

*SHARĪ'AT AND ṬARĪQAT: A STUDY OF THE  
DEOBANDĪ UNDERSTANDING AND  
PRACTICE OF TAṢAWWUF*



*Sharī'at* and *Ṭarīqat*: A Study of the Deobandī  
Understanding and Practice of *Taşawwuf*

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## ABSTRACT

Deobandīs are a reformist Sunni group from South Asia. They are a loosely connected group that shares similar attitudes towards Islam and *Sharī'ah* (Islamic law). The early Deobandī masters who flourished at the end of nineteenth and the beginning of twentieth century combined in themselves high spiritual achievements with scholarly erudition. Since then, Deobandī attitudes towards *taṣawwuf* have evolved and diversified. Various scholars have studied different dimensions of the Deobandī movement. However, to date there has been no comprehensive study of the Deobandī understanding and practice of *taṣawwuf*. Through analysis of Deobandī works about *taṣawwuf*, biographies of Deobandī masters, and field work amongst contemporary Deobandī Sufis, this study investigates Deobandī understanding and practice of *taṣawwuf*, and its relationship with *Sharī'ah*. This thesis argues that two Naqshbandī scholar Sufis, Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1624) and Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1762), have been most instrumental in shaping Deobandī attitudes towards Islam as whole. This Naqshbandī scholarship combined with Deobandīs' Chishtī Ṣābirī heritage to create the Deobandī school of thought. The two main planks of Deobandī Sufi doctrine are *tawḥīd* and following the *Sunnah*. Furthermore, there are two main characteristics of the Deobandī approach to *taṣawwuf*. One, they were keen to avoid those traditional practices, which invited criticism from externalist scholars. This, they called, *khurūj 'an al-khilāf* (leaving that which is differed upon). Second, they were singularly focused on the goals of *taṣawwuf* without a rigid beholding to particular means. This study concludes that the early Deobandī masters had been extremely successful in maintaining balance between the external and internal dimensions of Islam. However, a majority of later Deobandīs have moved away from *taṣawwuf* and towards externalist behavior, with only a minority upholding their elders' heritage of spirituality combined with scholarship.

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All praise is due to Allah, the Most Benevolent, the Most Merciful. I seek His help and His forgiveness, and I seek refuge with Him from the evil of my soul and from my bad deeds. Whomsoever Allah guides none can lead astray, and whomsoever Allah leads astray, none can guide. I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, the One, having no partner. And I bear witness that Muḥammad is His slave and Messenger.

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وصلى الله تعالى على خير خلقه سيدنا ومولانا محمد وعلى آله وأصحابه أجمعين

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between *Sharī‘ah* (Islamic law) and *taṣawwuf* (Islamic spirituality) has been a point of contention throughout Islamic history. From the early centuries of Islam until today it has led to intense debates and divisions that have yet to be healed. There are those who assert that *taṣawwuf* is an innovation. These are generally called the *aṣhāb al-zāhir* (externalists). Others insist that *taṣawwuf* is the very essence of Islam. These are the *aṣhāb al-bāṭin* (esoterics). In the Arab world, the divisions are primarily Sufi vs. Salafi. In the case of British India, this issue along with a range of other issues led to the formation of three major groups of the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah (Sunnis for short).<sup>1</sup> These are the Ahl-e-Ḥadīs,<sup>2</sup> the Barelvīs,<sup>3</sup> and the Deobandīs. Amongst these, it is the Deobandīs whose approach to *taṣawwuf* we will analyze in this dissertation.

### BASIC TERMS

Before we get on with the task at hand, we must first clarify a few basic terms that appear in our title. Having a clear idea of these terms will help in understanding the analysis that follows.

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<sup>1</sup> There are many Sunnis in the sub-continent who do not ascribe to any one of these three groups. In fact, common Muslims cannot be easily categorized as belonging to any one of these groups. Moreover, many Sufis and scholars have chosen to not associate themselves with any of them. However, these non-affiliated people are not organized. Hence, most analysts and commentators focus only on these three groups.

<sup>2</sup> Literally, it means people of *ḥadīth*. Many commentators regard the Ahl-e-Ḥadīs as the South Asian equivalent of the Salafīs. Although, it is true in most respects but there are differences, hence the different name.

<sup>3</sup> They are Ḥanafīs like the Deobandīs. The few areas in which they differ including certain matters of *‘aqīdah* (creed), they follow the opinions of Aḥmad Razā Khān Barelvī. Therefore, they are called Barelvīs.

## *Sharīʿat*

*Sharīʿat* is the Urdu version of the Arabic word *Sharīʿah* and has the same meaning as the Arabic term. Literally, *Sharīʿah* refers to “a watering place or a resort of drinkers (both men and beast) or a way to the water.”<sup>4</sup> However, as a technical term, it refers to the set of laws ordained by Allah for His slaves and that were conveyed to humanity through any of the prophets of Allah.<sup>5</sup> The connection with its literal meaning is that *Sharīʿah* is also “a way to the means to eternal life.”<sup>6</sup> In the present context, it refers to the set of laws that were revealed to Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him). Thus, in its broad sense *Sharīʿah* refers to both the laws pertaining to beliefs and internal states of the heart, as well as to external actions. However, many times in common usage, it is understood to refer to the external dimension of *Sharīʿah* only. Other Arabic synonyms of *Sharīʿah* in its original technical sense are *dīn* and *millah*. For the rest of this dissertation, we will use *Sharīʿah* in its broad meaning unless otherwise indicated.

## *Ṭarīqat*

It is the Urdu version of the Arabic word *ṭarīqah* with the same meaning as the Arabic term. Literally, it means “way.” However, as a technical term *ṭarīqah* is contrasted with *Sharīʿah* where the former is the way towards God while the latter is the way towards Paradise. In this sense, *ṭarīqah* is a part of *Sharīʿah* where the former is particular while the latter is general because the way to paradise includes the way to God.<sup>7</sup> In Urdu, *ṭarīqat* is used interchangeably with *taṣawwuf*. In a narrower sense

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<sup>4</sup> Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1968), book 1, part 4, 1534.

<sup>5</sup> *Mawsūʿat kashshāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn wa al-ʿulūm*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, “al-Sharʿ.” [Arb]

<sup>6</sup> Lane, book 1, part 4, 1534.

<sup>7</sup> *Mawsūʿat kashshāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn wa al-ʿulūm*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, “al-Ṭarīqah.” [Arb]

where *Sharī'ah* is taken to mean outward actions only, the relationship between *ṭarīqah* and *Sharī'ah* can be described as *Sharī'ah* being the *zāhir* (outside) or the shell and *taṣawwuf* or *ṭarīqah* as its core or *bātin* (inside). We shall look at the definition of *taṣawwuf* and its various aspects in detail later in this dissertation.

We have chosen to use the word *ṭarīqat* in our title instead of *taṣawwuf*, which would have been clearer in meaning. The reason is that in Urdu literature, *Sharī'ah* and *taṣawwuf* are generally contrasted using the words “*sharī'at*” and “*ṭarīqat*.” Moreover, these terms are also used in the titles of two important sources for our analysis. These are *Sharī'at-o-ṭarīqat kā talāzum* by Muḥammad Zakariyyā Kāndhlavī, and *Sharī'at-o-ṭarīqat* by Muḥammad Dīn.

## **BACKGROUND**

We have mentioned above that there are three major groups in the Indo-Pak sub-continent who claim to be true Sunnis namely, Ahl-e-Ḥadīs, Barelvīs, and Deobandīs. Amongst these, the Ahl-e-Ḥadīs are known for their tough stand vis-à-vis *taṣawwuf*. For many of them, *taṣawwuf* is a *bid'ah* (innovation), which leads to *shirk* (polytheism). In many ways these are the ideological heirs of Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1792). The Barelvīs are on the other extreme. They are known for their whole-hearted espousal of *taṣawwuf*. They also seem to legitimize the practices associated with popular *taṣawwuf* such as *mawlid* (celebrating the birth of the Prophet), ‘*urs* (celebrating the death anniversary of a saint), seeking help from dead saints, etc., which are the subject of intense debate between the scholars.<sup>8</sup> The Deobandīs, however, occupy a position between the two. They are mainly Sufi

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<sup>8</sup> We have used the words “seem to legitimize” because there are important nuances in the Barelvī position on these issues. In popular imagination, they are regarded as supportive of these practices. We will discuss their position in somewhat detail later in the dissertation.

‘*ulamā* who are strongly anti-*bid‘ah*. It is this attitude of theirs, which defines their particular approach towards *taṣawwuf*.

There are numerous issues that divide the Deobandīs from other Sunnis. These “Sunnis” include those who doubt *taṣawwuf* altogether such as Ahl-e-Ḥadīs, Jamā‘at-e-Islāmi, etc.<sup>9</sup> These groups question the legitimacy of *taṣawwuf* itself, as well as that of many practices that are quite fundamental to it. Many rank and file Deobandīs of today have developed a similar distrust of *taṣawwuf*. However, senior Deobandīs of today, as well as the elders of old have always been convinced of the legitimacy of true *taṣawwuf*. They have written numerous works to prove this. At the same time, they acknowledge the innovations that have crept into *taṣawwuf* and seek to negate these like their non-Sufi opponents. This in turn sets them apart from other Sufi groups such as *gaddī nashīn pīrs* (hereditary shaykhs) and Barelvīs.

