CHAPTER III

LIFE AND EARLY EDUCATION

1. Family Background

2. Childhood and Educational Career

3. Appointment and Administration

4. Scholarship

5. Biography as given in "Hussein mahjarah."
Before I enter upon my subject itself I shall first give a life-sketch of Suyūtī which is partly based as given by other writers and then as given by himself so as to present a complete picture. It is very important what a man says about himself and particularly if the writer is honest and frank. We know that human nature requires one's own shortcomings to be concealed, but in case of Suyūtī we do not find this universal principle to be true. He boasts of his excellent knowledge of certain subjects in which he claims to surpass even his teacher, but at the same time he confesses his ignorance of mathematics in words which pictures to us his lack of proficiency in that subject. To quote his own words where he tackled a mathematical problem he felt like lifting a mountain.

An author can naturally deal with his life only up to a certain period after which we have to depend on other sources for his life. I, therefore, give first his life-sketch, partly based from sources by other writers.

*Family Background:*

Jalaluddin al-Khudairī, al-Shafi‘ī, the most prolific Egyptian writer in the Mamlūk period and perhaps in Arabic literature, whose original name was Abū Fālid ‘Abdul Qahāriman better known by his surname Suyūtī after a town called Suyūtī in Upper Egypt where his ancestors had lived for no less than
three centuries. As his ninth ancestor Sheikh Humaruxin settled there and lived as Sufi. As for Khudairi he earned this title from his forefathers who, originally belong to Persia, and one of whom had lived in the quarter of Khudairiyah in Baghdad. They were all men of position, some of whom were businessmen, public officers but none of them had followed the path of learning as he did. As none of them had received a proper education before his father Abu Mansiqh Abu Saqr, son of Muhammad Kamaluddin, who was born soon after 800 H./1407 A.D., studied in Suyut and became judge at a very young age till he went to Cairo in 826 A.H./1426 A.D., continuing his study there. He held for many more years hence forth the post of judge in Cairo and was the professor of jurisprudence at al-Shirakiyyah as well as pleader at the Tulunid mosque. He had written some books on law and grammar and died at a very young age of 55 years in the month of Safar 855 A.H./March '1451 A.D.

Childhood and Educational Career:

Jalaluddin was born on Monday, 1st of Rajab 849 H./3rd October '1445 of a Turkish slave-girl in Cairo. He lost his father at an early age, as at that time he was only five years and a half old, and was brought up by a Sufi friend of


his father. Jalaluddin was a precocious child who had learnt the Qur'an by heart at the age of eight only which showed that he was endowed by nature with an exceptionally strong memory. He studied under the teachers like Shihabuddin Sharmasghi,
Al-maddin at Bulqini, and his son Shaikh Isam Sharafuddin Hanawi, Shaikh Isam Allemah Taqiuddin Shibli Hanafi, Muhyyuddin at Kafiji and Shaikh Saifuddin at Hanafi etc. But he remembers with particular affection his master Al-maddin al-Bulqini who taught him the science of traditions. He studied grammar under Shaikh Isam Allemah Taqiuddin Shibli Hanafi.26

Gifted with a strong memory he soon finished his educational career at the age of sixteen and took to composing books himself. His facile pen ran over a wide range of subjects. I shall shortly speak of his works in a later paragraph, known for his learning and command of various sciences.

Appointment and Administration

Before taking up a teaching post he visited all the important towns of Egypt like Fayyum and Damietta and others. In addition to visiting important Egyptian towns he went also to Mecca and performed the pilgrimage. On returning to Egypt

he first set up as a consultant on legal problem and in 872 A.H./1467 A.D. was appointed on the post of the professorship of jurisprudence (Fiqh) on the recommendation of his teacher al-Balqini at the College of Shakhbaniyyah where his father had himself taught and was afterward transferred to al-Baibarsiyah, another college in 891 A.H./1486 A.D.

