

### Research Article

## An Introductory Study of Shibli Nomani's Life and His Major Contributions to Islamic Literature

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**Abstract.** Maulana Shibli Nomani (1857–1914) stands among the most influential Muslim scholars, historians, and literary figures of modern South Asia. His intellectual journey, from his formative years in Azamgarh to his academic maturity in Aligarh, Hyderabad, and Nadwatul Ulama reflects the complex cultural, political, and educational transformations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This paper presents a comprehensive study of Shibli's life, tracing his early upbringing, his exposure to traditional Islamic scholarship, and his engagement with modern educational reform. It examines his multifaceted contributions as a historian, biographer, theologian, with particular emphasis on his major works such as *Al-Mamun*, *Seerat-un-Nu'man*, *Al-Farooq*, *Aurangzeb Alamgir par Ek Nazar*, *Ilm-ul-Kalam*, and his magnum opus *Seerat-un-Nabi*. The study also explores Shibli Nomani's role in shaping the ideological foundations of Nadwatul Ulama and founding the Darul-Musannefin Shibli Academy. The analysis highlights his methodological innovations, critical historiographical approach, and his attempts to harmonize classical Islamic scholarship with the

intellectual challenges of the modern age. Through this comprehensive discussion, the paper underscores the enduring significance of Shibli Nomani's intellectual legacy in the fields of Islamic history, scholastic philosophy, biographies of muslim heroes etc.

**Keywords:** Biographies, Nadwatul Ulama, Darul Musannefin, Historical books, Scholastic Philosophy, Education, Intellectual.

## **PENDAHULUAN**

Maulana Shibli Nomani (1857–1914) occupies a distinguished place in the intellectual history of South Asian Islam as one of the most influential scholars, literary stylists, and reformist thinkers of his era. Emerging from a traditional environment yet intellectually shaped by the transformative forces of the nineteenth century, Shibli Nomani evolved into a pioneering Islamic writer whose works reshaped the scholarly and literary landscape of the subcontinent. His life reflects a continuous negotiation between classical Islamic scholarship and the modern intellectual challenges posed by colonialism, social reform, and the need for educational revival among Indian Muslims.

As an Islamic writer, Shibli brought an unprecedented blend of historical accuracy, aesthetic refinement, and analytical depth to Urdu and Persian literature. His biographical masterpieces, such as *Sirat-un-Nabi*, *Al-Farooq*, *Al-Mamun*, and *Seerat-un-Nu'man*, combined rigorous research with a literary elegance that made Islamic history accessible to both scholars and general readers. Maulana Shibli's narrative style revived interest in early Islamic personalities by presenting them not merely as religious figures but as dynamic leaders shaped by political, social, and cultural contexts. Through this approach, he established a new standard for Islamic historiography in Urdu, moving it away from hagiography toward critical scholarship.

Shibli Nomani's legacy extends far beyond his writings. His role in shaping institutions, particularly the Darul Musannifin (Azamgarh) and his contributions to Nadwatul Ulama, created enduring platforms for Islamic research and literary production. The establishment of Darul-Musannefin Shibli Academy in Azamgarh shortly before his death in 1914 stands as a testament to his vision for a permanent institution dedicated to Muslim intellectual rehabilitation. Through its publications and research initiatives, the academy continues to extend Shibli's legacy. His intellectual vision, centred on harmonising reason with tradition, not only redefined Urdu prose but also influenced generations of scholars who followed him. Even today, Shibli is remembered not merely as a writer but as an architect of modern Islamic thought in South Asia, whose life and works continue to inspire contemporary discussions on education, religious scholarship, and cultural identity.

## Life Sketch

Maulana Shibli Nomani was born on Wednesday, 3 June 1857 A.D,<sup>1</sup> in Bindwal—a village that today falls under the Sagri sub-division of the Azamgarh district in Uttar Pradesh. His family originally belonged to the Rawat branch of the Rajput Hindu community. According to family tradition, one of his ancestors, Shivraj Singh, embraced Islam nearly four centuries ago, after which he adopted the name Sirajuddin. This early conversion laid the foundation for the family's long-standing association with Islam.