Many of the issues that divided the Barelvīs and Deobandīs had their roots in the dispute between Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1624), popularly known as Mujaddid Alf-e-Sānī (Renewer of the second millennium) and his opponents, and that between Shāh Walī Allāh’s (d. 1762) family and its opponents. In the case of the former, the issues did not last long. Eventually, they were resolved although both sides have different accounts of the resolution.<sup>10</sup> In the case of the latter, the issues actually came to prominence with Shāh Ismā‘īl and Sayyid Aḥmad of Rae Bareli. Amongst these issues were the practices that we have mentioned regarding the Barelvī-Deobandī divide such as *mawlid*, *Fātiḥah*, ‘*urs*, etc. Many of these were considered to be part of

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<sup>9</sup> The issue of who defines Sunni orthodoxy is a contentious issue in the sub-continent. Amongst the Ahl-e-Ḥadīs, Barelvīs, and Deobandīs, members of each group have penned treatises detailing why they are the only Sunnis and others are not. Moreover, many of them agree that Jamā‘at-e-Islāmi cannot be termed a Sunni group. However, it is not our job to arbitrate between them. Therefore, we have used Sunni in a broad sense including all of these groups which are considered Sunni in popular imagination.

<sup>10</sup> See the footnote by the translator of *Anfās al-‘arīfīn* in Shāh Walī Allāh, *Anfās al-‘arīfīn*, translated by Sayyid Muḥammad Fārūq Qādirī from Persian into Urdu, (Delhi: Maktabat al-Falāḥ, n.d.), 398. For a more detailed analysis, see Shaykh Muḥammad Ikrām, *Rūd-e-Kausar*, (Lahore: Idāra Saqāfat-e-Islāmi, 2001), 361-379. [Urd]



Islam in popular imagination. When these practices were opposed, a reaction took place from those ‘*ulamā*’ who regarded these to be permissible in themselves (*jā’iz fi nafsihā*).<sup>11</sup> These opponents felt that Shāh Ismā‘īl and his colleagues were in league with the “Wahhabi extremists” of Arabia and sought to destroy “traditional” Islam. The controversy that ensued and a host of other factors led to the development of the three distinct Sunni groups of South Asia namely, Ahl-e-Ḥadīs, Deobandīs and Barelvīs. All three were characterized by a strong sense of mission to protect true *dīn* from what they considered to be innovations. For Barelvīs, the other two “reformist” groups were themselves innovators in trying to re-interpret and undermine traditional understandings of Islam.

Numerous attempts have been made to bridge this divide. Almost all have failed and backfired.<sup>12</sup> From the Deobandī side, we can cite the example of Ṣūfī Iqbāl and his supporters who sought to find a common ground with the Barelvīs. This backfired and resulted in their own alienation from the wider Deobandī *jamā‘at* (Urdu version of the Arabic word “*jamā‘ah*” meaning “community” or group”). From the Barelvī side, Muḥammad Tāhir-ul-Qādirī is a prominent example of someone who tried to bridge this divide.<sup>13</sup> However, his attempts also led to his alienation from the wider Barelvī community.

Before we proceed further, it would be appropriate for us to explain in detail who the Deobandīs are and how they got this name.

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<sup>11</sup> These were primarily the ‘*ulamā*’ of Badaun and Khayrabad.

<sup>12</sup> An interesting study of the differences between Deobandīs and Barelvīs is *Kīmiā-e-Waḥdat* [Alchemy of unity] by Muftī ‘Atā Allāh. It seeks to prove that “there are no fundamental differences between the two. Both agree on the basic understanding of the issues. Their differences are merely semantic.” It remains to be seen what positive effect, if any, has this work produced. See Muḥammad ‘Atā Allāh, *Kīmiā-e-Waḥdat*, (Karachi: n.p., 1993). [Urd]

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Muḥammad Tāhir-ul-Qādirī, *Firqa parastī kā khātma kiyūn kar mumkin hai?*, (Lahore: Idāra Minhāj-ul-Qur’ān, 1987). [Urd]

## Who are the Deobandīs?

To know Deobandīs, one has to know Deoband. Deoband is a mid-sized town located about 80 miles north of Delhi. It is an old town whose name is a combination of two words “devī” (Hindu goddess) and “ban” (jungle) which changed over time into “Deviban” and due to excessive use finally became “Deoband” (sometimes pronounced as Devband). It lies in Saharanpur district which in turn forms part of a region called “Doaba” (pronounced Do Āba). Doaba (sometimes written as Doab) is a Persian word which means two waters or rivers. The name is generally given to land between two rivers.<sup>14</sup> In this case, it was given to the region between the rivers Yamuna and Ganges in the northwestern part of present day Uttar Pradesh state in Northern India.

It comprises the districts of Saharanpur, Muzaffarnagar, Meerut and Delhi. Saharanpur district lies in the north. Within it are located the towns of Deoband, Saharanpur, Nanauta, Gangoh and Ambahta which are important for our analysis. These form a triangle with Saharanpur forming the northern corner, Deoband the south-eastern corner and Gangoh the south-western corner. Nanauta is located on the line between Deoband and Gangoh; and Ambahta is located on the line between Gangoh and Saharanpur. In the central part of Doaba is located Muzaffarnagar district. Within this are the towns of Jhinjhana, Kairana, Thana Bhawan and Kandhla.

In this region, on 15<sup>th</sup> Muḥarram, 1283 AH / 30<sup>th</sup> May, 1866 CE, a *madrasah*<sup>15</sup> (traditional Islamic school) was set up at Deoband, which was later named Dār al-‘Ulūm. Six months later, another *madrasah* called Mazāhir al-‘Ulūm was set up at

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<sup>14</sup> The same term “doab” is used for many such places. Consider, for example, Rachna Doab located in Punjab, Pakistan.

<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that *madrasah* refers to an institute, which offers a comprehensive multi-year course in Islamic studies. It is different from a *maktab*, which refers to part-time schools that offer instruction in reading the Qur’an (without understanding), and basics of Islam.

Saharanpur. These two were the first ones to be set up and they are still the two most important *madrasahs* in the whole of the Indo-Pak sub-continent.<sup>16</sup> They still boast top scholars and Sufis in their ranks.

The main founder of Dār al-‘Ulūm was Mawlānā Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautvī (d. 1880). Other co-founders were Mawlānā Zulfiqār ‘Alī (d. 1904), Mawlānā Rafī‘-ud-Dīn (d. 1890/1891), Mawlānā Fazl-ur-Raḥmān ‘Usmānī (d. 1907), Hāji Muḥammad ‘Ābid (d. 1912) and Mawlānā Muḥammad Ya‘qūb Nānautvī (d. 1886). All of these were fairly young and in their thirties. The oldest was Mawlānā Zulfiqār who was 45.

Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautvī was a visionary. His intention was not to set up just one *madrasah* but he envisioned a chain of similar *madrasahs* spread all over India catering to the Islamic educational needs of the Muslims of India. This is why he did not stop at Deoband but within months he was laying the foundations of other *madrasahs* in Saharanpur, Moradabad, Amroha, Delhi, and other cities and towns. However, amongst all these, the *madrasah* at Deoband occupied a unique position. It was the first and the greatest and had the most prominent people associated with it. Pretty soon, all those scholars who were associated with these *madrasahs* came to be known as Deobandīs.

These ‘*ulamā*’ did not choose this name for themselves and were at pains to explain that they were not a new sect but the same Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah. However, the name stuck and after some time, these ‘*ulamā*’ also tacitly accepted it as indicating their particular approach to Islam within the overall framework of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah. The term used for such sub-sects is *maslak* which literally means “path” but is used to refer to “an approach within a single sect.” Thus,

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<sup>16</sup> This is akin to the status of Oxford and Cambridge amongst British universities.

Deobandī, Barelvī and Ahl-e-Ḥadīs are *maslaks* within Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah according to those who accept all three as being Sunni. In this sense, it is similar to the term *madhhab* which also literally means path but is used to refer to *fiqh* (a legal school of thought) such as Ḥanafī, Shāfi‘ī, Mālikī, Ḥanbalī and so on. The difference is that *madhhab* is used only with reference to *fiqh*; while *maslak* transcends that. In the case above, Deobandīs and Barelvīs are both Ḥanafīs while Ahl-e-Ḥadīs are like Salafīs. However, these three also have creedal differences. This has led some to say that these three groups are sects and not just Sunni sub-groups. The reasoning goes that a sect is defined on the basis of creedal differences and all three of these have important creedal differences.