As a learned man he was entrusted with the management of endowed properties, but due to his haughtiness and the handling of the task entrusted to him in the interest of his own friends, as he cut down the stipends, granted to sufis and allotted them to his own friends. By this step he incurred great unpopularity and brought a slur on his own name, with the result that the students who were affected by his mismanagement of the properties under his charge rose against him. The Sultan Tuman Bai was forced to undergo an enquiry and as they charged against him, were found to be true, he was dismissed from his post in Rjab 906 A.H./February 2, 1501 A.D. After his dismissal he retreated to island, al-Sayedah in the Nile where he lived in seclusion, devoting his time entirely to literary pursuits.

As stated above he was a man of haughty temper, he was on a very bad terms with his contemporaries who accused him of plagiarism. Suyuti levelled the same charge against Castallani and others. After the death of his successor Lisanuddin ibn Ballan al-Bilbisi he was again offered the post of professorship, but his pride would not permit him to accept it, and it was in retirement from public life
that he died on 18th Jumada I, 911 A.H./October 17, 1508 A.D.
at the age of sixty one years ten months and eighteen days and
was buried in the courtyard of Qusun outside of at Carafah.

Scholarship

Sayuti was a man of encyclopaedic knowledge, having
left a very large number of works which are, according to
Prof. Nicholson, more than five hundred, though some of them
may be called mere pamphlets consisting of just a few pages.
However, it is upon his major works that his fame rests.
According to Brockelmann he holds a unique place in the
history of Arabic literature. His works are still of great
value which have preserved for us the knowledge gathered by
his predecessors. Brockelmann gives the number of his
works 327.

The above biographical notice is partly based on what
he has written himself and partly what others, now I produce
his biography as he himself has given in "Musnad Muhaddarah"
as it will be found to be more informative and interesting.

27. Nagmatul Sayuti, Constantinople 1398 A.H., p. 100.
BIOGRAPHY as given in
Nasne 1. Nabedarah fi Akhbari Mura wa L- pillah

This book is of the particular value. It contains a notice of a biographical nature on the life of the author himself from his pen with a genealogy up to the 14 generation. According to this notice he was a man of Persian origin and came of a family which was distinguished for learning and piety. He mentions that his ancestor Humam al-Humam al-Khadij was a mystic and one of the chief leaders of the bufi order. As for those who came afterwards, were men of wealth and rank, some of whom were those who were entrusted with the governorship of his town, and one who held post of the public honor and as is deduced from his writings, was a merchant, built a school (Madraseh) in Asyet endowing it with property. He further tells us some of his ancestors were rich men but he expresses his opinion that there was none among them who served knowledge except his father and promises to speak of his under Shafites jurisconsults. As for his surname Khadijri, he says, "I do not know what this nisabah is due to, but to Khadijriyeh, one of the wards of Baghdad. Speaking of his origin he says, "Once when I trust, related to me that he heard my father relating that his

ancestor was a Persian or a man from the East. It is, therefore, evident that our surname is derived to the quarter (of Baghdad) mentioned above.

Speaking of his birth he says, "My birth took place after the sunset on the night of Sunday, the beginning night of Rajab in the year 869 A.H. I was taken, while my father was living, to Sheikh Muhammad al-Majshub, who was one of the great saints in the neighbourhood of the Mausoleum of Sayyidah Bint Sahih. He blessed me, I grew up an orphan. I learnt the Quran while I was still below eight years. Then I learnt by heart al-"Umdah, Musajju l-Qiq wa l-Ural and Alfiyah lbn Malik, beginning now to occupy my self with knowledge from the beginning of the year 864 A.H. I acquired the knowledge of religious law and grammar from a number of great scholars, studied Faraaid from the great scholar, the one expert in this subject, Sheikh Shihabuddin Shermasabi, about whom it is said that he attained to a great age having exceeded 100 years by many more. God knows best. I studied under him the commentary of the Quran on al-Majshub. I received the permission to teach Arabic in the beginning of the year 866, A.H. He further says, "I composed