Shibli's father, Shaikh Habibullah, was a prominent and respected lawyer of Azamgarh. He was well-known not only for his legal acumen but also for his command of Arabic and Persian, alongside his native Urdu. His mother, Bibi Hamida, played a crucial role in his early upbringing. Before her passing in 1886 A.D., she imparted to him the foundational values, discipline, and intellectual curiosity that later defined his scholarly personality.

The household environment in which Shibli grew up was one of relative prosperity and cultural refinement. From an early age, he displayed remarkable intelligence, a sharp memory, and a natural inclination toward learning. He memorised the Qur'an and received early instruction in Persian under the guidance of distinguished teachers. Among his notable instructors were Maulana Abbas Ali Chiryakoti, Maulana Faizullah, Hidayatullah Khan, Maulana Farooq Chiryakoti, and Irshad Hussain, all scholars who greatly influenced his linguistic and intellectual development.

Fulfilling his father's aspirations, Shibli Nomani appeared for the law examination. Though he was unsuccessful in his first attempt, he passed the examination the second time. However, despite his academic qualification, he did not achieve success in the legal profession. Consequently, in 1882 A.D. he accepted employment as a copyist (naqal navees), and soon afterwards he worked on a vacant position of bailiff (Qurq Amin) in the court.

A significant milestone in his life occurred in 1883A.D., when he was appointed Professor of Arabic and Persian at the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental (MAO) College, Aligarh. He served there for sixteen years. His stay in Aligarh proved to be transformative and intellectually stimulating. It not only marked the beginning of his formal academic career but also provided him exposure to modern educational ideals, reformist thought, and scholarly discourse. During this period, Shibli published several valuable works and became actively associated with various literary and educational organisations. His contributions to academic and cultural programmes further enhanced his reputation as a rising scholar. The Aligarh experience played a decisive role in shaping Shibli Nomani's scholarly identity and widening his intellectual horizons. In 1898A.D., he resigned from his position at

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<sup>1</sup> Nadwi, S.S., *Hayat e Shibli*, 1970, Azamgarh, Darul Musannefin, p. 68.

Aligarh. During his tenure there, he authored several celebrated works, including *Al-Mamun*, *Seerat-un-Nu'man*, *Al-Farooq*, and a number of articles on different topics which established him as one of the leading intellectual figures of his time.

In 1901 A.D., Maulana Shibli Nomani travelled to Hyderabad, where he accepted an important position in the State's Department of Education. He served as *Nazim-e-Sarrishta-e-Uloom-o-Funun*. During his tenure in Hyderabad, Shibli authored several significant works, including *Al-Kalam*, *Ilm-ul-Kalam*, *Al-Ghazali* and *Sawaneh Maulana Room*; these books are related to Islamic Scholastic philosophy. All these works are included in *Silsila-e-Asfiyah*. Despite his scholarly productivity, Shibli soon became disillusioned due to intense internal political conflicts within the Hyderabad State. Feeling mentally exhausted and dissatisfied with the environment, he resigned in 1905A.D.

Maulana Shibli had been associated with the *Nadwatul Ulama* Movement from its very inception in April 1894 A.D. At its founding session, he delivered an influential speech in which he presented several valuable suggestions for the reform of Muslim education in India. Many of these recommendations were adopted in subsequent sessions. Shibli regularly attended the annual sessions and soon emerged as one of the most active and visionary leaders of the *Nadwah* movement.

Even during his stay in Hyderabad, Shibli continued to reflect deeply on the aims, structure, and direction of *Nadwatul Ulama*. After resigning from Hyderabad in 1905A.D., he devoted his energy to the reform and reorganization of *Nadwah*. He introduced a number of significant changes in the curriculum and administration of the institution, such as: Introducing the English language into the syllabus, recognizing its growing importance. Establishing a department for Hindi and Sanskrit, although this department existed only for a short period. Encouraging students to speak, learn, and converse in Arabic, aiming to revive linguistic competence in classical Islamic languages. Inviting exceptionally talented teachers to *Nadwah* to improve the quality of education. Opening advanced and specialized classes for outstanding students to develop expertise in specific fields. However, Shibli's reforms and progressive ideas were not welcomed by everyone. Over time, he became the target of strong opposition and organized hostility from certain circles within the institution. As a result, facing continuous resistance and personal distress, he resigned from *Nadwatul Ulama* in July 1913 A.D.