It will be useful to consider how the former rector of Dār al-‘Ulūm, Qārī Muḥammad Ṭayyib (d. 1983), the grandson of Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautvī, defined Deobandīs. He writes:

As far as their religious orientation and particular outlook is concerned, the ‘*ulamā*’ of Deoband are fully Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah. This is not a new sect nor is it a group with new set of beliefs, which time and circumstances may have created. Within and outside the country, this is the group that has genuinely defended the beliefs, principles and laws of the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah. It has taught these (to others) because of which the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah continue to exist. This is what the founders of Dār al-‘Ulūm disseminated in its original and classical form through their students and those trained directly or indirectly by them. They made this universal.<sup>17</sup>

In the same book, he has clarified:

In this treatise, (the term) “‘*ulamā*’ of Deoband” does not only refer to the people who are based in the Dār al-‘Ulūm at Deoband for teaching, giving legal opinions, preaching, writing or for some other purposes. Rather, it refers to all those ‘*ulamā*’ whose mental outlook and thought is connected to the thought of Mujaddid Alf-e-Sānī Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī and that of Imām Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi, and follows the approach and methodology of the founders of Dār al-‘Ulūm, viz., Mawlānā Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautvī, Mawlānā Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī and Mawlānā Muḥammad Ya‘qūb Nānautvī. It does not

<sup>17</sup> Muḥammad Ṭayyib, ‘*Ulamā*’ Deoband kā dīnī rukh aur maslakī mizāj, (Lahore: Idāra-e-Islamiāt, 1988), 23. [Urd]

matter whether these are the ‘*ulamā*’ of Dār al-‘Ulūm at Deoband, or Mazāhir al-‘Ulūm at Saharanpur, or Madrasah Shāhī at Moradabad or Madrasah Kāshif al-‘Ulūm at Bastī Niẓām al-Dīn .... All the ‘*ulamā*’ of the hundreds of *madrasahs* in the (various) districts of India are Deobandī whether they are engaged in teaching, or politics, or preaching or writing. Furthermore, whether they are in Asia or Africa or Europe or America; they are all ‘*ulamā*’ of Deoband and are called as such.<sup>18</sup>

It is important to note here that Ṭayyib counted Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī (d. 1905) as one of the founders of the Dār al-‘Ulūm even though he was not one of the original founders. The reason is to be found in the very close relationship between him and Muḥammad Qāsim. The two had studied together under the same teacher Mawlānā Mamlūk ‘Alī Nānautvī (d. 1851) in Delhi. Later, they were the first amongst the ‘*ulamā*’ to do *bay‘ah* (Sufi pledge of allegiance) with Ḥāji Imdād Allāh Muhājir Makkī (d. 1899) who made them his principal successors (*khalīfahs*). He is reported to have said:

Furthermore, the person who loves me and has regard for me, should consider Mawlawī Rashīd Aḥmad Ṣāhib, may Allah preserve him, and Mawlawī Muḥammad Qāsim Ṣāhib, may Allah preserve him, who combine in them outward and inward perfections in my place. Rather, he should consider them superior to me, although, apparently the situation is the other way around that they are in my place and I am in their place. He should consider their company worthwhile because people like them are not found in this age. He should seek *fayḍ* (spiritual grace) through their blessed service. He should seek the methods of *sulūk*<sup>19</sup> [that are in this book] from them. Allah willing, he will not remain deprived. May Allah bless their age and bestow upon them all the blessings of gnosis and the perfections of His proximity. May He grant them high ranks and brighten the world with the light of their guidance; and may He make their grace continue for the sake of the Master of the world, Allah bless him and give him peace, until the last day.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, in terms of stature the two were equal and no one else came close to their rank. However, Muḥammad Qāsim passed away early at the age of 49 while

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>19</sup> Literally, it means spiritual journey. It is often used as a synonym for *taṣawwuf*.

<sup>20</sup> Imdād Allāh, “Ḍiyā al-qulūb” in Imdād Allāh, *Kulliyāt-e-Imdādiya*, (Karachi: Dār-ul-Ishā‘at, 1976), 72-73. [Urd]

Rashīd Aḥmad, based in his *khānqah*<sup>21</sup> in Gangoh, lived a long life. After the former's death, he became the chief patron of the Dār al-'Ulūm; and for the next twenty-five years, he guided most Deobandīs as Imdād Allāh's main successor in India.

The second important thing to note in Ṭayyib's lengthy quotation is the intellectual and spiritual lineage of Deobandīs. He has clearly identified Deobandīs with Sirhindī and Walī Allāh. Thus, Deobandīs consider themselves to belong to a tradition of prominent personalities who were Sufis, as well as erudite scholars. This chain extends down from Sirhindī to Walī Allāh and through his descendents to the early leaders of the Deobandī movement. This tradition represents the reformist streak within the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah.

Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1624) flourished during the eras of Mughal emperors Akbar and Jahāngīr. He has been called *Mujaddid Alf-e-Sānī* (the Renewer of the second millennium). His celebrated collection of letters, which came to be known as *Maktūbāt-e-Imām Rabbānī* [Letters of Imām Rabbānī], is hailed as a landmark in the development of Islamic thought in India. It has been a near consensus among Muslim historians that he brought about major changes in the development of Islam in India. He reversed the heretical trends initiated by Akbar and inspired the religious reforms of Awrangzeb.<sup>22</sup>

Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1762) also occupies a crucial place at another important juncture in the history of Islam in India. He straddles the medieval and the modern worlds. He operated at a time of extreme political upheaval and deterioration for

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<sup>21</sup> A Persian word indicating a Sufi hospice. It is equivalent to *zāwiyah* as used by Arab Sufis.

<sup>22</sup> Yohannan Friedmann has disputed this view of his legacy. See Yohannan Friedmann, *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindī: An outline of his thought and a study of his image in the eyes of posterity*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1971). However, the evidence available suggests that the predominant view of Sirhindī's political role is quite plausible.

Muslims. The Mughal Empire had begun its quick decline and Northern India lacked stability. New players were emerging on the scene. Long-suppressed peoples and movements were finding room to exact revenge. His place of residence, Delhi, which was the royal capital was besieged by these aggressive hordes, which included Muslim groups, Sikhs and Hindus. Sunni-Shi'ī rivalry threatened to bring the Mughal Empire down, sooner than later. In the middle of all this, he formulated his thought and started a comprehensive movement for the regeneration of Islam and Muslims. His ideas spawned various important intellectual and religious movements in India. His biological and spiritual descendents are credited with the reform and renewal of Islam in India that took place in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The nineteenth century was also a period of tremendous changes in India. Muslims had only recently lost all political power and were also losing on the economic front. The year 1857 was a watershed when the last Mughal King was deposed by the British and the British crown formally took over India. Prior to this, India especially its northern half had seen a major reform and revival movement led by the descendents of Walī Allāh. These were Sayyid Aḥmad of Rae Bareli and Shāh Ismā'īl of Delhi. While this movement had caused major positive changes; at the same time their rhetoric had led to hardening of sectarian positions. In the beginning it was the Ḥanafī '*ulamā*' of Badaun and Khayrabad who took issue with the reformist ideas of this movement. This opposition later on crystallized in the form of the Barelvī movement of Aḥmad Razā Khān of Bareilly.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, after Sayyid Aḥmad's defeat on the military front, his movement split into two factions. The leadership of the movement passed on to those who were

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<sup>23</sup> Bareilly and Rae Bareli are two separate towns. The former is in the western part of Uttar Pradesh in a region called Rohilkhand inhabited by a large Pashtun Muslim population. The latter is in the central part of the state near the capital Lucknow.

against *taqlīd*, i.e., following one *madhhab* (legal school of thought) and who wanted to continue the jihad. These later came to be called the Ahl-e-Ḥadīs.<sup>24</sup> The other half which was firmly in favour of following Ḥanafī *madhhab* but wanted reform in popular Muslim practice finally crystallized in the form of the Deobandī movement. Thus, the Deobandīs occupy the middle position between the Ahl-e-Ḥadīs and the Barelvīs.

### **Deobandīs as Sufis**

Almost all major figures of the Deobandī *jamā'at* have been Sufis. They belong to one of the four main *ṭarīqahs*<sup>25</sup> that predominate in the Indo-Pak sub-continent, namely, the Chishtiyyah, the Naqshbandiyyah, the Qādiriyyah and the Suhrawardiyyah. Of these, the Chishtiyyah is the most popular and influential. Among the Chishtīs, there are two main branches, the Nizāmiyyah and the Ṣābiriyyah. For most of its history, until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ṣābiriyyah branch had been overshadowed by the Nizāmiyyah branch with few exceptions.<sup>26</sup> With the rise of the Deobandīs, whose main *ṭarīqah* was Chishtī Ṣābirī, the Ṣābiriyyah branch came to prominence. Ḥāji Imdād Allāh Muhājir Makki (d. 1899), who was the Shaykh of most early Deobandīs, is referred to as Sayyid al-Ṭā'ifah (Leader of the group) in Deobandī literature. His main *ṭarīqah* was Chishtī Ṣābirī but he also had *ijāzah* (permission) from his shaykh in the four main *ṭarīqahs*, as well as the Kubrawiyyah. Apparently, the practice of joining these four *ṭarīqahs* simultaneously had been started by some early shaykh with a view to minimizing inter-*ṭarīqah* rivalry. Thus,

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<sup>24</sup> There were other members of Ahl-e-Ḥadīs who were not part of this jihad effort. Examples include Nazīr Ḥusayn Dehlavī, the foremost *ḥadīth* expert amongst them.