1. A fact which shows that he was a precocious child and youth who at the age of 16 had mastered all the current branches of knowledge in those days. Having received the permission even to engage in teaching at that early age. It reminds us of the famous philosopher and greatest medical man that the East has every produce:3. I mean Ibn Sina, who had gained complete mastery of the current sciences in his time at the young age of 16 and became

(contd.)
in this year i.e. now began composing books and the first thing that I composed was the commentary on 'Istid'dhah' and 'Sammalah', and showed it to my master Shaikh I-Islam Al-Assadin Al-Salqini, who wrote a recommendatory introduction to it. I regularly attended his lectures or kept company with him till he died. Then I began to associate regularly with his son, studying under him from the beginning of al-Subhib by his father, up to Al-Makalah. And I attended his lectures from the beginning of Al-Mawisaghir to Al-Adad, and also from the beginning of Al-Makalah to Al-Zamah and from the beginning of Al-Subhib to nearly the chapter of Al-Zarahn and a piece of Al-Sawdah from the chapter of Al-Adad, as well as a piece or part of the compliment of the Commentary of Mihaj by Zarhoshi, and from Ibha l-Hesrat to Al-Hesray etc.

(cont'd.)

A renowned physician, Had Syrati lived in better days; when the spirit of free inquiry had not been stifled by the bigotry of the narrow minded orthodox chauvinists.

'Istid'dhah ... The reciting of the formula, "I seek refuge with God against Satan, the accursed one."

This formula is recommended to be pronounced in the beginning of the recitation of the Qur'an as well as in the beginning of the opening chapter, Al-Fatihah, when reciting it in the first bowing in the prayers. While Sammalah comes from بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم, meaning (Ibqia) in the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

29. Ibid., p. 189, vol. I.
He granted me the permission to teach and also to issue legal verdicts from the year 875, and he attended the function of my inverititure. When he died in the year 875, I joined Shaikh I-Islam Sharafuddin Hanawi, and studied under his a part of Al-Minhaj and heard his lectures on it regarding the Division except some lectures which I missed. I also attended some lectures on the commentary of Al-Bajjah and an annotation on it as well as on the commentary of Al-Baidawi. And I permanently joined the lectures on traditions and Arabic sciences under our Sheikh Imam Allamah Taqiuddin Shibli Hanafi, with whom I remained regularly for four years. He wrote for me a recommendatory introduction on the commentary of Iba Balik as well as on Jam al-Jawami on Arabic sciences which is my own work. He bore witness to my advancement in sciences with his tongue and hand. He would accept my opinion only in a tradition on Al-Shifa, the tradition of Abi l-Jamra fi l-Ijma, and ascribed it to the narration of Iba Hajah. As I wanted to produce it with its authority I opened the work of Iba Hajah in its place, were the above tradition could likely be found but I did not find it. I went through the whole book, but again failed to find it. Doubting my sight I went through the book a second time without finding it. I went through the book for the third time, but did not find the tradition in question. I found it in the Dictionary of the companions by Iba Calli. I, therefore, came to the Sheikh and told him
of it. The Shaikh so sooner as I related to him and he heard from me, he took his own manuscript, and taking the pen struck off the word Ibn Majah, putting down in his place Ibn Qasi on the marginal note. I considered it something very great, standing in awe of the Shaikh due to the high esteem in my heart and my own contempt for myself. I said to him, "will you not wait? perhaps you say revise your view." The Shaikh said, "No, I only followed in taking Ibn hajah as the narrator from al-Surhan al-Halabi." And then I joined our Shaikh al-Allamah, the master of the universe, Kahiyyeddin al-Kafiji for fourteen years. I studied under his subjects as the interpretation of the Quran, the principle of law, Arabic language and its sciences, rhetoric etc. He wrote for me the degree of permission with great appreciation. I also attended several lectures by Sheikh Saiifeddin al-Hanafi on "al-Kashaf al-Faidi, its annotation by him, Talkhis al-Miftah and al-Aded, and began to write books, in 866 A.H. My works have so far reached 300 books. Besides what I have destroyed by washing them off and re-working my views stated therein.

