

'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib in Shaykh Āzarī's Qasidas¹Güneş Muhip ÖZYURT²

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Abstract

'Alī Hamza b. 'Alī Melik al-Ṭūsī al-Bayhaqī al-İsferâyīnī, shortly known as Shaykh Āzarī (d. 1461-1462) is a Timurid-era Persian Sufi poet from Khorasan region of Iran who also stayed in India for a while. The fact that he received the appreciation of both Timurid king Shāhrukh and Bahmanī king Aḥmad Shāh Walī and was admitted for service in their palaces is testimony to his prowess as a poet. That said, academics have paid little attention to Shaykh Āzarī until recently and the content of his poetry almost completely remained outside the scope of research. Hence, this paper attempts to tackle a key element in his poems, which is the praise of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (R.A). Shaykh Āzarī's diwan contains no beyts praising kings and other patrons. Instead, his qasidas are marked with the praise of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W), his Ahl al-Bayt and especially 'Alī. A scrutiny of Shaykh Āzarī's qasidas reveals that he sees 'Alī as the paragon of the perfect human being, who is free of sins and outstanding in his valour and knowledge. Moreover, the poet maintains that 'Alī is the rightful Imam i.e. the ruler of Muslims after the Prophet. Indeed, Āzarī describes 'Alī as above all created beings with the exception of Prophet Muhammad, whose pre-eminence he clearly states in a number of beyts. It is concluded that Shaykh Āzarī's portrayal of 'Alī is in line with itnā'asharī Shiism.

Keywords: Shaikh Azari, Sheikh Azari, Azari Tusi, Azari Esfarayeni, Ali ibn Abi Talib.

Şeyh Âzerî'nin Kasidelerinde Hz. Ali**Öz**

Kısaca Şeyh Âzerî olarak bilinen Ali Hamza b. Ali Melik Et-Ṭūsî El-Beyhakî El-İsferâyînî (ö. 1461-1462) Timurlular devrinde İran'ın Horasan bölgesinde yaşamış ve bir süre de Hindistan'da bulunmuş mutasavvıf bir Fars şairidir. Timurlu hükümdarı Şahruh ve Behmenî hükümdarı Ahmed Şah Velî'nin takdirini kazanarak her iki hükümdarın hizmetine kabul edilmiş olması onun üstün bir şairlik yeteneğine sahip olduğunu göstermektedir. Ancak, yakın zamana kadar araştırmacılar Timurlular devri Fars şiirinin önemli bir siması olduğu anlaşılan Âzerî'ye gereken ilgiyi göstermemiş ve onun şiirinin içeriği neredeyse hiçbir araştırmaya konu olmamıştır. Buna binaen, mevcut çalışmada Âzerî'nin şiirlerinin ana unsurlarından birisi olan Hz. Ali övgüsü ele alınmıştır. Şeyh Âzerî divanında hükümdarları ve diğer hamileri öven hiçbir beyit yoktur. Bunun yerine, onun kasideleri Hz. Muhammed, Ehl-i Beyt ve hususen Hz. Ali'yi metheder. Şeyh Âzerî'nin kasidelerinin incelenmesi neticesinde onun Hz. Ali'yi cesareti ve ilmi ile adeta kâmil bir insan ve günahlardan korunmuş bir şahsiyet olarak gördüğü ortaya çıkmaktadır. Dahası, şaire göre Hz. Ali, Hz. Muhammed'den sonra Müslümanların idarecisi yani imam olma hakkına sahip olan kişidir. Esasen, Âzerî Hz. Ali'yi Hz.

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Muhammed dışında tüm mahlukatın üzerinde bir mertebeye sahip olarak tavsif etmektedir. Hz. Peygamber'in Hz. Ali'ye üstünlüğünü ise şair beyitlerinde açıkça vurgulamaktadır. Sonuç olarak Şeyh Âzerî'nin Hz. Ali'ye bakışının İsnââşeriyye Şiîliğin bakış açısıyla örtüştüğü görülmüştür.

Anahtar kelimeler: Şeyh Azeri, Azeri Tusi, Azeri İsfereyeni, Hz. Ali.

Introduction

This paper aims to investigate the image of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib as reflected in the qasidas of Shaykh Āzarī³ (شیخ آذری) a Timurid-era Shia-Sufi poet from Khorasan. In the introduction of the paper, there will be a brief discussion on the Muslims' perception of Ali. Next, some example beyts about 'Alī by poets who composed Persian poetry before Āzarī will be examined and an account on the life, works and diwan of Shaykh Āzarī will be given. Finally, how 'Alī was referred to and portrayed as well as the way his various qualities and the narratives relating to him were mentioned in Shaykh Āzarī's qasidas will be demonstrated with examples.

'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 661)⁴ being both a cousin and a son-in-law to the Prophet Muhammad, grew up under his care to become one of the first Muslims and accompanied the Prophet in almost every battlefield while displaying great heroism in combat. Distinguished with the depth of his knowledge ('ilm), he was the fourth of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (Rāshidūn) and one of the Ten with the Glad Tidings of Paradise (al-'Ashara al-Mubashshara). Accordingly, 'Alī is regarded by all Muslims as one of the most virtuous among the Companions of the Prophet (ṣaḥāba). Shias, on the other hand, have gone beyond Sunnis in their reverence of 'Alī and see him, in a way, as a perfect individual and a person comparable to the prophets (Bozan, 2011: 15-17). From the Shia perspective, with his virtues such as piety, knowledge, valor, clemency and generosity, 'Alī represents a level of perfection that no ordinary human being and not even the ṣaḥāba could attain (Shīrāzī, 1385: 962). Shia believe that 'Alī and the Imams descending from him are infallible (ma'ṣūm) just like the prophets and have, through Quran and Hadith, been given the right to lead (wilāya) the Islamic community after Prophet Muhammad (Rizvi, 1985: 57).

One of the most important virtues of 'Alī recognized by both Sunnis and Shias is his vast knowledge on religious issues. All Muslims agree that 'Alī was among the ṣaḥāba who knew Quran the best and that his grasp of Hadith and Fiqh were complete. His appointment by Prophet Muhammad as a qāḍī in Yemen, the willingness of the first three Caliphs in consulting with him and that he was viewed by ṣaḥāba as an authority on matters of religion are examples that demonstrate the degree of Ali's knowledge (Shīrāzī, 1385: 408-409) (Kandemir, 1989: 375). Yet another example is the often-cited hadith by the Prophet "I am the city of knowledge and 'Alī is its gate", which is considered sahih by some Islamic scholars and mawḍū' by others (Shīrāzī, 1385: 645-646) (Kandemir, 1989: 376). This quote, along with others, has paved the way for the views that 'Alī received from the Prophet some kind of specialized, secret knowledge and only passed it onto those worthy of knowing it. These views were particularly embraced by Sufis, who saw 'Alī as the source of Tasawwuf's secrets (Yıldırım, 2009: 42-43). As for Shias, they regarded the idea that 'Alī possessed special knowledge as a proof for his right to wilāya after Prophet Muhammad.

³ Encyclopaedia of Islam THREE transliteration system is used in this paper, with the exception of ڙ which has been transliterated as z in order to better reflect the Persian pronunciation. For well-known words such as "diwan", the most commonly used spelling has been adopted.

⁴ All dates are in Gregorian calendar unless otherwise stated.

Another virtue of Ali, upon which all Muslims agree is his valour in battle. The famous quote “lā fatā illā ‘Alī, lā sayfa illā Zū’l-Faqār” meaning “no brave man but ‘Alī, no sword but Zū’l-Faqār” is the most often mentioned testimony to ‘Alī’s bravery. “Lā fatā” is most widely accepted to be called out by Muslim soldiers in reaction to ‘Alī’s feats in battlefield but there are also reports that it was uttered by the angel Riḍwān or Jabrā’īl in the battle of Badr or Uḥud (Güneş, 2018: 14). Examples of ‘Alī’s heroism are also seen in the Battle of Khaybar. During this battle, ‘Alī killed Antar, the powerful Jewish warrior defending the city and dislodged the fort’s gate all by himself. According to some narratives about Khaybar’s gate, ‘Alī, after losing his shield during the fighting, picked up the gate and wielded it as a shield until the end of the battle. After he dropped the gate on the ground, eight people tried to move it together, but they failed. In some narratives, the number of people trying to move the gate is given as forty and even seventy. (Sarıçam, 2005: 19-20).