After his resignation, he stayed temporarily in Bombay and later returned to Lucknow. In 1914 A.D., he finally went back to Azamgarh, where he concentrated on the establishment of *Darul-Musannefin Shibli Academy*, an institution he had long envisioned as a centre of academic excellence for Muslim scholarship. Tragically, a few months later, on 18 November 1914 A.D., he passed away, leaving behind an enduring intellectual legacy.

## Shibli Nomani's Literary Contributions

During his association with Aligarh College, he developed a deep interest in Islamic history and gained access to a wide range of authentic historical sources. The intellectually vibrant environment of Aligarh, along with the constant encouragement and co-operation of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, greatly enriched Shibli's literary pursuits. It was during this period that he wrote some of his earliest and most influential works. But it can not be said that Shibli Nomani's writing was all because of Aligarh. Shibli had begun his writing career before coming to Aligarh, but the subjects of those books were different. After arriving in Aligarh, Shibli wrote books related to Islamic history, and Shibli himself acknowledged this fact.<sup>2</sup>

### Al-Mamun

One of the most celebrated among these is "Al-Mamun", the first book in his series on the great heroes of Islam. Shibli wrote Al-Mamun while serving at Aligarh College, and it was first published in 1889 A.D. by the college press. The book gained remarkable popularity, and a second edition was released shortly thereafter. The work is divided into two main parts. The first part covers the early Abbasid period, including the establishment of the Abbasid Caliphate, the civil wars, and political events leading up to the caliphate of Mamun al-Rasheed. The second part provides a detailed account of Mamun al-Rasheed's administration, his personal life, the cultural and academic activities of his court, and the broader social and intellectual conditions of his era. Shibli's work on Mamun al-Rasheed demonstrated his mastery of historical method and his ability to combine classical sources with modern critical analysis. It became a foundational text in Urdu historical literature.

### Seerat-un-Nu'man,

After completing his celebrated historical work Al-Mamun, Maulana Shibli Nomani turned his attention to another monumental project: Seerat-un-Nu'man, the biography of Imam Abu Hanifa, the founder of the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence. This work further strengthened Shibli Nomani's reputation as a pioneering Muslim historian and biographer. The well-known scholar Abdullah Hasan paid tribute to Seerat-un-Nu'man in remarkable words, praising it as "a unique book, written in a fresh and beautiful style, and a valuable contribution not only to Urdu literature but to all Oriental languages."<sup>3</sup> His words capture the significance of this work as a scholarly milestone. Maulana Shibli began writing Seerat-un-Nu'man in 1889 A.D., and by the end of that year he had completed its first part. The second part was finished in 1890 A.D., and the complete work was published by M.A.O. College, Aligarh, in 1891 A.D.

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<sup>2</sup> Zuberi, Muhammad Ameen, Dhikr e Shibli, 1953, Lahore, Maktabah Jadeed

<sup>3</sup> Abdullah, Syed, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan Aur Unke Namwar Rufaqa ka Fikri o Fanni Jayeza, 1960, Delhi, Chaman Book Depot, p.165.

Shibli structured the book in two major sections, each dealing with an important dimension of Imam Abu Hanifa's life and contributions:

1. First Part: Biography of Imam Abu Hanifa

This section presents a detailed and engaging account of Imam Abu Hanifa's life from his birth and family background to his character, habits, scholarly temperament, and moral qualities. After the preface, Shibli includes an annotated list of earlier scholarly works written on Imam Abu Hanifa. He then moves on to discuss the Imam's interactions with his contemporaries, their admiration and criticisms, and the social and political conditions of his era. Shibli Nomani's narrative combines classical historical sources with modern critical analysis, giving the biography both depth and authenticity.

2. Second Part: Intellectual Contributions and Jurisprudence

The second part of the book focuses on Imam Abu Hanifa's intellectual and legal legacy. Shibli examines the sciences he contributed to, his methodology of jurisprudence, and his system of legal reasoning and analytical deduction. The book also includes a concise but insightful account of the Imam's well-known disciples who later shaped the Hanafi school across the Muslim world. *Seerat-un-Nu'man* stands as a seminal text in Urdu scholarship, offering both biographical detail and jurisprudential analysis in a manner accessible to general readers and scholars alike.