1. His detection on the mistake of his Shaikh Taqiyyeddin of his assiduity and command or mastery of the science of traditions.
I travelled by the grace of God to Syria, Hijaz, Yemen and India, North Western Africa and Takrar. When I performed the pilgrimage to Mecca, I drank the water of Zamzam for some objects of which one was my desire to attain in the holy law to the status of Sheikh Sirajuddin al-Balqini, and in traditions to the rank of Rafi b. Hajji, I began giving legal verdicts from the beginning of 872 A.H. I have gained perfect mastery in seven sciences, i.e. interpreting the Quran, traditions, holy law, grammar, Na`ini, Bayan and Badi (all included according to our notion under rhetoric) according to the method of the Arabs and men of eloquence, not after the manner of the Persians or non-Arabs and philosophers. What I believe that the status to which I have attained in these seven sciences except the holy law and traditions of which I have gained a knowledge, none has attained to that position, not even my masters, nothing to speak of those below them. As for the Muslims law, I do not claim that as regards it, my masters in their subjects have a broader vision and greater command of it, and besides these seven sciences are the principles of law, dialectics and etymology. After them come literary compositions, a epistolary

1. Although Sayuti mentions his discontinuance of the study of logic and his dislike for it, yet he speaks of his mastery in dialectics which is the art of arguing. It seems to be a strange to contradiction, for unless one is well acquainted with the laws of correct reasoning and thought which is the subject of logic, one cannot be a dialectician.
art and Farygl after which follow various readings of the Qurān which I did not study under any master, and after it is medicine. As for mathematics, it is the most difficult subject for me and remotest from my mind: and when I look into a problem relating to it, I feel as if I were trying to lift a mountain. By the grace of God I know now perfectly all the arts of the holy war. I say that only to speak of the grace of God, not out of pride. And what is there in the world which may be sought for the sake of pride and now the time of departure has drawn near, grey hair having appeared and the best part of life having gone. And if I wished to write a book on every problem with all opinions about it and its traditional and rational arguments, its implications, its refutations, its answers and comparison between difference of schools about it, I could have done that by the grace of God, not by my power and strength, as none has any power or strength except God, only that happens what God wills; none has any power but God. I had studied a little of logic in the beginning of my student career then God put its dislike in my heart, and after that I heard that Ibn al-Salāh had issued a verdict declaring it as unlawful. I, therefore, gave up its study and God gave me as a substitute for it, the science of tradition which is the noblest of sciences. As for my masters in the narration of the traditions, whom I heard and from whom I obtained a degree, are many whom I have mentioned in the dictionary of traditionists, having collected their names in

1. Called in Arabic al Diravah, which literally means to know, but technically it is used to mean principle of the criticism of tradition.
it. Their number is about 150. I did not hear the narration of traditions due to my being engaged with what is more important, and it is the science of criticism.  

After this notice on his autobiography he gives a list of the books which he had written till that time. He divides his works into a number of categories. First he gives the subject of the interpretation of the Quran and things written to it. This list shows that besides his commentaries on the Quran, Tafsirul Jalalain, al-Durrul Manthur, he had written some other works also on the same subject, e.g. Hashiyah ala Tafsiril Ba'idawi, Najmusul Sabraja wa Nata'ul Badraja fil Tafsir, Nafidhih ul Qaib fil Tafsir etc. After giving a list of his works on the interpretation of the Quran and matters relating to it, he takes the science of traditions and subjects relating to it. Among these works we find the name of a book called 'Kashful Maghatta fi Sharhi 1 Mawatta. Perhaps it is the same book known to us as Tafsirul Mawalik fi Sharhi Mawatta lil Imam Malik. He mentions his commentaries on some other books of well-known collections of traditions, e.g. Sunan abi Dawud, Sharh abn Majah. An other work on this subject is Tadhibul Mustadarak. 