One issue about ‘Alī that has been the subject of argument is his Imāma or his appointment through holy scripture as the ruler of Islamic community after the Prophet. Sunnis, taking Imāma and Khilāfa as synonymous, acknowledge the need for the election of a qualified individual as the leader to insure the wellbeing of the Umma but they do not claim that this individual is to have extraordinary qualities such as infallibility (‘iṣma) or appointment by divine decree (Öztürk, 2015: 13-16). Shias, on the other hand, hold that the question of who is to become the Imam after Prophet Muhammad is not one that is left for men to decide and that twelve persons consisting of ‘Alī and eleven of his descendants have been assigned by Allah as the leaders of Muslims (Shīrāzī, 1385: 190) (Rizvi, 1985: 42-43). To provide evidence for their claim, Shia scholars have interpreted numerous Quran verses and hadiths as indicating ‘Alī’s Imāma (Öztürk, 2015: 18-26). This unique approach of Shiism has paved the way for Imams to be considered as a group of individuals fundamentally different from all other humans and for the rise of the concept of ‘iṣma i.e. sinlessness. As a result, Sunnis came to believe that only prophets are safeguarded from sinning while Shias expanded the borders of ‘iṣma to include ‘Alī, Fāṭima and the eleven Imams descending from them. (Dungersi, 1996: 21). Thus, the group of fourteen sinless persons including the Prophet has been named “Chahārdah Ma‘šūm-e Pāk” by Shias, meaning “Fourteen Infallibles” in Persian (Öztürk, 2015: 44).

'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib in Persian poetry before Shaykh Āzarī

Though not as detailed as Shaykh Āzarī himself, Persian poets preceding him also praised ‘Alī in their poems. For instance, Sanā’ī (d. 1131) who is known for his role in introducing mystical concepts into poetry, stated that ‘Alī is the gate to the city of knowledge and that he who seeks the right path must choose him as guide:

چون همی دانی که شهر علم را حیدر درست خوب نبود جز که حیدر میر و مهتر داشتن

(Sanā’ī, 1362: 468)

Now that you know ‘Alī is the gate of the city of knowledge,
It will not be good that you choose but him as master and guide,

Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273) also mentioned ‘Alī’s virtues and aspects of his personality in his Mathnawī (Yıldız, 2007). From among the several beyts that contain praise of ‘Alī, one is especially noteworthy:

شیر حق را دان مطهر از دغل

از علی آموز اخلاص عمل

(Mevlânâ Celâleddin Muhammed, 2007: 204)

From 'Alî learn the deeds of purity,

Deem the Lion of God free of ruse,

According to Yıldız (2007: 135) the above beyt points out that 'Alî has purity of faith (ikhlâş), which is correct, but it also suggests that 'Alî is free of wrong deeds, bringing to mind the Shia notion of infallibility of Ahl al-Bayt. That said, one should not jump to the conclusion that Rûmî embraced Shia views. Investigating Rûmî's ideas about Shiism, Ekinci (2007) has concluded that he was not Shia.

Yet another grand master of Persian literature, Sa'dî (d. 1292) openly depicted 'Alî as ma'sûm in a qasida, while referring to Shafâ'a, the intercession for forgiveness by Imams on Judgment Day, which is a key concept in Shia doctrine:

ماییم و دست و دامن معصوم مرتضی

فردا که هرکسی به شفیعی ز نند دست

(Sa'dî, 1385: 942)

Tomorrow when everyone turns to an intercessor,

We will seek help from Murtaḍā the ma'sûm,

Ḥāfīz-e Shīrāzī (d. 1390) who is considered the pinnacle of classical Persian prosody, was still alive during Āzarī's childhood. In one of his famous ghazals, he called 'Alî "Shaḥna of Najaf" (شحنه نجف) and declared that loyalty to 'Alî was the key to the ultimate guidance:

بدرقه رهت شود همت شحنه نجف

حافظ اگر قدم زنی در ره خاندان به صدق

(Ḥāfīz, 1379: 463)

Ḥāfīz, if you walk the path of the dynasty with trueness,

The will of the Shaḥna of Najaf will guide your way,

Shaḥna is a title given in some Islamic states to military governors commissioned to protect an area (Merçil, 2010: 292). Thus, "Shaḥna of Najaf" means the protector and ruler of Najaf. This epithet must be a reference to the fact that 'Alî was based in Najaf, also known as Kufa, during his term as Khalīfa and that his tomb is located in this city.

It is of note that Persian poets that came before Shaykh Āzarī also used concepts belonging to Shiism when praising 'Alî. However, there is no sufficient evidence to reach a clear conclusion on the sectarian affiliation of these poets. The way they praised 'Alî is more likely to be connected with Sufism. The Sufi view of 'Alî as the source of Tasawwuf's secrets had allowed for the emergence of common ground between Sufism and Shiism (Nasr, 1970). The poets of Persian literature, as they were immersed in Sufi thought, did not necessarily need to be Shia in order to view 'Alî from a Shia perspective.

The life and works of Shaykh Āzarī

'Alî Hamza b. 'Alî Melik al-Ṭūsī al-Bayhaqī al-Isfarāyīnī, shortly known as Shaykh Āzarī, was born sometime between 1380 and 1382 in the town of Isfarāyīn in the Khorasan region. Because his birth occurred on the month of Āzar in Iranian calendar, he chose Āzarī as his appellation (Yūsufnāzhād, 1389: 5). 'Alî Hamza was involved with poetry from an early age and praised royals and governors in his youth. He earned appreciation for a Qasida praising Timurid ruler Shāhrukh, who promised to designate

him as Malik al-Shu'arā' (Dawlatshāh, 1385: 718-719). However, Āzarī became interested in Tasawwuf around this time and ignoring the career prospect as the royal poet, he initially joined the circle of Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Ghazālī. After Muḥyī al-Dīn's death in 830 AH, Āzarī completed his training (sulūk) under the supervision of Shāh Ni'mat Allāh Walī, the founder of Ni'mat Allāhiyya sufi order and received a mystic's wool robe (khirqa) and authorization to guide others (ijāzat) (Dawlatshāh, 1385: 719-720).

Shaykh Āzarī stayed in Mecca for a year and performed asceticism, after which he travelled to India and entered the service of Bahmanī king Aḥmad Shāh Walī. While he did receive the favor of the king, he hardly enjoyed the life in India. He left India after five years with a considerable fortune donated to him by Aḥmad Shāh (Yūsufnāzhād, 1389: 7). Returning to Isfarāyīn, Shaykh Āzarī was done with palaces and praise of kings. The sufi poet spent the last thirty years of his life with worship, scholarship and charity and passed away in 866 AH (Dawlatshāh, 1385: 719-727).

All existing research on Shaykh Āzarī agrees that he embraced ithnā'asharī Shiism (Wusūkī, 1390: 9) (Mujtabāi, 1367: 266-268) (Yūsufnāzhād, 1389: 8). It should also be kept in mind that Āzarī's father 'Alī Malik was an official of the Sarbadārī state in Isfarāyīn (Dawlatshāh, 1385: 718) and Sarbadārīs pursued a harsh policy of Shiification in the last twenty years of their power (Mahendrarajah, 2012: 394-395). Born as the son of a government official towards the end of this period, any alternative other than Āzarī being brought up as a Shia seems an unlikely scenario.

Other than his diwan, Shaykh Āzarī's two fully extant works are Miftāḥ al-Asrār and its rewritten version by the same author, Djawāhir al-Asrār. In these volumes, Āzarī explains the meaning of hard-to-understand Quranic verses, hadiths, sayings by mystics and beyts by poets. The only manuscript of Miftāḥ al-Asrār is in Tehran University Library, while there are several existing manuscripts of Jawāhir al-Asrār. The poet also composed a mathnawī titled Bahmannāma narrating the deeds of Bahmanī kings, but no known manuscript of this work is presently available. Yet another work by Āzarī is Mir'āt, an informative mathnawī of four chapters discussing various subjects, of which only two chapters remain. Some works of the poet on mathematics has also been found (Yalamahā, 1390).