### **Safarnamah-e-Room-o-Misr-o-Sham**

In *Safarnamah-e-Room-o-Misr-o-Sham*, Maulana Shibli Nomani describes his journey to three Muslim countries—Turkey, Egypt, and Syria—undertaken between April and November 1892. After returning, he wrote this travelogue, which was published in late 1894 A.D. During his travels, Shibli visited major cities such as Constantinople, Beirut and Cairo, along with several other important places. In this work, he presents detailed accounts of the countries he visited, focusing on their educational institutions, social life, moral values, and general lifestyles, as well as providing brief historical backgrounds of the regions. He also refers to significant markets, historical buildings, mosques, museums, gardens, and other notable sites, thereby offering a vivid picture of the cultural and intellectual life of these lands.

Shibli's observations on educational institutions both traditional and modern along with his discussion of libraries, newspapers, and journals, are particularly insightful and valuable. Ziauddin Islahi remarks that the book is neither one-sided nor biased; rather, it presents both the merits and shortcomings of these societies with fairness and balance.<sup>4</sup> Thus, *Safarnamah-e-Room-o-Misr-o-Sham* stands as an important and thoughtful travel account, and a commendable effort by Maulana Shibli to provide useful and reliable information about Turkey, Egypt, and Syria.

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<sup>4</sup> Islahi, Ziauddin, *Safarnama Room o Misr o Sham*, Maarif, 1995, Azamgarh, 156 (6), p417

## **Al-Farooq**

In 1894 A.D. Maulana Shibli started to write another masterpiece: Al-Farooq, the third work in his series on the "Heroes of Islam," after Al-Mamun and Seerat-un-Nu'man which was completed in four years. Shibli Nomani held Al-Farooq in especially high regard and considered it one of the finest works he ever produced. He called it a "well-decorated literary ode," reflecting the pride he took in its composition. Like his other biographical works, Al-Farooq is divided into two major parts:

### 1. First Part: The Life of Hazrat Umar ibn al-Khattab (R.A.)

This section narrates the life of Hazrat Umar(R.A.) from his early years and conversion to Islam to his role as a close companion of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Shibli presents Hazrat Umar's personality, moral virtues, statesmanship, and unparalleled services to Islam with depth and scholarly precision.

### 2. Second Part: His Caliphate and Administration.

The second part focuses on the administration of Hazrat Umar(R.A.) during his caliphate. It includes detailed discussions on the political reforms, judicial system, financial administration, military organization, and the broader cultural and social conditions of the Muslim world under his rule.

Through this work, Shibli Nomani demonstrates how Hazrat Umar's governance became a model of justice, welfare, and administrative excellence. Maulana Shibli's dedication to authentic historiography is evident in the extensive research he conducted for Al-Farooq. He did not limit himself to sources available in India. Instead, he travelled to Turkey, Egypt, and Syria to study rare manuscripts and historical documents preserved in major libraries. This approach made him one of the first Urdu scholars to use international archival research to write history.

Al-Farooq holds a distinguished place in the intellectual history of the subcontinent. It is considered one of the earliest scholarly historical works written in Urdu that meets the standards of modern historiography. Combining narrative beauty with rigorous scholarship, the book remains a masterpiece and continues to be cited, admired, and republished to this day.

## **Aurangzeb Alamgir Par Ek Nazar**

Very few original works on Indian history have been produced in the Urdu language, particularly those based on critical evaluation of sources and free from inherited biases. Against this background, Maulana Shibli Nomani's work Aurangzeb Alamgir Par Ek Nazar holds a special place. It is essentially a compilation of several articles that Shibli wrote in defence of Emperor Aurangzeb Alamgir, challenging the accusations and misconceptions that had been circulated about him in colonial historiography.