1. Al-Mustadarak which is one of the most well-known collection of traditions by Abu Abdillah al-Malき Al-Sahuri who claims that Bukhari and Muslim had failed to record a large number of traditions, although they were perfectly correct and sound, judged by the standard of criticizing the traditions by these two great traditionists. But al-Mustadarak contains a number of traditions which are spurious on their very face.
These traditions were evidently connected by the supporters of the Arab party to prove the superiority of the Arab race. It is common knowledge that the disputes of the Shi`ahites and the pre-Arab party had to do a lot with the connection of traditions. Undoubtedly Sayuti is a great critic of traditions and had this book i.e., Ta`ṣiḥu l-`Umdah fi l-`Adhthi l-Jam`ah, been available to us, it would have been a great value to students of traditions.

Another work on the same subject and of great value is "al-Isali l-Jam`ah fi l-`Adhthi l-Jam`ah". Fortunately, this book is available to us, having been printed in Egypt twice or thrice. This book gives an idea of the motives of the connection of traditions, besides containing the most


31. Ibid., Vol. 4, p. 87.
important and current spurious traditions. Another work of
the similar nature is 'al-nukhbat l-badrist ila l-sunnah'. As
the traditions were handed down by the companions of the
prophet to the next generations. According to traditionalists,
it is of paramount importance to know the lives and the
character of the narrators of traditions. Hence there exists
a number of works by traditionalists dealing with the degree of
the reliability and veracity of the narrators of traditions.
It was with this purpose in view that Asyuti wrote his work
"Ainu l-isahab fi marifati l-sahabah", dealing with the lives
of the companions of the Prophet who had narrated traditions.
"Kashfu al-talbis an qalb abli l-talbis" deals with unreliable
narrators of traditions who were either accused of deliberately
lying or forgetfulness. Another small work is "Ame u 1-
medallisin" and Al-Jumu fi asmai men wades dealing with concoctors
of traditions.

After giving a list of his works on traditions he proceeds
to give the names of works, composed by his on mudir l-jaw.
Besides detailed books, there are also a number of pamphlets
on the same subjects of which he gives the names. For example,
there is a pamphlet entitled, "al-Gnal 1-Mashiq fi Tabiri
Ishbighal in bi 1-Mantiq". As the title shows the aim of the
pamphlet was to prove the unlawfulness of the study of logic,
of which he has already spoken as an undesirable subject of
study. I shall say a few more words later on about this pamphlet, as it is indicative of the conservative mentality of Suyuti.

He then takes up the list of words composed in an Arabic language and subjects relating to it. Among these works, is a commentary on the Alfiyyah of Ibn Balik to which the author has given the name "al-Bahjatu l-Kudlah, sharh l-Alfiyyah." It is to be remembered that the Alfiyyah of Ibn Balik is one of the most important books on Arabic grammar. It is written in verse to facilitate its learning by heart. Considering the importance of this book, he has again composed a work dealing with the most important points of grammar discussed in the Alfiyyah and two other very well-known text books of grammar, "al-Kafiyyah" and "al-Shafiyyah," as well as on al-Shudhur and al-Najah. As if not satisfied with what he has already written on Alfiyyah, he has gone to an independent of it. Another important work on Arabic grammar which has also received his attention is, "Mughni l-Labib," on which he has written a commentary called, "al-Fathu l-Arab li-Mughni l-Labib." To do justice to this important work he has written a commentary on the examples of grammatical rules, occurring in the text of Mughni l-Labib. Another work on which he has written: commentary is the Kafiyyah of Ibn Balik. Perhaps it is a work, different from the Kafiyyah of Ibn Majil, every
popular text book of grammar, used in Indian schools of Arabic studies of the classical type. To sum up he has written on grammar dealing with all the aspects of that subject.

