but the common people in general. While explaining the verses in *Majālis al-Sināniyya*, the sayings of the followers of Righteous Caliphs were included, and especially references were made to the commentaries that were common in the Ottoman geography of the time. The treatise includes the daily problems and moral issues of social life witness by the community but does not touch on political issues. Although *Majālis al-Sināniyye* is not a complete book of *Tafsīr*, the ruling is that every treatise, which is the explanation and interpretation of verses should be evaluated within the scope of *Tafsīr*. Briefly, it can be said that this work is a kind of *Folk*

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*Tafsīr* that aims to bring the wisdom of the Qur'anic Message to the public in order to uplift their attitude. With all these features, *Majālis al-Sināniyye* is one of the typical works that reflects the Ottoman social structure in the line of *Ahl al-Sunnah*, which also has a mystical flair and is dominated by the *Hanaḫī-Maturidī*<sup>27</sup> school of thought.

It is noteworthy to mention that the content of the above writings produced by the three selected Sufi Muslim scholars during the seventeenth century of the Ottoman caliphate, presents beneficial knowledge, which can be very useful to respond to the contemporary challenges faced by the Muslim community and humanity at large. Therefore, such kind of writings should be revisited and re-evaluated as well as made relevant to the contemporary scholarship of *Sufism*. Indeed, this will help to elevate people's souls and make them improve their activities.

### Analysis of Examples of *Tafsīr* from *Majālis* Writings

The researchers see it of a great need to provide analysis of selected examples of *Tafsīr* from *Majālis* writings produced by the three Sufi Muslim scholars. The text of the Qur'anic verse mentioned in the book is cited from the work and then its translation is provided together with the translated explanation made by the scholar.

'Azīz Maḫmūd Hūdāī has focused on two important Qur'anic terms, such as *Taqwā* (consciousness) and *Tawbah* (repentance) while explaining the following Qur'anic Verse:

﴿وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ آمَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا لَكَفَّرْنَا عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ وَلَأُدْخِلْنَاهُمْ جَنَّاتِ النَّعِيمِ﴾ (المائدة: 65)

“If only the People of the Book had believed and been righteous, We should indeed have blotted out their iniquities and admitted them to gardens of bliss.” (al-Mā'idah: 65)<sup>28</sup>

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ تَقَاتِهِ وَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ﴾ (آل عمران: 102)

“O ye who believe! Fear Allah as He should be feared, and die not except in a state of Islam.” (Al-E-'Imrān: 102)

<sup>27</sup> Mustafa Şentürk, “Osmanlı Mecālis Geleneğinden Bir Tefsir Çalışması Ümmî Sinanzāde'nin Mecālisü's-Sināniyyeti'l-Kebire Adlı Eseri” (İstanbul: Kuran ve Tefsir Akademisi İlim Yayma Vakfı, 2016), 125-26.

<sup>28</sup> The reference for all translated Qur'anic verses mentioned in the entire paper is: A. Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary*, (Maryland: Amana Corporation, 1989).

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According to Hūdāī, the Qur’anic term *Taqwā*, which is mentioned in the above verses from the perspective of *Dīn al-Islām*, is related to the protection of the human souls from things that will harm them in the Hereafter. In his view, *Taqwā* has three level. *First level* makes people to be protected from eternal torment. *Second level* makes them to avoid committing sins. *Third level* makes them to turn away from everything that takes their hearts away from Allah S.W.T.<sup>29</sup> This kind of interpretation about *Taqwā* is very sound and appropriate as it reflects the main message provided by the Qur’anic verses.

﴿إِلَّا مَنْ تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا فَأُولَئِكَ يُبَدِّلُ اللَّهُ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ حَسَنَاتٍ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا﴾  
(الفرقان: 70)

“Unless he repents, believes, and works righteous deeds, for Allah will change the evil of such persons into good, and Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful,”  
(al-Furqan: 70)

According to Hūdāyī, the term *Tawbah* mentioned in this verse signifies the repentance of the common people through their excessive worship, which is stated in a very beautiful manner by this Qur’anic verse. When the common people repent, they conclude that it is necessary to ask forgiveness for themselves from Allah S.W.T. The repentance of those in the middle position makes them to get Allah S.W.T.’s Mercy as well as to avoid themselves from following errors. The repentance of those who have the status of *Khawas*, they should stay away from the waste of time.<sup>30</sup>

Niyāzī Mıṣrī has provided an important explanation about the issue of Prophet Jusuf (a.s.) concerning his situation after he was thrown by his brothers into the well while interpreting the following Qur’anic verses:

﴿فَلَمَّا ذَهَبُوا بِهِ وَاجْمَعُوا أَن يَجْعَلُوهُ فِي غِيَابَةِ الْجُبِّ...﴾ (يوسف: 15)

“So they did take him away, and they all agreed to throw him down to the bottom of the well...” (Yūsuf: 15)

<sup>29</sup> Hudāyī, “Nefāis”, c.I, (Book, İstanbul Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, n.d.), p. 74a.