These articles first began to appear individually in various magazines. The earliest of them was published in Nadwah magazine, Lucknow, in 1896, and others

continued to appear until 1898. Later, all these pieces were collected and published together in the form of a monograph under the same title. A powerful propaganda movement was active at the time against Mughal rulers, especially Aurangzeb, accusing them of religious bigotry and intolerance. Shibli Nomani felt compelled to address these accusations. His inspiration for taking up this subject came partly from Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar. In 1898, Shibli visited Baroda, where Maulana Muhammad Ali was posted, and during their discussions he urged Shibli Nomani to write a scholarly, evidence-based defence of Aurangzeb. In this book, Shibli systematically refutes false allegations levelled against Aurangzeb. The first chapter, titled "Aurangzeb Alamgir and the Deccan," deals with the accusation that Aurangzeb's campaigns in the Deccan were acts of religious aggression. Shibli Nomani presents historical documents and contemporary accounts to demonstrate that Aurangzeb's annexation of Golconda and Bijapur was driven by political necessity rather than communal hatred. In this compendium he describes Aurangzeb's relations with the Marathas and the Hindus. And his conflict with his father Shah Jahan and his brothers, political circumstances leading to the war of succession, his administrative and financial reforms, remission of taxes and improvements in the revenue system, judicial efficiency and promotion of law and order, spread of education and patronage of scholars, his deep personal religiosity, piety, and simple lifestyle. Through this analysis, Shibli Nomani portrays Aurangzeb as a brave, capable, and morally upright ruler who, despite his imperial position, lived a remarkably simple and principled life. The work stands as one of the earliest academic defences of Aurangzeb in Urdu literature.

### **Al-Ghazali**

Maulana Shibli Nomani wrote Al-Ghazali during his Hyderabad period, and it was published in 1902 A.D. Initially, he intended to write about Muslim Scholastic philosophers in the third volume in his series on Ilm-ul-Kalam. However, after studying the life and writings of Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, he was profoundly influenced by the depth of his thought, the vastness of his scholarship, and his unique contributions to moral and spiritual philosophy. As a result, Shibli Nomani decided to write a separate, detailed biography of this great theologian, philosopher, and Sufi master. This book covers: the entire philosophical system of Imam al-Ghazali, his intellectual struggles and spiritual crisis, his contributions to ethics and mysticism, and his role in shaping Islamic scholastic theology. This work introduced Indian Muslim readers to the intellectual legacy of one of the most important thinkers in Islamic history. It played a crucial role in making Ghazali's philosophy, ethical thought, and spiritual teachings accessible to Urdu readers.

## **Ilm-ul-Kalam**

Maulana Shibli Nomani devoted nearly one full year to writing his seminal work *Ilm-ul-Kalam*, which was published in 1903 A.D. during his stay in Hyderabad. The book was included in the *Silsila-e-Asfiyah* series, written and published under the patronage of the Nizam of Hyderabad. This work is considered one of the earliest systematic and comprehensive histories of Islamic scholastic theology ever written in Urdu. In this book, Shibli Nomani traces the evolution, expansion, transformation, and intellectual development of Islamic philosophical and theological thought. He discusses: The origins of *Ilm-ul-Kalam*, its relationship with Greek philosophical traditions, its interaction with Persian intellectual heritage, and its influence on medieval scholastic philosophy, particularly in the Muslim world. With his characteristic clarity, logical argumentation, and power of expression, Shibli Nomani explains how *Ilm-ul-Kalam* emerged as a rational defence of Islam during the Abbasid Caliphate. He writes that during the early Abbasid period, a vast body of philosophical texts from Greek, Syriac, and Persian sources were translated into Arabic. Simultaneously, scholars of various religious backgrounds were permitted to engage in open debates on theological issues.

As a result, communities who had previously been subdued by Muslim rule began to challenge Islam through philosophical argumentation rather than open confrontation. Muslim intellectuals responded by studying philosophy themselves and employing rational methods to meet these challenges. Thus, *Ilm-ul-Kalam* became an effective and intellectual means for defending Islamic beliefs. Maulana Saeed Ahmad Ansari praised this work highly, noting that no similar book exists in Arabic or Persian. He described it as a "magnificent achievement" and an invaluable contribution to the intellectual heritage of Islam.<sup>5</sup>