<sup>25</sup> In Urdu, mostly the word *silsilah* is used. It is equivalent to *ṭarīqah* as used in Arabic for Sūfi orders. In Arabic, *silsilah* refers to a chain of Sufi masters. For the rest of this dissertation, we will use *ṭarīqah* for the Urdu *silsilah* so as to avoid confusion with the Arabic term.

<sup>26</sup> A prominent exception is Shaykh 'Abd al-Quddūs Gangohī (d. 1537).



Chishtiyyah Şābiriyyah Imdādiyyah, as it came to be called after Imdād Allāh, combined in it all the four major *ṭarīqahs* of the sub-continent.

As mentioned earlier, the early leading figures of the Deobandī movement were two outstanding scholars, Muḥammad Qāsim and Rashīd Aḥmad. They had studied together under the same teachers in Delhi and both were Imdād Allāh's designated successors. Their relationship with their shaykh has been described above. After the Indian war of independence in 1857, Imdād Allāh moved to Makkah, hence he came to be called Muhājir Makkī (migrant to Makkah). Muḥammad Qāsim founded the Dār al-ʿUlūm at Deoband in 1866 and started a movement for the setting up of other *madrāsahs* on the same model. After he passed away in 1880, Rashīd Aḥmad became the chief patron of the Dār al-ʿUlūm and spiritual guide of most Deobandīs until his death. He was in many ways instrumental in providing the Deobandī *jamāʿat* with its particular blend of *Sharīʿah* and *taṣawwuf*, which set it apart from the traditional Sufis of the sub-continent.

These two along with the other leading figures of the early generations are referred to as the *akābir*<sup>27</sup> (literally, elders) in Deobandī literature. This term is also interchangeably used for all major figures of the Deobandī *jamāʿat*, whether of the past or the present. In the current analysis, this term shall be used for the early figures unless otherwise stated.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The purpose of this research is to examine and analyze the Deobandīs' understanding and practice of *taṣawwuf*. It will look at the Deobandī articulation of *taṣawwuf*, their

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<sup>27</sup> Other prominent figures include: Mawlānās Muḥammad Yaʿqūb Nānautvī, Maḥmūd-ul-Ḥasan, ʿAbd al-Raḥīm Rāipūrī, Khalīl Aḥmad Sahāranpūrī, Ashraf ʿAlī Thānvī, Muḥammad Ilyās Kāndhlavī, ʿAbd al-Qādir Rāipūrī, Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī and Muḥammad Zakariyyā Kāndhlavī.

identification of its goals, their methodology with respect to achieving these goals, and their contributions towards the rejuvenation and reformulation of *taṣawwuf*. The period under study extends from the second half of the nineteenth century until the present day.

In the beginning, the Deobandī movement started off as a unified group. However, beginning in the early part of the twentieth century, it started to diversify and eventually came to represent several different, although not necessarily mutually contradictory streams of religious and political orientations. Dr. Mumtāz Aḥmad has identified these diverse orientations as (1) the Sufi stream, (2) the reformist stream, (3) the sectarian stream, (4) the anti-colonial Jihadist stream, (5) the Muslim nationalist stream, (6) the socialist stream, and (7) the Tablīghī stream.<sup>28</sup> Some of these streams have died out while others continue to be very important. Another way of looking at the various branches of the Deobandī movement is to look at the leading figure that inspired each of these various sub-movements. Thus, Maḥmūd-ul-Ḥasan and Ḥusain Aḥmad Madanī inspired the anti-colonial jihadist stream. Muḥammad Ilyās Kāndhlavī inspired the Tablīghī stream. Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī and Muḥammad Zakariyyā Kāndhlavī inspired two main branches of the current Sufi stream. Even though each one of these was a Sufi and a scholar, yet their emphasis on particular aspects of religion led them to be identified with that. Thus, the last two because of their special emphasis upon *taṣawwuf*, came to be seen more as Sufis than anything else.

Of all of these various branches of the Deobandī movement, the most relevant from our perspective is the Sufi stream. It is here that we find the Sufi dimension of the original elders of Deoband still thriving. As is to be expected, amongst the other

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<sup>28</sup> Mumtāz Aḥmad, Public lecture delivered at IIUI, Islamabad, November 2007.

streams, the Sufi element no longer occupies the primary position that it once did in the early period of the movement. That is why the rank and file members of these branches have become somewhat hostile to *taṣawwuf* even though the vast majority of the senior ‘*ulamā*’ of these streams are Sufis. This is further compounded by the mixing that took place in Pakistan and Afghanistan between the Deobandīs on the one hand and Ahl-e-Ḥadīs and Arab Salafis on the other hand during the Afghan Jihad against the Soviets. Many of the Deobandīs who took part in this came more and more to resemble Salafis. The aspect of opposing innovation finally got to *taṣawwuf* itself.

In this study, we seek to answer the following questions:

- 1) What was the position of *taṣawwuf* in the lives of the elders of the movement?
- 2) Which personalities or schools of thought influenced the Deobandīs the most?
- 3) How are they connected to Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindi and Shāh Walī Allāh and his descendents?
- 4) What were the main elements of Deobandī *taṣawwuf*?
- 5) How did they define the goals of *taṣawwuf*?
- 6) What were the main aspects of their methodology for achieving these goals?
- 7) How was this particular form of *taṣawwuf* different from other forms of *taṣawwuf* prevalent in the sub-continent?
- 8) What was the relationship between *Sharī‘ah* and *taṣawwuf*? Was it one of contradiction and competition or was it that of mutual reinforcement?
- 9) How has the role of *taṣawwuf* amongst Deobandīs changed over the years?

## SCOPE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This study is divided into five chapters.

This first chapter is the introductory chapter in which we have described in some detail the subject matter under discussion and provided definitions of the key terms. We have given an overview of the religious life of the Muslim society in South Asia in general, and North India in particular, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the rest of this chapter, we will establish a methodological context for the remaining chapters. We will review the relevant literature, identify the key sources and explain the methodology of investigation.

The second chapter starts out by exploring the concept of *iṣlāh* (reform) and *tajdīd* (renewal) as understood by mainstream Sunni scholarship. Then, we deal with the legacy of Aḥmad Sirhindi, Shāh Walī Allāh and Sayyid Aḥmad of Rae Bareli. These individuals and the movements that they spawned represent the bedrock of the future Deobandī movement. We look into the connection of the early figures of the Deobandī movement with these individuals especially with regards to the Ṭarīqah Muḥammadiyah, which Sayyid Aḥmad put forth and which had its roots in eighteenth century Naqshbandī masters of Delhi,<sup>29</sup> and which was also promoted by Shaykh Aḥmad Tijānī in North Africa.<sup>30</sup> We will also see the two main strands of Chishtī and Naqshbandī *taṣawwuf* and scholarship coming together in the form of Deobandīs.

The third chapter provides the biographies of the elders of Deoband in more detail, and traces the intellectual and spiritual sources of their learning. It focuses

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<sup>29</sup> For a detailed discussion of this phenomenon, see Harlan Otto Pearson, “Islamic reform and revival in nineteenth century India: The Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1979).

<sup>30</sup> For a discussion of the Tijānīs, see Zachary Valentine Wright, *On the path of the Prophet: Shaykh Ahmad Tijani and the Tariqa Muhammadiya*, (Atlanta: The African-American Islamic Institute, 2005).

more on four figures. These are Mawlānās Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, Muḥammad Zakariyyā Kāndhlavī and Muḥammad Ilyās Kāndhlavī. The *tablīgh* work started by the last mentioned has important connections to *taṣawwuf* even though his *Tablīghī Jamā‘at* is no longer as supportive of *taṣawwuf* as it used to be. These four figures represent three distinct phases of the Deobandī movement, namely, crystallization, articulation and expansion, and attempts at renewal. We look at the relationship of these figures with one another, and how that helped to reinforce their attitudes towards *taṣawwuf*. We also examine their individual spiritual paths and the spread of their teachings.

The fourth chapter begins by exploring the classical definitions and descriptions of *taṣawwuf*. A comparison of these with the definitions of *taṣawwuf* put forward by Deobandī masters is undertaken. We also outline the main features of the Deobandī understanding of *taṣawwuf*. We examine the key doctrines enunciated by Deobandī Sufi masters, their understanding of the goals of *taṣawwuf* and their stand vis-à-vis the means to achieve these goals. The Deobandī view of the relationship between *Sharī‘ah* and *taṣawwuf* is also explored. We will see how Deobandī *taṣawwuf* is firmly rooted in *Sharī‘ah* (according to their understanding of *Sharī‘ah*) and how that affects their self-image.