<sup>30</sup> Hüdayi, “Nefais”,c.III, (Book, İstanbul Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, n.d.),171.



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﴿وَجَاءَتْ سَيَّارَةٌ فَأَرْسَلُوا وَارِدَهُمْ فَأَدْلَى دَلْوَهُ قَالَ يَا بُشْرَى هَذَا غَلَامٌ وَأَسْرُوهُ بَضَاعَةً وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ﴾  
(يوسف: 19)

“Then there came a caravan of travellers: they sent their water-carrier (for water), and he let down his bucket (into the well)...He said: “Ah there! Good news! Here is a (fine) young man!’ So they concealed him as a treasure! But Allah knoweth well all that they do!” (Yūsuf: 19)

Mısrī interprets the event related to Yūsuf (a.s.) by using the symbolic approach. He believes that the Qur’anic parable related to Yūsuf (a.s.), who was thrown into the well by his brothers and later was brought out from the well by a caravan, is a representative narrative, where people and events are interpreted in a symbolic way. According to this interpretation, prophets and saints are like caravans, which come from Allah S.W.T. and return to Him. Yūsuf (a.s.), who is a human being does have divine knowledge. In other words, he was created with the potential to be a perfect human being in order to respond positively to the call of the prophets. The well is a nature dungeon. Aquarius, who is the water bearer is a sign from the Book of Allah S.W.T. that is related to Prophetic caravan, who by slinging of buckets is inviting people to the Book of Allah S.W.T. For Mısrī, to hold that bucket is to believe and accept the person who brought that Book. Those who are frogs, centipedes, scorpions, snakes, and other insects living in a well and do not stick to the bucket that is hanging over, are people who do not believe in the Books sent by Allah S.W.T.<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, such kind of interpretation does provide strong insight by addressing two kinds of people and their position. *The first kind* denotes the Prophets and all those who believe and follow the Book of Allah S.W.T., who will have better position in the Sight of Allah S.W.T. This category of people is presented here by Prophet Yūsuf (a.s.) and the water bearer. The second kind of people includes those who do not believe in Allah S.W.T and do not follow His Book. Such people are presented in very metaphorical way by other creatures that are created by Allah S.W.T. found in the well where Yūsuf was thrown by his brothers. In other words, this means that all those people who do not pay attention to the opportunity given to

<sup>31</sup> Mısrī, “Majālis” (Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, n.d.),59a.



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them by Allah S.W.T., like the case of the bucket and the creatures of the well, they will be among the looser in both of their earthly and hereafter aspects of life. Also, it means that they must search for guidance in order to earn it through their sincere devotion and continuous efforts. All this should be done to win the Pleasure and Mercy of Allah S.W.T.

#### Conclusion

This research paper concludes that *Majālis* writings were formed in the form of composition of the *Tafsīr* conversations presented orally by the famous *Sufis* during the Ottoman Caliphate in their public sermon assemblies. The contribution made by the three selected *Sufi* Muslim scholars, 'Azīz Maḥmūd Hūdāī, Niyāzī Mısrī and Ummī Sinānzāde Ced Hasan Efendi, who lived during the seventeenth century in Ottoman Caliphate, provided great insight for contemporary scholarship of *Sufism*. Their family background as well as their early intellectual development have reflected their passion to travel to different places in order to acquire knowledge. They were very attached to the Sufi lodges and contributed to their establishment and maintenance. They used to teach and guide people through their sermons emphasising what is commanded by Allah S.W.T. in His Book, *al-Qur'an*. The content of their *Majālis* writings presents beneficial knowledge, which can be very useful to respond to the contemporary challenges faced by the Muslim community and humanity at large. Therefore, it could be suggested that such kind of writings should be revisited and re-evaluated as well as made relevant to the contemporary scholarship of *Sufism*. Indeed, this will help to elevate people's souls and make them improve their day-to-day activities and their relationships with their Creator and their own kind.

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