## **Al-Kalam**

*Al-Kalam* is Maulana Shibli Nomani's second major work on Islamic scholastic theology. While his earlier book surveyed the historical development of *Ilm-ul-Kalam*, this work seeks to present a new framework of Islamic theology that responds to the intellectual challenges of the modern age, particularly materialism, rationalism, and moral relativism. According to Mehdi Ifadi, Professor Shibli Nomani's work has made Urdu readers almost "self-sufficient" in this field. He argues that Shibli Nomani's treatment of major philosophical and theological problems is so comprehensive and well-reasoned that later additions may hardly be necessary. He further notes that Shibli's solutions reflect intellectual, rational, and moral depth of a very high order.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ansari, Maulana Saeed Ahmad, *Shibli Aur Ilm -ul-kalam, Shibli Naqqadon ki Nazar Mein*, ed. by. Naz Siddiqui 1976, Hyderabad, Ilyas Traders, p.149

<sup>6</sup> Hasan, M. Mehdi, *Ifadat-e-Mehdi*, ed. by. Begum Mehdi, Azamgarh, Maarif Press, p.124

Shibli Nomani wanted to present new IIm-ul-kalam by discussing under it three essential aspects of Islam:

1. Aqa'id (beliefs)
2. Ibadat (acts of worship)
3. Akhlaq (morality)

He further says that in this particular volume he will address only the section on beliefs, which he considered the most fundamental. He argued that the two essential beliefs in Islam are:

Tawhid (the Unity of Allah)

Risalah (the Prophethood)<sup>7</sup>

The entire book revolves around these two foundational doctrines, while other discussions are treated as secondary or supplementary.

A distinctive feature of Shibli Nomani's work is his careful preservation of the views of early Muslim scholars. He recognised that many classical works had been lost, making it necessary to rely on quotations preserved in later sources such as: al-Milal wa-n-Nihal of al-Shahrastani, Tafseer al-Kabir of Imam Fakhruddin al-Razi, and other classical commentaries and compendiums. By collecting and presenting these scattered references, Shibli preserved the insights of earlier theologians like Abu Muslim al-Isfahani and others, many of whose original works are no longer extant. Maulvi Mehdi remarks that Shibli Nomani adopted a balanced, moderate approach for appreciating European philosophy and science contributions. This intellectual moderation, according to him, is one of Shibli Nomani's most significant contributions to modern Islamic theology.<sup>8</sup>

### **Sawaneh Maulana Room**

After completing his celebrated work Al-Kalam, Maulana Shibli Nomani turned his attention to the life and contributions of Maulana Jalaluddin Roomi. He began writing Maulana Room's biography in 1904 A.D., and despite completing the manuscript within a few months, the book was published two years later in 1906 A.D. due to several unavoidable delays. This work, like many of Allamah Shibli's writings from that period, was composed during his stay in Hyderabad, was included in the Silsila-e-Asfiya series of books. This biography holds great literary and scholarly value because it is the first comprehensive work of its kind in the Urdu language. In it, Shibli Nomani explored multiple dimensions of Maulana Room's personality, scholarship, and spiritual thought. He examined the philosophical foundations of Maulana Room's ideas, the mystical symbolism in his teachings, and the depth of wisdom embedded in his renowned Mathnavi. Shibli Nomani systematically analysed various aspects of the Mathnavi, highlighting its structure,

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<sup>7</sup> Nomani, Shibli, Al-Kalam, 1341 A.H. Azamgarh Matbah Maarif, Deebachah,

<sup>8</sup> Hasan, M. Mehdi, op.cit., p.125

themes, philosophical insights, and its profound influence on Islamic intellectual and spiritual tradition.

Maulana Shibli also emphasised the unique position Maulana Room occupies within Islamic literature and Sufism. He demonstrated how Maulana Room blended poetic beauty with deep metaphysical reflection, and how his teachings continue to illuminate the spiritual path for readers across generations. Through this scholarly work, Indian Muslims, many of whom were previously unfamiliar with the intellectual richness of Maulana Room's legacy, were introduced to one of the greatest mystical thinkers in Islamic history. Shibli Nomani's biography of Maulana Room is therefore regarded as a significant and enduring contribution to Urdu literature, Islamic scholarship, and the study of Sufi philosophy. It remains an essential reference for anyone seeking to understand the intellectual depth and spiritual message of Maulana Jalaluddin Roomi.