The fifth chapter outlines the main aspects of Sufi practice among Deobandīs. The main figures for our analysis are Rashīd Aḥmad and Ashraf ‘Alī. Through their works, and interview with contemporary Deobandī shaykhs and disciples, we explore the main aspects of Deobandī Sufi life. We look at the relationship between masters and disciples. The central role played by *dhikr* and the constant attempt to balance *Sharī‘ah* requirements with the goals of *taṣawwuf* is also looked at. This brings into

sharp focus the Deobandīs' understanding of *taṣawwuf*'s goals, and deepens our understanding of their stand vis-à-vis the means.

The sixth chapter concludes the dissertation summarizing its main points. It highlights the main contributions of Deobandī Sufis and their works. It also looks at the potential of the Deobandī system for serving as a bridge between the various apparently irreconcilable segments of the Muslim *ummah*.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The way Deobandīs have understood *taṣawwuf* and practiced it is a still less-studied area. Amongst Western scholars, Barbara D. Metcalf in her pioneering work *Islamic revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900*, (New Delhi, 2005)<sup>31</sup> has dealt with it to some extent. Her book was an outstanding piece of scholarship that sought to look at the Deobandī movement as a movement of reformist 'ulamā' and not from a political perspective, which characterized the works of those before her: Z.H. Faruqi's *The Deoband school and the demand for Pakistan* (Bombay, 1963), and I.H. Qureshi's *Ulema in politics* (Karachi, 1972).<sup>32</sup> Metcalf approached the Deobandīs with sympathy and understanding and devoted considerable attention to the Sufi aspect of their lives. However, this was only as a part of the overall story. The comprehensive nature of the work did not allow her to examine the *taṣawwuf* aspect in greater detail.

Carl Ernst and Bruce Lawrence have given some attention to Deobandīs as part of their account of Chishtīs in *Sufi martyrs of love: The Chishti order in South Asia and beyond* (New York: 2002). This account is dedicated to the Chishtī *ṭarīqah*

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<sup>31</sup> Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>32</sup> See Francis Robinson's review of her book in Francis Robinson, *Islam and Muslim history in South Asia*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 254-264.

and Deobandī Sufis do not receive full attention since they form only a small part of the Chishtī story. Moreover, the authors do not seem to have engaged in direct research of the original works of Deobandīs. Rather, they based their findings on the works of others. Thus, they incorrectly characterize Deobandīs as anti-Sufi. While this might be true of some contemporary Deobandīs but the fact remains that the early elders wanted to reform popular *taṣawwuf* and not reject it altogether. In certain places, their description of the relationship between early Deobandīs and their shaykh Imdād Allāh appears contradictory. On the one hand, they seem to suggest that the Deobandīs did not even examine Ḥāji Imdād Allāh’s metaphysical treatises and consigned them to the flames. On the other hand, they acknowledge that Ashraf ‘Alī actually reinterpreted Imdād Allāh works.<sup>33</sup> In any case, their discussion of the Deobandī Sufis is short and leaves a lot to be desired.

Muḥammad Qāsim Zamān has written a short volume on Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī titled *Ashraf ‘Ali Thānawi: Islam in modern South Asia* (Oneworld: 2008). It contains valuable information and useful analysis. However, as the author has himself stated (2008: 2), “a major focus of his study is on issues of religious authority, in intellectual, social, as well as political contexts, and as illustrated by the career and discourses of a preeminent religious scholar.” This approach is not really helpful from the perspective of our study. It tends to skew the analysis and presents Sufi shaykhs and ‘*ulamā*’ as competing with others for authority. He has devoted a full chapter to *taṣawwuf* as understood and practiced by Ashraf ‘Alī. However, his analysis is confined to just one prominent personality among the Deobandīs. Thus, the full picture of Deobandī *taṣawwuf* does not emerge.

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<sup>33</sup> Carl Ernst and Bruce Lawrence, *Sufi martyrs of love: The Chishti order in South Asia and beyond*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 120.

Barbara Metcalf has also written a small volume on Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī titled *Husain Ahmad Madani: The jihad for Islam and India's freedom* (Oneworld: 2009). Like the previous volume on Ashraf 'Alī which belongs to the same series, this work deals with the Sufi dimension of Ḥusayn Aḥmad's life and personality only as part of the overall analysis. Its main focus is the political struggle that Ḥusayn Aḥmad undertook against the British. It is a useful analysis of the political dimension of the Deobandī movement but it fails to fully engage the Sufi dimension.

Yoginder Sikand has devoted a full book to the Tablīghī Jamā'at, which is the largest and one of the important Deobandī groups.<sup>34</sup> He has devoted a significant section to its Sufi roots. Moreover, Dietrich Reetz has done considerable research on Deobandīs in general and Tablīghī Jamā'at in particular. He has examined various issues related to Deobandīs, their transnational linkages, as well as the Sufi dimension of some Deobandī groups. The July 2009 issue of "The Muslim World," a journal published by Hartford Seminary, was dedicated to studying different aspects of the Deobandī movement including the Sufi aspect. Many of its articles were first presented at the 2007 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR). Furthermore, Metcalf has written articles and small booklets analyzing the Tablīghī Jamā'at and Tālibān and their connection to the Deobandī Movement in spite of their apparent differences.<sup>35</sup>

To our knowledge, no one has so far devoted an entire book or dissertation to the Deobandī understanding and practice of *taṣawwuf*. We propose to do just that. The debate amongst the three groups of Sunnis identified above has a very current relevance, not only to the situation in the sub-continent but also to the South Asian

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<sup>34</sup> Sikand, Yoginder, *The origins and development of the Tablighi Jama'at (1920-2000)*, (Hyderabad: Orient Longman Private Ltd., 2002).

<sup>35</sup> Amongst these is Barbara D. Metcalf, *'Traditionalist' Islamic activism: Deobandis, Tablighis, and Talibs*, (Leiden: ISIM, 2002).



Diaspora living in North America, Europe, Africa and Asia. We hope that through our research, we will help to foster a more rational debate, at least amongst the English-speaking community, about this important issue which in many ways, defines South Asian Muslim identity.

## **SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY**

As mentioned above, we have identified four main personalities as embodying the particular Deobandī approach to *taṣawwuf*. Amongst these, Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, and Muḥammad Zakariyyā Kāndhlavī are more important for our analysis. These three form a continuous chain spanning a century and a quarter from the start of the Deobandī movement until the beginning of the fifteenth Muslim century. The periods in which these three lived overlap with each other. Rashīd Aḥmad lived from 1827 – 1905; Ashraf ‘Alī lived from 1865 – 1943; and Muḥammad Zakariyyā lived from 1898 – 1982.

These three represent the three distinct phases that the Deobandī *taṣawwuf* went through viz., crystallization, expansion, and revival. As for the current fourth phase, there are a number of personalities who pretty much define the current practice of *taṣawwuf* but none of them is as towering as these three. Whereas Rashīd Aḥmad laid the foundations for his particular brand of *taṣawwuf*, Ashraf ‘Alī explained it and produced a huge body of literature which helped to popularize it. Later, Muḥammad Zakariyyā who sensed *taṣawwuf* declining amongst Deobandīs, attempted to revive it. Between these three, we we can find a representation of Deobandī *taṣawwuf*. To these three can be added the name of Muḥammad Ilyās Kāndhlavi (1886 – 1944), the founder of the Tablīghī Jamā‘at. His period overlaps that of Ashraf ‘Alī and he also

helped expand Deobandī *taṣawwuf* by popularizing it in a very different manner. We will be examining the relationship between his movement and Deobandī *taṣawwuf*.

For our research, we have studied the works written by or about the *akābir* with a view to gaining first hand understanding of their thoughts and ideas. Secondary sources (Orientalist in particular) have been used minimally. All of the Deobandī works are in Urdu with occasional Persian and Arabic passages. We have also looked into current writings on the subject and have supplemented these by interviews with contemporary shaykhs and their disciples. Although the total number of Deobandī works on *taṣawwuf* runs into thousands, the main ones can be identified as follows:

1. Imdād Allāh, *Kulliyāt-e-Imdādia* [Works of Imdād].
2. Muḥammad Ismā‘īl Mīrathī, *Tadhkirat al-Rashīd* [Account of Rashīd].
3. Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk* [Help for the spiritual journey].
4. Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, *Tālīfāt-e-Rashīdia* [Rashīd’s works].
5. Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, *Makātīb-e-Rashīdia* [Letters of Rashīd].
6. Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Imdād al-mushtāq ila ashraf al-akhlāq* [Help for the eager towards noble morals].
7. Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *al-Takashshuf ‘an muhimmāt al-taṣawwuf* [Unveiling of the important matters of *taṣawwuf*].
8. Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Tarbiyyat al-sālik* [Training of the wayfarer].
9. Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *al-Tasharruf bi ahādīth al-taṣawwuf* [Honour through knowing the *ḥādīths* of *taṣawwuf*].
10. Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Malḥūzāt-e-Ḥakīm-ul-ummat* [Utterances of the Sage of the nation].
11. Muḥammad Dīn, *Sharī‘at-o-ṭarīqat* [*Sharī‘ah* and *taṣawwuf*].