Shaykh Āzarī's Diwan

Yūsuf alī Yūsufnāzhād (1389) who prepared a critical edition of Shaykh Āzarī's Diwan, identified and described three manuscripts of the diwan itself and three other manuscripts containing poems by Āzarī together with those of other poets. According to Yūsufnāzhād, the Royal Danish Library manuscript dated 863 AH is the oldest surviving copy of the diwan and also the one most free from errors. However, several pages of this manuscript are missing and therefore it contains only 2477 beyts. The diwan manuscript with the highest number of beyts is kept in Malik National Library in Tehran. This copy, dated 1073 AH, is legible but presents frequent errors by the scribe. Another manuscript stored with record number PSC-606 at the Library of Asiatic Society in Kolkata (Calcutta) has few missing beyts but is again replete with errors. Also, this copy is poorly legible as it has been exposed to moisture. Finally, one collection kept in Malik National Library and two collections in microfilm form in Tehran University Library, also contain a limited number of beyts by Shaykh Āzarī (Yūsufnāzhād, 1389: 15-21).

In 1389 (2010-2011), Aḥmad Shahīd published Shaykh Āzarī's Diwan as a book (Isfarāyīnī, 1389). However, Shahīd's edition cannot be considered a critical edition and suffers serious flaws. First of all, apparently, different manuscripts were not accessed and only a single copy was used in reconstructing

the text. The editor did not care to indicate the manuscript that was used and naturally manuscript differences are not given. Also, textual errors are unacceptably frequent to the degree that some beyts are completely unintelligible.

Another edition of Shaykh Âzarî's Diwan was also published for the first time in 1389 (2010-2011) by Muhsin Kiyâyî and Sayyid 'Abbās Rastākhīz (Âzarî-e Isfarāyīnī, 1390). While this version is actually a critical edition, the editors did not use two of the most reliable manuscripts, namely the Denmark manuscript and Calcutta manuscript. This has made the editors dependent on the Malik National Library manuscript, copied two centuries after Âzarî's death and possibly under the biased supervision of Safawids.

The critical edition of Shaykh Âzarî's Diwan that takes into consideration the most complete set of manuscripts is the one prepared by Yūsuf alī Yūsufnāzhād as a doctoral thesis (Yūsufnāzhād, 1389). The six manuscripts mentioned above have been used in this unpublished thesis and manuscript differences are given. Yūsufnāzhād's text consists of 32 qasidas, 478 ghazals and poems in other forms that add up to approximately 4800 beyts. In this paper, Yūsufnāzhād's text is used as the main source⁵ and reference is made to Kiyâyî and Rastākhīz edition⁶ where necessary.

'Alī b. Abī Tālib in Shaykh Âzarî's qasidas

Shaykh Âzarî is known to have received the patronage of the Timurid ruler Shāhrukh and the Bahmanī ruler Aḥmad Shāh Walī. Yet, even if he did recite qasidas praising his patrons, he did not put them in his diwan as none of his presently known qasidas include praise of kings or statesmen. Instead, the majority of the qasidas in Âzarî's diwan revere Prophet Muhammad, Ahl al-Bayt, the Shia Imams and especially 'Alī. In his non-qasida poems, too, Âzarî mentioned 'Alī a number of times but it is in his qasidas that his perception of 'Alī can be observed in the most detailed manner. In the following part of this paper, various aspects of Shaykh Âzarî's views about 'Alī will be discussed with example beyts from his qasidas.

'Alī's epithets mentioned in the Diwan

Two of 'Alī's most famous epithets are "Lion of God" (شیر یزدان) and "King of the Brave" (شاه مردان), both of which are references to his valour. These two epithets are also found in Shaykh Âzarî's qasidas:

شیر یزدان شاه مردان شهنه ی دشت نجف تاج دار انت منی شهسوار لافتا

(Diwan p. 33)
Lion of God, King of the Brave, Shaḥna of Najaf desert,
Crowned with "anta minnī", knight of "lā fatā",

Another epithet of 'Alī, also meaning lion is "Ḥaydar" (حیدر). The poet mentions this epithet in the below beyt, in which he advises those willing to attain spiritual ranks to accept the guidance of 'Alī:

گرت هواسست که در دین به دولتی برسی مدار دست ارادت ز دامن حیدر

(Diwan p. 50)
If you have desire to reach fortune in religion,

⁵ For brevity, Yūsufnāzhād's edition will be cited as "Diwan" when quoting beyts.

⁶ To be cited as "Kiyâyî-Rastākhīz" when quoting beyts.

Let not the will’s hand cease imploring Ḥaydar,

“Murtaḍā” (مرتضا) is another one of ‘Alī’s well-known epithets. According to the narratives, when Prophet Muhammad departed for the Tabūk expedition, he left ‘Alī behind as his deputy in Madīna. Prophet asked ‘Alī, “Your place by my side is like Hārūn’s place by Mūsā’s side. Are you not contented?” and ‘Alī replied, “I am contented”. Thus, he received the name “Murtaḍā” meaning “contented” (Üzüm, 2004: 97-98). In a beyt where he refers to ‘Alī as “Murtaḍā”, Āzarī alludes to this conversation:

السلام ای آدم اهل ولایت مرتضا

السلام عليك ای هارون امت السلام

(Diwan p. 33)

Hail to thee, o Hārūn of the Umma, hail!

Hail o Ādam of the household of wilāya, Murtaḍā!

An epithet for ‘Alī often used in Turkish diwan poetry is “Sāqī-e Kawthar” (ساقی کوثر) (Demir, 2011: 99). “Sāqī” means a cup-bearer and Kawthar is the name of a spring in heaven according to Islam. Hence, the term “Sāqī-e Kawthar” denotes the one who serves the water of the heavenly spring. This epithet is also seen in classical Persian poetry. For instance, Ḥāfiẓ-e Shīrāzī calls ‘Alī “Sāqī-e Kawthar” in a rubā’ī (Ḥāfiẓ, 1379: 762). Shaykh Āzarī, too, refers to Alī with this epithet in some of his beyts:

شراب معرفت از دست ساقی کوثر

کسی به لذت مستی رسد که نوش کند

(Diwan p. 50)

Attain the zest of intoxication will he who drinks,

The wine of ma’rifa from Sāqī-e Kawthar’s hand.

As noted before in this paper, Ḥāfiẓ-e Shīrāzī calls ‘Alī “Shahna of Najaf” (شحنة نجف) and Shaykh Āzarī calls him “Shahna of Najaf desert” (شحنة ی دشت نجف). In the below beyt by Āzarī ‘Alī is referred to as “King of Najaf” (شاه نجف):

یعنی که علی میر عرب والی والا

یا رب به حق شاه نجف شحنة ی زمزم

(Diwan p. 28)

O God! For the sake of the King of Najaf and Shahna of Zamzam,

In other words ‘Alī, Lord of the Arabs, Wālī-e Wālā,

In the above beyt, the title “Lord of the Arabs” (میر عرب) must be a reference to ‘Alī’s position as the head of the Umma. It should be noted that in another beyt discussed in the following parts of this paper, the poet calls Alī “Lord of the Persians” (میر عجم). As for “Wālī-e Wālā” (والی والا), it means “the highest one in authority” and is an epithet Shias still use today to refer to Alī. Finally, for the explanation of “Shahna of Zamzam” (شحنة ی زمزم), there are two possibilities. The first has to do with the rediscovery of the then lost Zamzam spring by Abd al-Muṭṭalib, Prophet Muhammad’s and ‘Alī’s grandfather, who took upon himself the maintenance of the well. The responsibility then passed onto ‘Alī’s father Abū Ṭālib. However, Abū Ṭālib was having financial difficulties and ‘Abbās -another son of Abd al-Muṭṭalib- accepted the job, which he later passed onto his own descendants. It is possible that the epithet “Shahna of Zamzam” alludes to ‘Alī being the son of Abū Ṭālib, who was the first to inherit the responsibility of taking care of Zamzam well. Alternately, “Shahna of Zamzam” could be considered a metaphor

synonymous to “Sâqî-e Kawthar”. An example of the use of Kawthar and Zamzam in similar meanings is seen in the below beyt of Hâfîz-e Shirâzî:

گلیم بخت کسی را که بافتند سیاه

به آب زمزم و کوثر سفید نتوان کرد

(Hâfîz, 1379: 754)

Not even with water of Zamzam and Kawthar can be whitened,
One's rug of fortune that was weaved in black,

The connection in meaning is all the more apparent in a beyt by Yamîni, a Bektâshî poet who lived in Balkans in the late 15th century and early 16th century:

Ey Yemîni tayyib ü tâhir olunmaz şöyle
bil,

Her kim içmez Sâki-i Kevser'den âb-ı
Zenzemi

(Özmen, 1998: 35)

O Yamîni, know that one cannot be decent and pure,
If he does not drink the Zamzam water (served) by Sâqî-e Kawthar,

It should also be noted that the epithet “Shahna of Zamzam” is also present in another beyt to be discussed in the following parts and is mentioned together with “Sâqî-e Kawthar”.