### **Seerat-un-Nabi**

The last and most celebrated work of Maulana Shibli Nomani is *Seerat-un-Nabi*, widely regarded as the masterpiece of his scholarly career. Shibli Nomani began writing it in 1910 A.D., although he had long felt the need for an authentic, well-researched, and comprehensive biography of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in the Urdu language. By the early 20th century, many Western writers had produced biased accounts of the Prophet's life, often coloured by prejudice or misunderstanding. In 1906 A.D., Muhammad Ali Jauhar encouraged Shibli Nomani to undertake a proper scholarly response; however, due to the rise of apostasy movements, attacks on Islam, controversies regarding Western education, and the social tensions of the period, Shibli Nomani could not begin the work at that time.

In January 1912 A.D., he made a public declaration, stating that with the rapid spread of modern education among Indian Muslims, an accurate, detailed, and accessible biography of the Prophet had become indispensable. The educated Muslim youth lacked an authentic source in Urdu and were often dependent on unreliable and prejudiced European writings. When Maulana Shibli officially began collecting material for *Seerat-un-Nabi*, Her Highness Sultan Jahan Begum, the ruler of Bhopal, granted him a monthly scholarship of Rs. 250 on the recommendation of prominent scholar Mohammad Ameen Zuberi. This patronage allowed Shibli Nomani to devote himself fully to research. He worked with great dedication, but completed only the first volume before his death in 1914 A.D. At the time of his death, he had just begun writing the second volume. The remaining volumes were later completed by his disciple Syed Sulaiman Nadwi, following Maulana Shibli's notes, outlines and manuscripts.

The book was widely acclaimed in literary and academic circles. Many respected scholars paid glowing tributes to Shibli's achievement. Sheikh Muhammad Ikram, the eminent historian, wrote that even "one and a half volumes"

of Shibli's *Seerat-un-Nabi* demonstrated such research skill, intellectual foresight, literary elegance, and powerful argumentation that it is difficult to find its equal in Islamic literature.<sup>9</sup> Abdullah Abdul Latif Al-Azmi also offered high praise, noting that while biographies of the Prophet Muhammad(PBUH) have been written in many languages, the unique scholarly strength and literary beauty found in Shibli Nomani's work is rarely matched even in Arabic, the language of the holy Qur'an, or in Persian, or in other advanced languages of the world.<sup>10</sup>

*Seerat-un-Nabi* remains one of the most authoritative, influential, and widely read biographies of the Prophet Muhammad( PBUH) in Urdu literature. It combines historical accuracy with literary excellence and stands as the final, crowning achievement of Maulana Shibli Nomani's intellectual legacy.

### **Maqalat e Shibli**

Allama Shibli Nomani was the author of numerous books and rendered outstanding academic and literary services, for which he is remembered as a significant figure in the history of Urdu and Islamic literature. In addition to his major works, he wrote a large number of articles and critical essays on diverse subjects such as Islamic history, education, and Arabic literature etc.

Shibli Nomani contributed regularly to leading magazines and newspapers that were widely read by the educated Muslim community, including *Ma'arif*, *Deccan Review*, *Tehzeeb-ul-Akhlaq*, *Al-Nadwah* and *Aligarh Magazine* and among others. These articles were later compiled by his disciple, Maulana Sulaiman Nadwi, and published in eight volumes.

Through these writings, Maulana Shibli produced insightful and scholarly articles on historical, cultural, and political themes. His essays are marked by intellectual depth, literary elegance, and critical acumen. Syed Sulaiman Nadwi says that they may be compared to fragrant flowers scattered across a vast garden, spreading their influence and delight far and wide.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Legacy of Shibli Nomani**

The legacy of Maulana Shibli Nomani occupies a central place in the evolution of modern Islamic thought and Urdu scholarship in the Indian subcontinent. His most enduring contribution lies in establishing a critical, source-based, and aesthetically refined approach to Islamic historiography and biography. By combining rigorous research with a powerful literary style, he transformed Urdu prose into a medium capable of expressing complex historical and philosophical ideas with clarity and elegance.

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<sup>9</sup> Ikram, Shaikh Mohammad, *Yaadgaar e Shibli*, 1972, Lahore, Idara Thaqafat e Islamiya, p. 436

<sup>10</sup> Aazmi, Abdul Lateef, *Maulana Shibli ka Martaba Urdu Adab Mein*, 1945, Delhi, Shibli Academy, p.92.