As mysticism or Tassawuf had firmly set itself as an inseparable part of the Muslim religion, Tasyuti has exercised his facile pen in this field also. Some works of interest may be mentioned here, e.g. Faruq'ul-Din fi Qasrati l-Ghazali als l-munkiri l-Astaghali. The teachings of Ghazali failed to acquire that popularity or attention which it had received in the East. Ghazali is today accepted one of the most important thinkers of Islam, but his teachings and doctrines were rejected by the orthodox ulama of the west and consequently a bonfire of his book was made in Cordova. This work of Tasyuti shows that Ghazali's thought was still rebuked by some scholars in the west, i.e. Northwestern Africa, and it is with the object of defending Ghazali that he writes this work. Among the names of his books also appear that of another book called, "Mukhtararul Ihyar", which is evidently an abridgement of Ghazali's Ihyar Ulumul Bein.

In connection with his works of mysticism may be mentioned that according to Sufi belief, the world is governed by a number of beings called utub (the priest), hutac (wicked), plural of fatid, Najaba (the noble ones), plural of Najib. What evidently necessitated the writings of this book was the denial of the existence of these beings by either philosophers
or historians, as the idea of the existence of Allah\textsuperscript{32} (substitutes) is a platonic idea which found its way into Syria when the Greeks conquered that country under Alexander the Great and a appendage of the Greek world after the conversion of the Syrians to Christianity,\textsuperscript{33} when Syria became the most important centre of Greek culture next to Greece itself. It seems that after the Muslim conquest of that country, this idea passed through Syrian converts to Islam to the Muslims. It will not be beside the point to mention that the first philosophical speculations among the Muslims began as a result of their contact with Christian thought which was deeply influenced by Greek philosophy. He mentions another book, “al-Jami‘ l-Masihum under mysticism although, unless it is some other book, it is the same as “al-Kansu l-Madfin wa l-Fulkul-Masihum, which cannot be by any means a work on mysticism alone which will be again noticed in some detail.

Lastly he gives us the names of his works on history and literature. Out of these books there is one, entitled “Tahqata l-Mubati‘l-Kubra wa l-Seeqra”. Some other works which he names, most certainly be of great interest and value like Tahqata l-Kuttah, Tahqata shuara‘ l-‘arab, Faribat.

Miara. He has also a collection of sermons, probably a

\textsuperscript{32} Rishkatu l-Rasabih, Delhi, 1932, pp. 162, 63.

\textsuperscript{33} Silver Age of the Greek World by John P. Kahafy, pp. 61, 86, Lon. 1906.
collection of sermons preached on Fridays. Besides he mentions a collection of poetry by him, unfortunately not available to enable us to estimate his place as a poet.

In imitation of Hariri and other writers of erzate prose he has also left a collection of ensembles (SEQUENTS) which is fortunately available and will be reviewed under the head of his style, language etc. His taste for traditions, is evident and manifests even this work. He often quotes traditions to prove and substantiate his assertion. This book has also thrown light on the author's knowledge of medicine.

In addition to these works on history he gives the names of some works of travels, undertaken by him. These works are al-Rihletu l-Fayumiyyah, al-Rihletu l-Abdiyyah. Two other interesting books under this head are ruba’at un-najda’i buldan by Yaqut and Tuhfatu l-nechibhir fi l-eastaq man tarikh ibn Asakir, which are abridged from the original works of Yaqut and Ibn Asakir, which are too bulky for ordinary readers. There are others like which seem to be of little value like Tuhfatu’l-surafa bi awnei’l-khalifa and Saf ul-yas as ham 1-Abbas. The latter book seems to be a book in defence of the Abbasids and their caliphs to which the author was greatly attached as an orthodox Sunni.