The notion of ‘Alî as the person who learned from Prophet Muhammad and passed on the knowledge that was foundational to tasawwuf has led Sufis to refer to him as “King of Saints” (شاه اولیا) (Ceyhan, 2006: 11). This epithet is also mentioned in Shaykh Āzarî's diwan:

سرور مردان و شاه اولیا پیداست کیست

مقتدای خلق بعد از مصطفی پیداست کیست

(Diwan p. 42)

It is evident who the leader of people after Muṣṭafā is,
It is evident who the King of the Brave and King of Saints is,

‘Alî's heroism in battle

Among the qualities of ‘Alî most often mentioned by Shaykh Āzarî are his physical strength and his valor in battlefield. The poet emphasizes that ‘Alî's combat prowess is a publicly known fact by citing the quote “lā fatā illā ‘Alî, lā sayfa illā Zū'l-Faqār” in one of his beyts:

قابل تشریف و قول لافتی پیداست کیست

صاحب لاسیف بر ارباب دین پوشیده نیست

(Diwan p. 42)

No secret for the experts of religion is the owner of “lā sayfa”,
It is evident who is honoured by the quote “lā fatā”,

Āzarî compares ‘Alî's combat skills to that of a lion in several of his beyts, one of which is as follows:

که اوست در ره دین پیشوای اهل هدا

هزبر معركة یعنی علی ابوطالب

(Diwan p. 36)

Fierce lion of battlefield, ‘Alî b. Abî Ṭālib,
He is the leader of the well-guided in the way of religion,

The poet also compares 'Alī to other creatures that symbolise courage and strength:

بیر وادی شجاعت شیر کوهستان حرب ازدهای بحر هیجا فیل میدان دغا

(Diwan p. 33)
Tiger of valley of courage, lion of mountain of war,
Dragon of sea of battle, elephant of field of deceit,

'Alī's valor is apparently beyond that of ordinary men. In a battle, where even brave men tremble in fear, 'Alī has the nerve of a dragon:

اندر آن میدان که شیران جمله روباه آمدند در گه هیجا به سان ازدها پیداست کیست

(Diwan p. 42)
In that field where lions all turned fox,
It is evident who was like a dragon at the hour of battle,

In addition to his valor, Āzarī also underlines 'Alī's physical strength and compares him to Prophet Mūsā in that sense:

در حلم خلیل الله و در علم چو آدم در وزن کفایت شده هم کفه موسا

(Diwan p. 40)
Like Khalīl Allāh in toleration, like Ādam in knowledge,
In physique he is the equal of Mūsā,

In two beyts, Āzarī compares 'Alī to Rustem-e Zāl, the famous warrior of ancient Iranian legends. According to the poet, 'Alī is unmistakably superior:

آن شهسوار معرکه کاندز مصاف حرب رفتی عنان ز هیبتش از دست پور زال

(Diwan p. 52)
That knight of war in the battle lines,
Of his dread, from son of Zāl's hand slipped the bridle rein,

به گاه حکمت و دانش هزار چون لقمان به گاه زور و شجاعت هزار رستم زال

(Diwan p. 53)
In wisdom and knowledge, a thousand times Luqmān,
In strength and courage, one thousand Rustem-e Zāls,

While 'Alī is known to have fought in many battles, his deeds in the Battle of Khaybar stand out as some of the best-known instances of his heroism. Shaykh Āzarī mentions the story of 'Alī dismantling Khaybar's gate while also reminding that he is the gate to the city of knowledge:

باب خیبر را به بازوی علی باب آنکه بر کند و برافکند از قفا پیداست کیست

(Diwan p. 42)
With the arm of "Alī is its gate", it is evident who ripped,
And threw back over his head the gate of Khaybar,

It is possible to infer from the above beyt that 'Alī, who is a conqueror in the material world, is also a channel for conquering the truths in the spiritual world. Another beyt mentioning Khaybar that also alludes to the connection between 'Alī's material and spiritual merits is below:

چون کند کید ضعیف شیطنت پیش علی آنکه باب خیبر او بر کند و افکند از قفا

(Diwan p. 40)
How can the weak designs of Satan stop 'Alī,
It is he who ripped Khaybar's gate and threw it away,

In yet another beyt, Āzarī cites several of 'Alī's heroic deeds together:

برنده ی تن مره برنده ی سر عمرو کننده ی در خیبر کشنده ی عنتر

(Diwan p. 51)
Cutter of Murra's body, taker of 'Amr's head,
Ripper of Khaybar's gate, killer of 'Antar,

In the above the beyt, the person whose body is cut is Murra b. Qays. According to a narrative, he was a rich and influential pagan who lived after 'Alī. Finding out that 'Alī had killed several of his ancestors, Murra gathered two thousand cavalymen and marched on Najaf, the site of 'Alī's tomb. After a six-day battle, Murra entered the city and was prepared to destroy 'Alī's tomb. At that moment, two fingers resembling the two blades of 'Alī's Zū'l-Faqār rose out of the tomb and killed Murra by cutting him into two pieces, which later became two black stones (Al-Naqdī, 1381: 423) (Ünlüsoy, 2014: 377). The other person mentioned in the beyt is 'Amr b. Abd-e Wadd. He was a Meccan pagan who taunted the Muslims in the Battle of Khandaq for sending forth a warrior to face him. 'Alī volunteered for the challenge and at the end of the fight, beheaded 'Amr. Finally, ripping Khaybar's gate and killing 'Antar are among the heroic deeds of 'Alī in the Battle of Khaybar.

'Alī's knowledge

As mentioned above Shaykh Āzarī describes 'Alī's wisdom and knowledge as a thousand times that of Luqmān. Indeed, the poet believes that concerning knowledge, Alī is second only to Prophet Muhammad:

شفای جان محب است و رنج سینه ی خصم علیست بعد نبی در علوم مولانا

(Diwan p. 36)
A remedy for the friend's soul, a pain in the enemy's heart,
After the Prophet, 'Alī is our leader in knowledge,

Being a Shia, Āzarī alludes to a connection between 'Alī's knowledge and his Imāma. According to him, the special knowledge 'Alī received from the Prophet includes the secrets of Wilāya, which make him qualified to become the Imam:

وارث سر ولایت باب شهرستان علم کوه حلم و کان دین و دانش و بحر سخا

(Diwan p. 33)
Inheritor of secret of Wilāya, gate to the city of knowledge,
Mountain of toleration, ore of religion and knowledge, sea of generosity,

available, it is naturally unwarranted to be limited by the earthly knowledge of Jām-e Jam. Hence, Shaykh Âzarî maintains that the person willing to reach true wisdom must choose 'Alī as his guide.

'Alī's generosity

Shaykh Âzarî underlines 'Alī's generosity in several places in his Diwan. For instance, in one of the abovementioned beyts, Âzarî calls 'Alī "sea of generosity". In another beyt, he states none can compete with 'Alī in benevolence:

هرگز نرسد منفعت چشمه به دریا

در جود و کرم غیر کسی همبر او نیست

(Diwan p. 40)

In generosity and benevolence, no other is his equal,
Benefit of the fountain never catches up with the sea,

The poet also mentions narratives about instances of 'Alī's generosity in his Qasidas. One such narrative maintains the verses 5-12 of Sūrat al-Insān refer to Ahl al-Bayt consisting of 'Alī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. According to this narrative, 'Alī and Fāṭima took an oath to fast for three days if their sons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn recovered from an illness. Yet, on each of the three evenings when they were supposed to break their fast, they came across a person in need, whom they gave all of their food. Thus, the family ate nothing for the length of three days. The verses of Sūrat al-Insān revealed about this event laud those who feed the needy even when they themselves would love to have the food. Âzarî quotes Sūrat al-Insān in alluding to 'Alī's generosity:

مطلع یوفون بالنذر آفتاب هل آتا

عالم علم سلونی سر شناس لو کشف

(Diwan p. 33)

The emblem of the knowledge of "salūnī", the luminary of "lav kushifa",
The point of sunrise of "yūfūna bi-l-nadhri", the sun of "hal atā",

"Yūfūna bi-l-nadhri" is a quotation from al-Insān (76:7) and means "they perform (their) vows" (translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali). According to the abovementioned narrative, the people who perform their vows are 'Alī and his family. As for "hal atā", it is a quotation consisting of the first two words of al-Insān and is also used as an alternate name for the Sūrat.