12. ‘Abd al-Ḥayy ‘Ārifī, *Başā’ir Ḥakīm-ul-ummat* [Insights of the Sage of the Nation].
13. ‘Abd al-Ḥayy ‘Ārifī, *Ma’āsir Ḥakīm-ul-ummat* [Feats of the Sage of the Nation].
14. Muḥammad Zakariyyā Kāndhlavī, *Āp bītī* [Autobiography].
15. Muḥammad Zakariyyā Kāndhlavī, *Sharī‘at-o-ṭarīqat kā talāzum* [The inseparability of *Sharī‘ah* and *taṣawwuf*].

In addition to these, there are numerous small treatises written by various people elucidating various points of Deobandī history and *taṣawwuf*. Most useful amongst these are the works of Ṣūfī Iqbāl. For the purpose of tracing the relationship between Deobandīs and Sirhindī, Walī Allāh and Sayyid Aḥmad, we have looked at works by and about them. Furthermore, we have engaged in some general comparison between the Deobandī approach and the approach of the classical masters of *taṣawwuf* such as al-Junayd, al-Hujwīrī, al-Ghazālī, etc. We cannot engage in an in-depth comparison. That should be the focus of a separate study.

The practices of the Sufis have undergone changes throughout history and also vary from place to place. The Deobandī practices appear, at first glance, to be quite different from what is commonly known about the Sufis. That is why, from the beginning, they have been accused by their Sufī opponents as being Wahhābīs disguising as Sufis. Interestingly, the Ahl-e-Hadīs accuse them of outwardly claiming to be following the Qur’an and *Sunnah* while harbouring secret innovative or even pantheistic ideas. The reality is that Deobandīs face a difficult task. They want to uphold the truths of *taṣawwuf*, yet they also seek to battle the innovations rampant in Muslim society whose bases are claimed to be Sufistic.

As will become clear in the following chapters, the *akābir* of Deoband were heavily influenced by Sirhindī and Walī Allāh. Muḥammad Qāsim and Rashīd Aḥmad had both studied in Delhi with scholars who either belonged to Walī Allāh’s family or were trained by them. In *taṣawwuf*, they had done *bay‘ah* with Imdād Allāh who was Chishtī Ṣābirī. Thus, they combined in them the scholarly heritage of Walī Allāh’s family (which also happened to be mainly Naqshbandī Mujaddidī)<sup>36</sup> and the Sufi heritage of the Chishtī Ṣābirī branch. It was this combination which manifested itself in the particular positions that Rashīd Aḥmad and other Deobandīs took regarding the various popular forms of *taṣawwuf* prevalent in North India of their time.

The Deobandī approach to *taṣawwuf* is characterized by their strong emphasis on *tawḥīd* and *Sunnah*. Moreover, they were keen to avoid those traditional practices, which invited criticism from ‘*ulamā’ al-zāhir*’ (externalist scholars) and were hard to harmonize with the outward dictates of *Sharī‘ah*. Moreover, they focused on the *maqāṣid* (ends) without a rigid beholding to particular *wasā’il* (means). Therefore, we find them doing away with a number of traditional Sufi practices which they felt had become stagnated and were serving as a *ḥijāb* (barrier) for the *sālik* (traveler on the spiritual path), rather than as an aid. The other Chishtīs of today would find only a few of the traditional Chishtī practices amongst them. The most notable example is *sama‘* (audition, with or without music) which is considered a standard Chishtī practice. Deobandīs, on the other hand, never engaged in it and oppose it vehemently. Most other practices have been replaced with practices that are more in line with the

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<sup>36</sup> Mujaddidī refers to that branch of the Naqshbandiyyah which was started by Aḥmad Sirhindī. His title was “Mujaddid Alf-e-Sānī.” It should be noted that in popular understanding, the Naqshbandī *ṭarīqah* is considered most conforming to the *zāhir* (external aspect) of the *sharī‘ah*.

*zāhir* of the *Sharīʿah*. A typical example is that of congregational *dhikr* which has been replaced with individual *dhikr*.

## **IMPLICATIONS OF OUR RESEARCH**

There will be practical implications of our research for different groups located in various parts of the world. This is set out in more detail below.

### **1. Deobandīs**

As outlined above, Deobandī *jamāʿat* has increased in numbers and has diversified into many distinct groups. With this diversification and increase in numbers, a certain degree of ambiguity has crept in amongst the Deobandīs regarding their Sufi heritage. The age-old suspicion that *taṣawwuf* is an innovation and un-Islamic has begun to take hold amongst Deobandīs as well. More and more, Deobandīs are becoming literalists, which is extremely unlike their forebears. The immediate effect of our study will be upon the English-speaking Deobandīs in the Indo-Pak sub-continent, as well as those who are part of the South Asian Muslim Diaspora spread across all continents but especially in UK, North America and South Africa. Deobandīs constitute the single largest body of Islamic scholars in South Asia, as well as in the South Asian Muslim Diaspora. They have the largest network of *madrasahs* in the West, and the number of students enrolled in these *madrasahs* is the thousands. This new generation of Deobandī *madrasah* graduates are prone to skepticism about their Deobandī heritage and their place within the broader Sunni community. We hope that our research will help clear up the confusion, and will contribute to a more rational discourse.

## **2. Muslims in General and Their Sectarian Differences**

The position of *taṣawwuf* within the Sunni tradition and its proper bounds has been debated continuously since the time this phenomenon became well-known as a distinct discipline. The debates between the ‘*ulamā*’ of the outward sciences and the inward sciences still continue. Since the time of Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj, Sufis have been suspect. A certain degree of reconciliation was achieved during the time of al-Ghazālī. However, the debate continued. This became a constant feature because amongst all the strands of Islamic practice, Sufis appeared to be the most vulnerable to fall into innovations. Therefore, each succeeding generation of scholars battled the un-Islamic tendencies amongst the Sufis.

The matter was further compounded by the forceful enunciation of “*waḥdat al-wujūd*” (unity of being) by ibn ‘Arabī (d. 1240). He was vehemently opposed by ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328) and their respective followers are still at daggers drawn. However, during this debate between two extremes there emerged the middle path enunciated by Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī. Deobandīs are a recent manifestation of his thought. Just as in the past, this thought and approach had the potential to bridge the divide and bring the two extremes closer. Similarly, we feel that today a proper scholarly examination of Deobandī thought can help to bridge the divide between the followers of Shaykhs ibn ‘Arabī and ibn Taymiyyah.

## **3. Scholars and Researchers**

Our study will help scholars in various fields: South Asian studies, *taṣawwuf*, Islamic reform and revival. A hitherto less-studied area will open up to them. Historically, Deobandīs have not been given the attention by research scholars that they deserve. And even when attention is given to them, more often than not it has to do with

political and counter-terrorism issues. Deobandīs are a distinct group within Ahl-Sunnah wa a-Jamā'ah whose contributions to their native societies of the Indo-Pak sub-continent, as well as to the South Asian Muslim Diaspora communities are immense. In many ways, Deobandīs have been the main instrument of preserving *dīn* in large parts of these communities. How do they understand Islam and how do they seek to preserve and spread it should be of value to all unbiased scholars and researchers. Deobandīs represent a strong force for positive change and their energies should be harnessed for this purpose. A proper study of Deobandī elders' attitudes towards *taṣawwuf* will help to improve scholars' analyses of their activities in other fields as well.

#### **TRANSLATION, TRANSLITERATION AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

We have extensively quoted Qur'anic verses and *ḥadīths* in this study. For these, most of the time, we have done the translations ourselves. At times, we have also made use of the existing English translations of Qur'an. The transliteration of Arabic terms and phrases follows the IIUM Thesis guide.

As for Urdu, we have had to play a delicate balancing act. There are Arabic loan words in Urdu that are still used in their original meanings. For such words, we have used the Arabic transliteration sequence. Thus, *dhikr* is used instead of *zīkr*. For other words that belong to Urdu only or are Arabic loan words with different meanings, we have followed Urdu pronunciation. The same applies to names of persons, places, books, etc. Thus, Zulfiqār (a common Indo-Pakistani name) is used instead of Dhū al-Fiqār; Fazl-e-Rasūl instead of Faḍl-e-Rasūl; Fazl-ur-Raḥmān instead

of Faḍl al-Raḥmān, Alf-e-Sānī instead of Alf-e-Thānī.<sup>37</sup> The same applies to publishers whose names might have been Arabic in origin but are now used the Urdu way. Thus, Dār-ul-Ishā‘at (a publisher) is used instead of Dār al-Ishā‘at; and Maktaba Rashīdia is used instead of Maktabah Rashīdiyyah.

Mentioning names was a difficult task. Many names are followed by last names which are in the form of a *nisbah* (attribution) to a certain place such as Gangohī, Nānautvī, Thānvī, etc. Moreover, honourific titles are abundantly used in Deobandī literature. Writing all of these titles, along with the prayers that follow them would have broken the flow of the narrative. We have used the following methodology for mentioning names.