<sup>11</sup> S.S. Nadwi, *op cit.*, p 34

One of the most tangible manifestations of his legacy is the Darul-Musannefin (Shibli Academy), Azamgarh, which became a beacon of Islamic research and literary production after his death. Under the leadership of scholars such as Maulana Sulaiman Nadwi, the academy carried forward Shibli's unfinished projects, most notably the completion of *Seerat-un-Nabi*. For over a century, Darul-Musannefin has continued to publish scholarly works in history, theology, biography, and literature, embodying Shibli's vision of collective and institutional scholarship.

Shibli's intellectual influence is also evident in the generations of scholars he inspired. Figures like Sulaiman Nadwi, Syed Sabahuddin Abdur Rahman, and other Nadwi and Azamgarhi scholars inherited his methodological rigor and literary sensibility. His approach shaped the curriculum and scholarly culture of Nadwatul Ulama, where the integration of traditional Islamic sciences with modern disciplines became a defining feature.

In the field of Islamic scholastic philosophy (*Ilm-ul-Kalam*), Shibli's legacy lies in reintroducing classical theological debates to modern readers in a historical and analytical framework. By presenting thinkers such as Imam al-Ghazali and the development of *kalam* in an accessible manner, he revived interest in Islamic intellectual history and demonstrated its relevance to contemporary religious and philosophical questions.

Beyond academia, Shibli Nomani's legacy endures in the cultural and intellectual self-confidence he instilled among Indian Muslims. At a time when colonial narratives often portrayed Islamic history as stagnant or regressive, Shibli reclaimed the Muslim past as a source of moral inspiration, intellectual achievement, and civilisational pride. His writings helped nurture a sense of dignity and continuity, encouraging Muslims to engage with modernity without severing their roots in tradition.

Today, more than a century after his death, Shibli Nomani is remembered as an architect of modern Islamic historiography in Urdu, a reformer of Muslim education, and a pioneer who harmonised faith with reason. His works continue to be read, researched, and reprinted, and his intellectual spirit lives on in institutions and scholars committed to the ideals he championed. In this sense, Shibli's legacy is not confined to history; it remains a living force in the ongoing pursuit of Islamic knowledge and intellectual renewal in South Asia and beyond.

## **CONCLUSION**

Maulana Shibli Nomani emerges from this study as one of the most prominent figures in the intellectual and literary history of modern South Asian Islam. His life reflects a rare synthesis of traditional Islamic scholarship and modern historical consciousness. Trained in classical disciplines yet deeply aware of the intellectual challenges posed by colonial modernity, Shibli sought to reinterpret Islamic history, theology, and biography through critical methods without

undermining faith or reverence for tradition. This balance between reason and reverence became the hallmark of his scholarship.

Through works such as *Al-Ma'mun*, *Seerat-un-Numan*, *Al-Farooq*, *Aurangzeb Alamgir Par Ek Nazar*, *Al-Ghazali*, and *Ilm-ul-Kalam*, Shibli introduced Urdu readers to a new model of Islamic historiography—one grounded in authentic sources, comparative analysis, and literary refinement. He moved beyond hagiographical narration and presented Muslim heroes and scholars as historically situated personalities, shaped by political, social, and intellectual forces. In doing so, he laid the foundations of critical historical writing in Urdu and elevated Islamic biography into a serious academic discipline.

Equally significant was his role as an educational reformer and institution-builder. His association with Aligarh, Hyderabad, and Nadwatul Ulama demonstrates his continuous engagement with the question of Muslim educational revival. His vision for Darul-Musannefin at Azamgarh epitomised his lifelong commitment to creating an enduring centre for research, writing, and intellectual renewal. Though his life was cut short in 1914, the institutions he nurtured and the methods he introduced ensured that his influence would extend far beyond his lifetime.

In sum, Shibli Nomani was not merely a historian or a biographer but a visionary intellectual who redefined the contours of Islamic scholarship in South Asia. His contributions continue to serve as a bridge between the classical Islamic tradition and the demands of modern academic inquiry, making his work relevant even in contemporary discussions on Islam, history, and education

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