According to another narrative exemplifying 'Alī's generosity, one day a beggar walked into the mosque where the Muslims were present and asked for alms, but nobody helped him. 'Alī, who was praying at that moment, pointed to the ring on his little finger and allowed the beggar to take it (Öztürk, 2015: 22) (Shirāzī, 1385: 306-307). In this way, 'Alī gave alms even when praying. Shaykh Âzarî composed the following beyt in reference to this narrative:

داد در حال رکوع از دست خود خاتم یکبیت

آنکه کرد او جمع با هم هم صلوه و هم زکوه

(Diwan p. 43)

He who brought together prayer and alms-giving is one and the same,
With he who gave from his hand the ring when bowing (in prayer),

According to several scholars of Tafsīr, verse 55 of Sūrat al-Mā'ida was revealed after the abovementioned event to laud 'Alī's generosity (Öztürk, 2015: 22) (Shirāzī, 1385: 306-307). In a beyt found only in Kiyāyī and Rastākhīz edition, Âzarî quotes the final word of this verse "rākī'ūna" meaning

“they bow down humbly (in worship)”, which per se is a reference to ‘Alī’ who was performing the rukū‘ part of the prayer i.e. bowing when he gave his ring to the beggar:

در خور تشریف وصف راکعون دانی که کیست آنکه می بخسد به سائل در نماز انگوشترین
(Kiyāyī-Rastākhīz p. 67)
Do you know who is in the sun of esteem in the description of “rāki‘ūna”,
It is he who gives the ring to the beggar during prayer,

‘Alī’s infallibility

In none of his beyts about ‘Alī did Shaykh Āzarī use the words “ma‘ṣūm” or “iṣma”. However, it is understood that the poet embraces the Shia view that ‘Alī is sinless as he implies in a number of his beyts that ‘Alī is a flawless individual as regards to his actions and his personality. The beyts in question are presented below:

در غفت او بحث کرا زهره و یارا آنجا که رود بحث ز پاکی و طهارت
(Diwan p. 40)
When there is talk about cleanness and decency,
Who has the courage and power to speak of his purity?

وز کبر و ریا و حسد و حقد میرا از مظلومه و غیبت و بخل است منزّه
(Diwan p. 40)
Free from wickedness, slander and niggardliness,
Devoid of arrogance, hypocrisy, envy and hate,

نبرده دست بر کس نکرده رد سوال نگفته سهو و ندیده خطا نخورده حرام
(Diwan p. 53)
No blunder in words, no error in view, no unlawfulness in earning,
He harmed nobody and turned back no appeal,

‘Alī’s spiritual rank

The Shia views that ‘Alī was appointed as Imam through holy scripture and that he has iṣma just like the prophets, have led to the notion that ‘Alī’s spiritual rank is superior to all other humans and even to every other created being. According to this viewpoint, ‘Alī is almost considered a being created from a different essence, with no equals and beyond human comprehension. Manifestations of a similar perception of ‘Alī can also be seen in Shaykh Āzarī’s qasidas. For example, in one of his qasidas praising ‘Alī, the poet twice states that a grasp of his nature and attributes lies outside the scope of human understanding:

طووسی عقل در صفت اوست گنگ و لال طاووس بوستان ولایت که از شرف
(Diwan p. 52)
The peacock of the garden of wilāya, of whose nobility,
The parrot of mind is stuttering and speechless about his attributes,

زهی تصور باطل زهی خیال محال
که هست یوسف ما را جمال او دلال

کند تصور مثلش خیال و گوید عقل
کمال فضل علی را چه حاجت تعریف

(Diwan p. 53)

Should fancy imagine his equal and should mind speak it,
One would be a void conception and the other an absurd dream,
What need to describe the excellence of 'Alī,
Analogy of his excellence is Yūsuf's beauty,

In another beyt, Āzarī suggests that comprehending 'Alī's essence is a feat that is possible only for God:

به غیر ذات خداوند ایزد متعال

علیست آنکه به کنه حقیقتش نرسد

(Diwan p. 53)

He is 'Alī, the essence of whose truth none can grasp,
But the very Lord, the exalted God,

According to Shaykh Āzarī, 'Alī represents a level of virtue and perfection that no human can achieve and any person comparable to him neither existed in the past nor will exist in the future. Two of Āzarī's beyts reflect this viewpoint clearly:

در ولایت چون علی از ابتدا تا انتها

از بنی آدم نخیزد تا قیامت آذری

(Diwan p. 40)

From beginning till end will not rise, o Āzarī,
From humankind 'Alī's peer in wilāya,

دادار جهاندار تبارک و تعالا

ای مثل تو در فضل نیاورده به دنیا

(Diwan p. 40)

The like of you in virtue to world did not introduce,
Lord Creator, blessed and exalted be He,

Being superior to ordinary men in virtue, 'Alī also ranks above angels in Āzarī's eyes:

جبریل پر و بال زند گر هزار سال
روح الامین ز سدره ندارد در آن مجال
مرغان قدس جمله بریزند پر و بال

بر ذروه ی سپهر کمالش نمی رسد
آنجا که جلوه گاه مناجات روح اوست
با اوج آفتاب کمالش اگر پرند

(Diwan p. 52)

Would not reach the peak of the sky of his excellence,
If Jabrā'īl beat wings for a thousand years,
Where the supplication of his soul manifests,
Beyond the Sidra, Rūḥ al-amīn has no access,
If they flew at the height of the sun of his excellence,
All would lose their wings, the birds of holiness,

'Alī's rank is above that of men and angels and according to Shaykh Āzarī, it is not possible for anyone to attain this rank through his own endeavour. Incapable of committing sin and appointed as Imam by

divine decree, ‘Alī has been bestowed his status by God. One of Āzarī’s beyts about ‘Alī demonstrates this point:

عزت او ای عزیز من به سعی و جهد نیست رو به قرآن از خدا بشنو تعز من تشا

(Diwan p. 33)

His glory, o dear, is not of effort and endeavour,
Go to Quran and hear from God “tu ‘izzu man tashāu”,

The quotation at the end of the above beyt is from verse 26 of Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān, which is translated as “O Allah! Lord of Power (and Rule), Thou givest power to whom thou pleasest, and Thou strippest off power from whom Thou pleasest: Thou endues with honour whom Thou pleasest, and Thou bringest low whom Thou pleasest: In thy hand is all good. Verily, over all things Thou hast power”. The point made in this beyt is that the spiritual rank a person can attain is determined by divine predestination. Āzarī believes that ‘Alī’s status as the perfect individual who can rule the Umma and provide an example for the humankind is not an attribute he earned at some point as a result of exertion. It is connate, predestined and therefore incontestable.

Finally, in one of his beyts Shaykh Āzarī implies that ‘Alī is the most superior being in the entire creation:

ممکن نگشت چون تویی از واجب الوجود کین صورتیست ممتنع از کشور محال

(Diwan p. 52)

“Necessary Being” never made the like of you “possible”,
For this is of “impossible” nature and from the land of the inconceivable,

The term “Necessary Being” or “Wājib al-Wujūd” in Islamic philosophy denotes the being that must necessarily exist, which is God. Everything God creates or chooses not to create constitutes “Mumkin al-Wudjūd” i.e. “possible beings”. The term “Mumtānī al-Wudjūd”, on the other hand, means “impossible beings” and refers to the things the existence of which is inconceivable. For instance, anything that would be a peer to God is in this category and cannot possibly exist. In the above beyt, Shaykh Āzarī, by using concepts from Islamic ontology, ascribes an almost divine quality to ‘Alī. The poet thus suggests that just like God can have no associates, it is impossible for ‘Alī to have a peer.