When a name first appears, we have mentioned it with its honourific title and *nisbah* and without the prayers. In the first three chapters, there are a lot of new names with overlapping last names and at times overlapping first names as well. Here, we have used the first two names after first mentioning the full name. Thus, Mawlānā Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī appears once and later Rashīd Aḥmad is used. Similarly, Mawlānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī appears once and later Ashraf ‘Alī is used. This is the case in the first three chapters. In the fourth and fifth chapters, the task was easier because there are few personalities mentioned. Using the first two names would have hindered the flow. Therefore, we mention their full name minus the honorific title once and then use their last names only except when there is overlapping. Thus, Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī is mentioned once and then Gangohī is used, and Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī is mentioned once and then Thānvī is used. Muḥammad

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<sup>37</sup> The letters “th” are used to represent a different sound in Urdu than in Arabic. In Urdu, they denote a single aspirated sound which is particular to South Asian languages. A typical example is Thānvī, which starts with an aspirated sound that is not found in Arabic. These same letters when used for Arabic, refer to a single letter which in Urdu pronunciation is reduced to ‘s’. Thus, contrast *sābit* and *thābit*. The former is Urdu pronunciation of the latter which is Arabic.



Zakariyyā Kāndhlavi's and Muḥammad Ilyās Kāndhlavi's full names are mentioned once. Subsequently, Muḥammad Zakariyyā and Muḥammad Ilyās are used, respectively because of the overlapping in the last name.

For frequently occurring Arabic and Urdu words, we have not used their actual plurals. Rather, we have made their plurals as if they were English words. However, they are still italicized to reflect their non-English origin. Thus, *fatwās* is used as the plural of *fatwā* and not *fatāwā*, and *ḥadīths* is used as the plural of *ḥadīth* and not *aḥādīth*.

We have used variety of sources for our research. Some of these are in English but most of them are in Arabic or Urdu. In order to identify the language of these sources, we have used abbreviations when they first appear in the footnotes. The abbreviations are [Urd] for Urdu, and [Arb] for Arabic. English works have not been identified because their language was obvious.

## CHAPTER TWO

### TAJDĪD AND DEOBANDĪS' FORERUNNERS:

#### AḤMAD SIRHINDĪ, SHĀH WALĪ ALLĀH AND SAYYID AḤMAD

#### IṢLĀḤ (REFORM) AND TAJDĪD (RENEWAL) IN THE SUNNI TRADITION

Amongst the innumerable bounties of Allah upon humanity is that He has not left it without guidance. Throughout history, He has sent prophets to the world at periodic intervals to guide humanity to the one true God. Muḥammad (peace be upon him) was the last in this long line of prophets. Allah says in the Qur'an:

مَا كَانَ مُحَمَّدٌ أَبَا أَحَدٍ مِّن رِّجَالِكُمْ وَلَكِن رَّسُولَ اللَّهِ وَخَاتَمَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمًا  
(الأحزاب: 40)

Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Messenger of Allah and the last of the prophets; and Allah is cognizant of all things. (Al-Aḥzāb: 40).

Since the Muḥammadan message was to be the last one and there was to be no messenger after him, Allah gave the responsibility of guiding this *ummah* after his death to its scholars. In a *ḥadīth*, it is mentioned that “scholars are heirs to the prophets.”<sup>1</sup> While scholars of the *ummah* can and have helped guide the *ummah* on a continuous basis, decay is an in-built characteristic of any human society. After some time, this decay reaches a level where it needs a major boost of spiritual energy. At such moments, a *mujaddid* (renewer) appears on the scene and provides that needed boost. In other words, the *mujaddid* is supposed to perform the duty of the Prophet (pbuh) after his death in a way, which is much more pronounced than the activities of other scholars.

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<sup>1</sup> Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad ibn 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Kamāl Yūsuf al-Ḥūt, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1987), 5:47. [Arb]

The Prophet (pbuh) has mentioned this in a *hadīth*:

عَنْ أَبِي عَلْقَمَةَ عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ فِيمَا أَعْلَمَ مِنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: "إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَبْعَثُ لِهَذِهِ الْأُمَّةِ عَلَى رَأْسِ كُلِّ مِائَةٍ مَنْ يُجَدِّدُ لَهَا دِينَهَا." رواه أبو داود.<sup>2</sup>

Abū ‘Alqamah reports from Abū Hurayrah according to what I [Abū ‘Alqamah] know is from the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace): “Every hundred years, Allah will send for this nation someone who will renew for it, its religion.” Reported by Abū Dāwūd.

This *ḥadīth* serves as the basis for the Sunni concept of *tajdīd* (renewal). Its popular understanding (amongst scholars and general Muslims) has been that the *mujaddid* is a single individual who appears at the end or beginning of a century. Most *ḥadīth* commentators have taken the view that he should be a scholar who is alive at the end of a century and is noted for his *mujaddid*-like qualities.<sup>3</sup> Other *ḥadīth* commentators have stated that the word (مَنْ) in this *ḥadīth* can refer to an individual, as well as a group. These include ‘Alī al-Qārī in his *Mirqāt al-mafātīḥ* [Ascent of keys].<sup>4</sup> These scholars have not limited the idea of *mujaddid* to just an expert in *fiqh*. Rather, they declare that kings, judges, reciters, *muḥaddiths* (*ḥadīth* experts), ascetics, Sufis, etc. can be a part of this group as well.

Manzūr Nu‘mānī has gone further and said that the word (رَأْس) is an accidental condition.<sup>5</sup> This means that the *mujaddid* may be one person or more and he (they) may appear at the beginning or the middle or the end of the century. The reasoning

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<sup>2</sup> Abū Dawūd Sulaymān ibn al-Ash‘ath al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥy al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, n.d.), 4:109. [Arb]. This *ḥadīth* has also been reported by other *ḥadīth* masters such as al-Ḥākim in his *al-Mustadrak*, and by al-Ṭabarānī in his *al-Mu‘jam al-awsaṭ*, and by al-Bayḥiqī in his *Ma‘rifat al-sunan wa al-āthār* through various chains, which all converge on Abū Hurayrah (Allah be pleased with him). See Muḥammad Manzūr Nu‘mānī, “Ḥadīs-e-tajdīd kī sharḥ aur mujaddidiyyat kī ḥaqīqat” in *Tazkira Mujaddid Alf-e-Sānī*, edited by Muḥammad Manzūr Nu‘mānī, (Lucknow: Al-Furqān Book Depot, 1992), 12. [Urd]

<sup>3</sup> See the discussions by *ḥadīth* commentators regarding this in the various commentaries: Shams al-Ḥaqq ‘Azīm Ābādī, *‘Awn al-Ma‘būd bi sharḥ Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, (Madinah: al-Maktabah al-Salafiyyah), 1968, 11:388-400. [Arb]. And Khalīl Aḥmad Sahāranpūrī, *Badhl al-majhūd fi ḥall Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, n.d.), 17:201-203. [Arb]

<sup>4</sup> ‘Alī ibn Sulṭān al-Qārī, *Mirqāt al-mafātīḥ sharḥ Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ*, (Multan: Maktaba Ḥaqqānīa, n.d.), 2:507. [Arb]

<sup>5</sup> Nu‘mānī, 17-19.

put forth by him is that the currently used Islamic calendar which is based upon the migration (*hijrah*) of the Prophet (pbuh) was started by ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (Allah be pleased with him) while the *ḥadīth* was uttered by the Prophet (pbuh) before him. The *hijrī* calendar did not exist in his time.

In another *ḥadīth*, it is mentioned:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ عَنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ : يَحْمَلُ هَذَا الْعِلْمَ مِنْ كُلِّ خَلْفٍ عَدُوُّهُ  
يَنْقُونَ عَنْهُ تَحْرِيفَ الْعَالِينَ وَانْتِحَالَ الْمُطِئِينَ وَتَأْوِيلَ الْجَاهِلِينَ. رَوَاهُ الطَّبْرَانِيُّ.<sup>6</sup>

Narrated from Abu Hurayrah from the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) who said: “From every succeeding generation, its upright folk shall carry this knowledge in turn. They shall repeal from it the distortions of the extremists (*taḥrīf al-ghālīn*), the misinterpretations of the ignorant (*ta’wīl al-jāhilīn*), and the pretenses of the liars (*intiḥāl al-mubṭilīn*.” Reputed by al-Ṭabarānī.

Taken together, these two *ḥadīths* and the verses before them clearly indicate that there will always be a group of scholars who will uphold the truth, and who will keep the *dīn* pure. In other words, their duty will be continuous reform (*iṣlāḥ*). Moreover, a prominent personality with extra-ordinary spiritual qualities, who will be innately disposed to renewal, will periodically appear. His task will be reform (*iṣlāḥ*) and renewal (*tajdīd*).