Prophet Muhammad and ‘Alī

There is no doubt that one of the top reasons for ‘Alī’s elevated status in the eyes of all Muslims is his closeness to the Messenger of God. In addition to being his cousin, ‘Alī was also the husband of Prophet Muhammad’s daughter Fāṭima, which made him the Prophet’s kin in two different ways. Shaykh Āzarī also notes this fact in his qasidas:

به غیر از حضرت شاه ولایت کیست در عالم کسی کو مصطفی را بود هم داماد و هم بن عم

(Diwan p. 57)

Other than His Holiness, the King of Wilāya,
Who was both a son-in-law and cousin to Muṣṭafā?

In another beyt, the poet mentions ‘Alī’s kinship with Prophet Muhammad as a point that makes Prophet Muhammad superior to other Prophets:

به علم و فضل جبلت نبیل و اصل اصیل

کراست بن عم و داماد ز انبیا چو علی

(Diwan p. 56)

Who among the Prophets has a cousin and son-in-law like 'Alī,
He is superior in knowledge and virtue and noble in lineage,

One important instance of the Prophet acknowledging 'Alī's proximity to him is the sentence "Anta minnī bi-manzilat-i Hārūna min Mūsā." (Your place by my side is like Hārūn's place by Mūsā's side.) which the Prophet said addressing 'Alī before leaving for the Tabūk expedition. Shaykh Āzarī quotes the words of the Prophet in a qasida:

السلام ای آدم اهل ولایت مرتضا

السلام علیک ای هارون امت السلام

تاج دار انت منی شهسوار لافتا

شیر یزدان شاه مردان شحنة ی دشت نجف

(Diwan p. 33)

Hail to thee, o Hārūn of the Umma, hail!
Hail o Ādam of the household of wilāya, Murtaḍā!
Lion of God, King of the Brave, Shaḥna of Najaf desert,
Crowned with "anta minnī", knight of "lā fatā",

Another example Āzarī brings up to underline the closeness of 'Alī to the Prophet is the event of 'Alī standing on the shoulders of the Messenger of God, which took place before Hijra. One day Prophet Muhammad and 'Alī went together to the Ka'ba, where the idols were being kept at the time. There, the Prophet mounted 'Alī on his shoulders and told him to push over an idol placed on a high spot. After 'Alī pushed over and broke the idol, the two left Ka'ba. (Haksöyler, 2011: 76). Āzarī's beyt referring to this event is below:

آنکه بر دوش نبی بنهاد پا پیداست کیست

در حرم همچون خلیل الله گشته بت شکن

(Diwan p. 62)

He became an idol breaker in Ka'ba like Khalīl Allāh,
It is evident who stood on the Prophet's shoulders,

Throughout history some extremist Shia factions have come up with ideas incongruent with Islam claiming 'Alī's parity with or even superiority to Prophet Muhammad. The fact that Shaykh Āzarī, in some of his beyts, depicted 'Alī as a perfect individual ranking above all creation, brings to mind the possibility that Āzarī was under the influence of such ideas. However, a scrutiny of the poet's beyts comparing 'Alī and Prophet Muhammad reveals that the superiority of the latter is stressed by Āzarī leaving no space for doubt:

که هست خادم این خانقاه شیر خدا

چو شیخ خانقه کون مصطفاست بدان

(Diwan p. 36)

The shaykh of the dervish lodge named universe is Muṣṭafā,
Know that the servant of this lodge is "Lion of God",

که اوست در شب دنیا چو آفتاب ضحا

مثال نور محمد خود اظهر الشمس است

بیاض نور قمر هست بی شک از بیضا

مثابه قمر است نور انبیای دگر

علیست کوکب برج ولایت بطحا

صحابه همچو عوامند در شب دنیوی

(Diwan p. 36)

The likeness of the light of Muhammad is obvious as the sun,
 For he is like the forenoon sun in the night of the world,
 The light of the other prophets is like that of the moon,
 No doubt that the lustre of the moonlight comes from the sun,
 Şahāba are like the common people in the night of the world,
 'Alī is the star in the wilāya sign of Baḥḥā,

Baḥḥā is one of the names of Mecca. It is reported that Prophet Muhammad's grandfather Abd al-Muṭṭalib's patronymic was Abū al-Baḥḥā and the Prophet himself had the nisba Abṭaḥḥī, also derived from the same word (Öğüt, 1994: 82-83). It is thus possible to conclude that the word "Baḥḥā" in the above beyt is a symbol for Prophet Muhammad. The wilāya sign of Baḥḥā, in turn, means the line of Imams descending from the Prophet.

According to some ḥadīths, the first being ever created by Allah was the spiritual essence of Prophet Muhammad also known as Nūr Muhammadī (the Muhammadan light). All other things were created from this essence and for the sake of Prophet Muhammad. One implication of this view is that Prophet Muhammad is the most important and most superior being in all creation. In one of his qasidas, Shaykh Āzarī ascribes a similar characteristic to 'Alī. According to Āzarī's below beyts, just like Nūr Muhammadī, 'Alī's essence was created in a superior manner and prior to all other things:

پس از نور نبی یعنی و پیش از فطرت عالم	در اقصای ازل پیش از ظهور عالم و آدم
ز جنس گوهر انسان خدای اکبر و اعظم	به رحمت گوهری از غیب در سلک وجود آورد
به صورت گوهر دریا و صد دریا درو مدغم	چه گوهر گوهری از عمقه ی دریای لاهوتی

(Diwan p. 57)

At the very beginning, before Ādam and the world came to be,
 After the light of the Prophet, afore the creation of the world,
 With grace, from oblivion to the realm of existence brought,
 An essence of the kind of men, the Almighty God,
 And what essence! A pearl from the depths of the sea of divinity,
 Exteriorly a pearl from sea and nested inside are a hundred seas,

This essence, second in rank to Nūr Muhammadī, manifested on Earth in human form when the time came:

پس از چندین هزاران سال از نسل بنی آدم	از بهر شوکت شرع و نظام خلق ظاهر شد
---------------------------------------	------------------------------------

(Diwan p. 57)

For the triumph of religion and orderliness of people, emerged,
 From the lineage of humans after a few thousand years,

In the later beyts of the qasida, it is revealed that the essence mentioned is none other than 'Alī:

کسی کو بود ختم انبیا را گوهر خاتم	که بود اینها که اوصافش شنیدی هیچ میدانی
امیرالمومنین ساقی کوثر شحنه ی زمزم	سپهدار عرب میر عجم لشکرکش اسلام

(Diwan p. 57)

Do you know at all whose qualities you have been hearing?

He is the seal stone of Seal of the Messengers,
Chief of Arabs, Lord of the Persians, Commander of Islam,
Amîr al-Mu'minîn, Sâqî-e Kawthar, Shahna of Zamzam,

As seen in his beyts, Âzerî sees 'Alî's proximity to the Prophet as one of his superior qualities. This proximity makes 'Alî the second most important figure in the scene of creation, after Prophet Muhammad, who is the first to be created and the purpose of creation. As for extremist Shia views concerning 'Alî's superiority to Prophet Muhammad, such views are not entertained by Shaykh Âzerî.

'Alî and Āl Rasûl

The term Āl Rasûl means Prophet Muhammad's descendants and has often been used synonymously with Ahl al-Bayt, which includes Fāṭima and the twelve Imams (Özel, 1989: 305). Shaykh Âzerî considers the fact that Āl Rasûl continued through 'Alî's children as one of 'Alî's virtues and mentions this point in his qasidas:

السلام عليك اى سرخيل خيل اوليا
السلام اى آدم اهل ولايت مرتضا

السلام عليك اى سرچشمه ى آل رسول
السلام عليك اى هارون امت السلام

(Diwan p. 33)
Hail to thee, o wellspring of Āl Rasûl!
Hail to thee, o commander of the army of saints,
Hail to thee, o Hārûn of the Umma, hail!
Hail o Ādam of the household of wilāya, Murtaḏā!

According to Shaykh Âzerî, in addition to being the forefather of the Prophet's lineage, 'Alî is also the highest ranking one of Āl Rasûl. Three beyts from different qasidas of the poet clearly demonstrate this point:

بر آسمان ولايت عليست بدر دجا

كواكب شب دنيا بدند آل رسول

(Diwan p. 36)
Āl Rasûl became stars in the night of the world,
'Alî is the nocturnal full moon of the wilāya sky,

همچون الف از جمله حروف آمده بکتا

اولاد نبى جمله حروف آمده و او

(Diwan p. 40)
Messenger's descendants all became letters and he,
Stood as one out of the entire alphabet, alone like Alif,

عليست مهر سپهر كمال و مطلع آل

ازين دوازده ماه و دوازده خورشيد

(Diwan p. 53)
Of these twelve moons and twelve suns,
'Alî is the sun of the sky of excellence and point of sunrise for the lineage,

'Alī and the sufis

It has been mentioned before in this paper that 'Alī is seen as the "gate of the city of knowledge" and the repository of secrets that were believed to be foundational to Tasawwuf. As a result, 'Alī has always been particularly revered by Sufis. Shaykh Āzarī, too, composed some beyts pointing out that Sufis see 'Alī as their guide:

امام جمله ولیان و شاه مردان است
نه مقتدای من است و امام من تنها
سلوک اهل طریقت به نور مرتضویست
که هست بعد پیمبر مقدم عرفا

(Diwan p. 36)
He is the Imam of all the mystics and King of the Brave,
He is not only my leader and my Imam,
The progress of the people of tarīqa is with Murtaḍā's light,
For he is the pioneer of the men of wisdom after the Prophet,

In another beyt, the poet implies that some Sufi factions are on deviant paths. According to Āzarī, the only right track for the Sufis is the path guided by 'Alī:

هر ره که در طریقت اهل سلوک هست
غیر از طریق مرتضوی نیست جز ضلال

(Diwan p. 52)
Of all the different paths followed by Sufis,
Other than Murtaḍā's path, all are but deviation,

'Alī's Imāma

One of the most discussed issues among Muslim scholars is the Imāma of 'Alī. Shaykh Āzarī's views on this issue are in line with those of Shiism. It is understood from the poet's beyts that he believes the right to lead the Muslim umma after the Prophet belongs to 'Alī and he will not accept the slightest doubt on this:

مقتدای خلق بعد از مصطفی پیداست کیست
سرور مردان و شاه اولیا پیداست کیست
صاحب تیغ و لوا و ناصر اسلام و دین
خویش و پیوند و وصی مصطفی پیداست کیست

(Diwan p. 42)
It is evident who the leader of people after Muṣṭafā is,
It is evident who the King of the Brave and King of Saints is,
Owner of the sword and the flag, leading Islam to victory,
It is evident who Muṣṭafā's kin and heir is,

آنی که در امامت تو شک و شبهه نیست
در عالم یقین نبود جای احتمال

(Diwan p. 52)
You are the one about whose Imāma, there is no doubt,
In the realm of absolute truth there is no place for odds,

Shaykh Āzarī also refers to some of the Quran verses interpreted by Shia scholars as proof for 'Alī's wilāya, evincing the Shia view of 'Alī's divine appointment to the post of Imāma:

حله پوش إنما و هل اتی پیداست کیست

ور به تشریف از کلام الله می آری دلیل

(Diwan p. 42)

And if you bring proof from the words of God,
It is evident who wears the khilat of “innamā” and “hal atā”,

The expression “hal atā” is the opening phrase of Sūrat al-Insān. This is a reference to the narratives stating that the people referred to as “abrār” (the righteous) in al-Insān (76:5) and lauded in (76:8) for giving away their food to the needy even they desire to have it are Ahl al-Bayt. “Innamā”, on the other hand, is a phrase found in several verses of Quran but the context of the beyt indicates that the reference here is to al-Mā’ida (5:55), which is translated as “your (real) protectors are (no less than) Allah, His Messenger and the (fellowship of) believers – those who establish regular prayers and regular charity, and they bow down humbly (in worship)”. In addition to all the Shia scholars, many Sunni scholars also agree that the reason for revelation of this verse is the abovementioned event where ‘Alī gives his ring to a beggar in the mosque. Based on the phrase “waliyyukum” (your protector, your walī) in al-Mā’ida (5:55), Shias have come to call it “the Wilāya Verse” and regarded it as one of the most important proofs for ‘Alī’s Imāma (Öztürk, 2015: 22) (Shīrāzī, 1385: 306-307). Shaykh Āzarī’s allusion to the Wilāya Verse bespeaks his espousal of the Shia view that ‘Alī’s Imāma is ordained by Quran.

According to Shaykh Āzarī, because ‘Alī was appointed by God as the successor to Prophet Muhammad, regarding him as a virtuous person will not suffice and it is imperative to accept his Imāma. The following beyt demonstrates the poet’s view:

یا مکن دعوی مردی یا بدو کن اقتدا

ای که گفتی مرتضای را شاه مردان گفته اند

(Diwan p. 33)

O you who say Murtaḍā is the King of the Brave,
Follow his leadership or speak not of bravery,

It is possible to consider the above beyt in the context of the socioreligious developments of the time. In 15th century Timurid Iran, although Sunnism was the dominant sect, reverence for ‘Alī and Ahl al-Bayt was quite common. Many Sunnis including members of Timurid royal family would visit the tomb of Imam ‘Alī al-Riḍā, in Khorasan, while scholars and poets known to be Sunnis elaborated on the merits of Imams descending from Prophet Muhammad. In other words, the virtues of ‘Alī were publicly confirmed but his Imāma was not officially recognized. In that sense, the above beyt can be regarded as an invitation to Shiism for Sunnis who acknowledge the superior qualities of ‘Alī.

‘Alī as the path to salvation

A number of Shaykh Āzarī’s beyts clearly indicate that the poet believes love of ‘Alī is the path to salvation and the key to Heaven:

بگیر دامن او را مکن ز دست رها

کلید باب نجات اندر آستین علیست

(Diwan p. 36)

Key to the gate of salvation is in ‘Alī’s sleeve,
Take his path and never stop following him,

از حب علی هر که نهالی به جهان کشت
در روضه ی طوبی رسدش مژده ی طوبا

(Diwan p. 40)
Whoever plants a sapling of ‘Alī’s love in this world,
In the garden of Ṭūbā, he will receive glad tidings of Ṭūbā,

هر در که گشایند ورا هست کلیدی
بی حب تو نگشاد در جنت اعلا

(Diwan p. 41)
Every gate that is opened has a key,
The gate of high heaven will not open without your love,

رهروان راه جنت را ازین رحلت سرا
کاروان سالار اقلیم بقا پیداست کیست

(Diwan p. 42)
Taking the passengers of the path to heaven from this stopover,
It is evident who the head of the caravan to the land of perpetuity is,

One way people can reach salvation through ‘Alī is to take him as an example and try to commit good deeds just like him. However, the concept of *Shafā’a* (intercession) also requires a mention here. *Shafā’a* means the ability of persons deemed worthy by God to ask for forgiveness on behalf of the sinners in the afterlife. Sunnis also believe in the possibility of *Shafā’a* but it is the Shias who gave the concept a greater importance and put particular emphasis on the Imams’ prerogative for intercession. Indeed, in one of his qasidas, Shaykh Āzarī, too, suggests that ‘Alī has the ability to aid sinners on Judgment Day:

در مقامی کانبیاء و خلق در مانند به خود
روز محشر حامی جرم و خطا پیداست کیست

(Diwan p. 42)
On Judgment Day, when the prophets and people can hardly help themselves,
It is evident who the patron of (the committers of) sin and mistake is,

In two separate beyts, Āzarī expresses that the ‘Alī’s spiritual presence is an important support for the individual in the fight against the ego and the devil. According to the poet, devil’s influence cannot affect those under ‘Alī’s protection and the final victory over temptations is possible with his help:

گر بگیرد لشکر شیطان همه عالم چه باک
هرکرا حامیست در دین دست و تیغ مرتضا

(Diwan p. 40)
Even if the army of satan takes the entire world, need not fear,
Those under the protection of religion by the hand and sword of Murtaḍā,

ور به حرب نفس شیطان میرسد مردم به حق
مرگ شیطان قاتل نفس و هوا پیداست کیست

(Diwan p. 42)
And if man achieves victory in the war against ego and Satan,
It is evident who the death of Satan and killer of desire is,

Shaykh Āzarī believes that just like the love of ‘Alī is the key to salvation, enmity towards him is the path to apostasy. To convey his viewpoint, the poet uses Bal‘am b. Ba‘ūr as an example. According to a number of traditions, Bal‘am was initially a follower of Prophet Mūsā but later abandoned his faith and

acted against the believers. According to Āzarî's beyt, those who oppose 'Alī are on the same side as Bal'am b. Ba'ūr i.e. they are apostates:

با علی هر کو خلافی کرد با بلعم یکبست بلعم باعور از درگاه حق مردود شد

(Diwan p. 43)
Bal'am b. Ba'ūr was driven from the house of God,
Whoever opposed 'Alī is one and same with Bal'am,

In another beyt included in Kiyāyī and Rastākhīz edition, the poet is much more explicit in stating that enmity towards 'Alī will lead to damnation:

دوستانش را غذای خلد شیر و انگبین زهر و زقوم است اعدای علی را در جحیم

(Kiyāyī-Rastākhīz p. 67)
'Alī's enemies' lot is poison and zaqqūm in hell,
For his friends are the heavenly dishes of milk and honey,

Some other traditions about 'Alī

In one of Shaykh Āzarî's qasidas, there is an allusion to Nādi 'Alī (ناد علی) which is a cherished prayer of Ithnā 'Ashariyya Shias as well as Alawites and Bektāshīs. The prayer text consists of an appeal to 'Alī to remedy the predicament of the reciter. According to narratives transmitted by Shia sources, Nādi 'Alī was taught by Jabrā'īl to Prophet Muhammad during the Battle of Uḥud and when the Prophet recited it, 'Alī heard the call from a long distance came to his aid (Sarıkaya, 1998: 25). Āzarî's beyt alluding to Nādi 'Alī is below:

چونکه بود نتیجه ی یاد علی سینجلی چون به غمی در وقتی یاد علی شفاعت آر

(Diwan p. 67)
When you have "gham" (sadness) call the name of 'Alī (the owner of) Shafā'a,
Because the outcome of calling 'Alī's name is "sayanjālī" (will vanish),

The text of Nādi 'Alī as published by Sarıkaya (1988) contains the phrase "ghammin sayancālī" (sadness will vanish). By citing this phrase in the beyt, Āzarî implies that asking 'Alī for aid can deliver the person from troubles.

According to a tale that has been narrated by Khorasanian folk storytellers up to the present day, one day 'Alī comes across a hawk hunting a pigeon. In return for letting the pigeon go, he gives the hawk a piece of flesh he cuts from his own leg. Thus, 'Alī makes peace between two enemies by making a great sacrifice (Yūsufnāzād, 1389: 280). Shaykh Āzarî alludes to this story in one of his beyts. The meaning conveyed by the poet is that those willing to acquire spiritual knowledge must be prepared to make sacrifices:

از ران خود کباب ده ای مرتضی صفت گر طالب معانی باز و کبوتری

(Diwan p. 68)
Give meat from your own thigh, o the like of Murtaḍā,
If you aspire (to grasp) the meaning of (tale of) hawk and pigeon,

One of Shaykh Āzarī's qasidas is about a confrontation between 'Alī and Satan. Before discussing the beyts, it would be appropriate to briefly review the relevant narratives transmitted by Islamic sources. In Kāndhalawī's Ḥayāt al-Ṣaḥāba, several narratives are relayed about one of the Prophet's companions confronting Satan. This person is either Mu'ādh b. Jabal, Abū Hurayra or 'Umar b. Khaṭṭāb in different versions of the event. According to these narratives, Satan, after being defeated and captured, advises the ṣaḥābī to recite Āyat al-Kursī to fend off devils (Kāndhalawī, 1410: 437-441). In another narrative relayed in Biḥār al-Anwār, which is one of the major Hadith sources of Shias, the ṣaḥābī defeating Satan is 'Alī. Dispatched into a valley by Messenger of God, 'Alī comes across an old man who turns out to be Satan in disguise. Engaging 'Alī in a grapple thrice and getting defeated every time, Satan is forced to give 'Alī three "tidings"⁷ in return for being released (Al-Majlisī, 1388: 89). In Āzarī's qasida, 'Alī is going somewhere at night to accomplish a task he was given by the Prophet, when Satan shows up in the form of smoke rising from the ground:

من کیم ابن ابی طالب علی مرتضا	گفت حیدر لاحیاک الله اگر نشناسیم
تا به کام خویش اکنون یافتم تنها تو را	گفت شیطانش تورا می جسته ام من سالها
چیست مقصود تو زین جستن بگو ای بی حیا	حیدرش گفتا که آنکس را که می جستی منم
وز تو پنهان سالها کوشیده ام اندر خلا	گفت شیطانش ترا میخواستم دادن فریب
با تو می خواهم که گیرم کشتی اکنون برملا	چون نرفت این مکر و حيله با تو پنهانم زپیش

(Diwan p. 39)

Ḥaydar said: May God not let you live if you do not know me,
Who am I? The son of Abī Ṭālib, 'Alī Murtaḍā,
Satan said to him: I have been searching for you for years,
Now, to my liking, I have found you alone,
Ḥaydar said to him: I am the one you have been searching,
O shameless, what is your intention in this search?
Satan said to him: I have been seeking to deceive you,
And I have been plotting in your absence for years,
Because these tricks and designs did not work,
I now wish to wrestle with you face to face,

At the end of wrestling, 'Alī seizes his opponent and Satan begins to beg for his life:

تا دهم من چار پندت کان به است از گنج ها	گفت یا ابن ابی طالب ز کشتن در گذر
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(Diwan p.39)
(Satan) said: O son of Abī Ṭālib, do not kill me,
So that I give you four pieces of advice better than treasures,

The four pieces of advice Satan gives consist of refraining from envy, arrogance, haste in ill deeds and lying. Satan's advice, naturally, is not very useful for 'Alī as he is already devoid of all kinds of sins. Yet, 'Alī declares he will not kill Satan for he has been granted time by God. Satan, in return, promises to stay away from Ahl al-Bayt:

⁷ 'Alī's sons Ḥasan and Ḥusayn will protect their supporters (Shias) from fire on Judgment Day. Satan has known every soul who has love or animosity for 'Alī since the Day of Alastu i.e. day of creation. No one with whom Satan did not become a partner in his children, his wealth and his father in his mother's womb will ever show enmity towards 'Alī.

هست مرات علی را زین کدورت ها صفا
گر نه ایزد مهلتت می داد تا روز جزا
تا ولی الله کرد از بعد عهد او را رها

گفت حیدر نفس من زینها که گفتی ایمن است
خلق عالم را علی گفت از تو می کردم خلاص
عهد کرد از رهزنی مخلصان اهل بیت

(Diwan p.40)

Ḥaydar said: My ego is safe from the things you said,
'Alī's mirror is clean from such stains,
'Alī said: I would have saved the people of the world from you,
Had not God given you time till Judgment Day,
(Satan) gave word not to bedevil the protected Ahl al-Bayt,
Walī Allāh let go of him only after this vow,

Conclusion

A scrutiny of Shaykh Āzarī's qasidas reveals that the poet has discussed a wide range of topics relating to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. In the diwan, in addition to his own name, 'Alī is referred to by several epithets including "Lion of God", "King of the Brave", "Ḥaydar", "Murtaḍā", "Sāqī-e Kawthar", "King of Najaf", "Wālī-e Wālā", "Shahna of Zamzam" and "Lord of the Arabs". The virtues of 'Alī most lauded in the diwan are valour, knowledge and generosity and while the poet never uses the word "ma'sūm" for 'Alī, he does imply in his beyts that 'Alī is free from sin. The influence of the Shia perception of 'Alī as a person superior to all other men can also be observed in Āzarī's qasidas. However, the poet clearly expresses that Prophet Muhammad ranks above 'Alī. According to Āzarī, 'Alī's virtues are a result of his proximity to Prophet Muhammad, who is the purpose of the entire creation. Again, in line with the Shia doctrines, the poet maintains 'Alī is the rightful ruler of the Umma as Imam after the Prophet. Drawing attention to his special status within Āl Rasūl and the reverence he receives from the Sufis, the poet also cites some rare traditions about 'Alī.

In conclusion, Shaykh Āzarī's views about 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib are aligned with those of Shiism. According to Āzarī, 'Alī is a perfect individual, free from all faults and he has been designated as Imam by God. The poet even portrays 'Alī as the second being ever created, preceded only by Nūr Muhammadī and elevates him to a status above all created beings except for Prophet Muhammad. Āzarī also maintains that lauding 'Alī does not suffice and one must accept his Imāma. Thus, he indicates his different position vis-à-vis the Sunnis of his time, who also never refrained from lauding Ahl al-Bayt. These findings are in line with the existing information stating Āzarī's Shia affiliation.

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