Scholars have ventured to name the renewers of each century. As discussed above, this may not be necessary. The main criterion is the renewal aspect of his or their work. In any case, most scholars agree that the first *mujaddid* in the *ummah* was the Umayyad caliph, ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. Whether we accept the popular understanding of the *ḥadīth* of *tajdīd* (renewal) or Nu‘mānī’s contention, Aḥmad Sirhindī, Shāh Walī Allāh, and Sayyid Aḥmad fit the profile of a *mujaddid*. Deobandīs make the same claim for themselves. It is beyond the scope of this research to verify their claim. For our discussion, it may suffice that their activities do

<sup>6</sup> Narrated by al-Ṭabarānī in *Musnad al-Shāmiyyīn*, cited in Gibrīl F. Ḥaddād, *Sunna Notes*, (UK: al-Aqsa Publications, 2005), 1:60.

fall within the overall framework of *tajdīd* even if individuals amongst them might not be called *mujaddids*.

Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadvī has mentioned in his account of Shāh Walī Allāh that the first task of a *mujaddid* is “to prepare the ground for implanting the seed of faith and to root out all traces of polytheism and infidelity (whether these are vestiges of bygone cultures or products of local influences).”<sup>7</sup> Thus, things that might have been permissible in themselves but are not proven from the Qur’an or the *Sunnah* and have an admixture of un-Islamic elements; the *mujaddid* does away with them too. This is embodied in Walī Allāh’s famous statement “*fakk kull al-nizām*” (away with all systems).

According to Walī Allāh, Islam has two aspects, the external and the internal. Just as *mujaddids* are sent after every hundred years to revive and renew the external aspect of the *dīn*; similarly, *mujaddids* are sent after regular intervals to revive the internal aspect of the *dīn*. This explains the multiplicity of Sufi *ṭarīqahs* and their sub-branches because these perform the role of the *mujaddid* as well.<sup>8</sup>

Looking at Sirhindī, Walī Allāh and Sayyid Aḥmad from this perspective, one can say that they considered themselves to be *mujaddids* of the external aspect of the *dīn* as well as the internal one. Thus, their reform efforts were not confined to *Sharī‘ah* (understood as Islam’s external dimension) but also included *taṣawwuf*. We shall discuss these in greater detail below.

Amongst the main Sufi *ṭarīqahs* of India, the Naqshbandīs are known for their more organized approach towards spirituality.<sup>9</sup> The Naqshbandī *ṭarīqah* was

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<sup>7</sup> Sayyid Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadvī, *Saviours of Islamic spirit*, translated from Urdu by S. Mohiuddin Ahmad, (Lucknow: Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, 1993), 4:94.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:45.

<sup>9</sup> See Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s comparison of the various Sufi orders in Nasīm Aḥmad Amrohī, *Tazkira Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Muḥaddith Dehlavī*, (Lucknow: Al-Furqān Book Depot, 1992), 60. [Urd]

introduced in India by Khawājah Bāqī Billāh (d. 1603) who came to Delhi from Kabul and established the first Naqshbandī *khānqāh* there. Although he died at the age of 40, he left a lasting impression upon the people there. His main disciple and successor (*khalīfah*) was Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1624) who came to be known as “Mujaddid Alf-e-Sānī” (Renewer of the second millenium). He expanded the order so successfully that according to the Mughal emperor Jahāngīr (d. 1627), his disciples reached every town and city of India.<sup>10</sup>

### **SHAYKH AḤMAD SIRHINDĪ<sup>11</sup> (1564-1624)**

Aḥmad Sirhindī is popularly known as “Mujaddid Alf-e-Sānī” (Renewer of the second millennium). He is the second most important personality in the chain of Naqshbandī masters after Khawājah Naqshband (d. 1384) himself. His influence can be gauged from the fact that his Mujaddidī branch has come to dominate all other branches of the Naqshbandīs and the appellation Mujaddidī is almost always used with Naqshbandī.<sup>12</sup>

A descendant of the second caliph ‘Umar (Allah be pleased with him), he was born in Sirhind in eastern Punjab in 1564. His ancestors had migrated from Kabul to Sirhind. His father was ‘Abd al-Aḥad, a prominent scholar who had been authorized (to accept disciples) in both Chishtī and Qādirī *ṭarīqahs*. He was an important successor of Shaykh Rukn al-Dīn who was the son of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Quddūs Gangohī (himself a renewer of the Chishtī Ṣābiri *ṭarīqah*). He was Sirhindī’s first

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<sup>10</sup> *Encyclopedia of Islam (New edition)*, First Edition, “Naqshbandiyya.”

<sup>11</sup> The important primary sources for his biography are *Zubdat al-maqāmāt* and *Ḥaḍarāt al-Quds*; while important secondary sources are *Rūd-e-Kausar*, *‘Ulamā’-e-Hind kā shāndār māzī*, *Tazkira Mujaddid Alf-e-Sānī*, and *Tārīkh-e-da‘wat-o-‘azīmat*, vol. 4. Shaykh Muḥammad Ikrām of *Rūd-e-Kausar* considers the author of *Rawḍat al-qayyūmiyah* to be somewhat careless. See the discussion by Shaykh Muḥammad Ikrām regarding the authenticity or otherwise of his main biographical sources. The analysis is spread throughout his discussion of Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī. See Ikrām, *Rūd-e-Kausar*, 223-342.

<sup>12</sup> Arthur F. Buehler, “Charisma and exemplar: Naqshbandi spiritual authority in the Panjab, 1857-1947,” (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 1993), 47. Outside the sub-continent, the main appellation used is Khālidiyyah, which itself is a sub-branch of the Mujaddidiyyah.

shaykh, as well as the first teacher. Sirhindī received most of his education at the hands of his father and from other scholars of Sirhind. These included Kamāl al-Dīn Kashmīrī of Sialkot, Ya‘qūb Ṣarfī Kashmīrī and Qāḍī Bahlūl Badakhshānī from whom he took most of his *ḥadīth*.

### **Spiritual Training**

He started out by joining the Chishtī *ṭarīqah* at the hands of his father and completed *sulūk* (spiritual journey) according to it. He was authorized (to take disciples) by his father. Then he started *sulūk* according to the Qādirī *ṭarīqah* with him and completed it. However, he received authorization in it from Shāh Sikandar. He also acquired the Kubrawī *ṭarīqah* from his teacher Ya‘qūb Ṣarfī.

Later, after his father’s death, he was initiated into the Naqshbandī *ṭarīqah* at the hands of Bāqī Billāh in Delhi. Bāqī Billāh was a native of Kabul and had been trained in the Naqshbandī way at the hands of Khawājagī Amkanakī. He had come to India based on a dream, which suggested that he was destined to train someone who would light up the whole world (meaning he would be a major source of guidance).<sup>13</sup> This was proven true. Sirhindī became the most famous of Bāqī Billāh’s disciples. The latter was all praise for him and compared himself to him as stars to the sun.<sup>14</sup> The Naqshbandī *ṭarīqah* that Sirhindī acquired from him eventually dominated his other spiritual affiliations, which he had acquired earlier.

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<sup>13</sup> ‘Abd al-Shukūr Lakhnawī, “Imām Rabbānī,” in *Tazkira Mujaddid Alf-e-Sānī*, ed. Manzūr Nu‘mānī (Lucknow: Al-Furqān Book Depot, 1992), 233-234. [Urd]

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

## **The Political Dimension**

Organized polities are an essential component of human civilization. They are an expression of the collective will of a people, whether natural or forced. Thus, they affect every aspect of human existence. This was true of medieval monarchies as it is of modern nation-states; the difference being that in the case of the former, the person of the King assumed immense importance. Sirhindī's life spans the reigns of two Mughal Emperors, Akbar (reigned 1556-1605) and Jahāngīr (reigned 1605-1627). Like other Naqshbandī masters before him,<sup>15</sup> he did not believe in staying away from the state and the ruler. The case of Mughal India was even more critical where Muslims were a numerical minority and relied upon government support to maintain their worldly and religious position of superiority. Sirhindī perceived that Akbar's experiments with religion would weaken Islam and Muslims in this country.<sup>16</sup> He felt that these would gradually lead to a fusion of Islam and Hinduism thereby diluting Islam. Therefore, these had to be dealt with immediately. It is this focus of his which has caused many Indian commentators to declare him to be the *mujaddid* for all aspects of Islam.<sup>17</sup> Thus, his being heir of the Prophet (pbuh) is considered complete while that of other *mujaddids* is partial because they all dealt with only some aspects of Islam.

## **Sirhindī and *Taşawwuf***

Naqshbandīs have always been known for their strict adherence to *Sharī'ah*. Amongst them, Sirhindī appears as the most prominent figure that is credited with redefining *taşawwuf*'s role vis-à-vis *Sharī'ah*. He firmly established the centrality of *Sunnah* to

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<sup>15</sup> Buehler, 38.

<sup>16</sup> For an over-view of Sirhindī's perspective, see the primary and secondary sources mentioned above. They all reproduce Sirhindī's portrayal of Akbar's India.

<sup>17</sup> Lakhnavī, 282.



*taṣawwuf*. This was especially true in the Indian milieu of his time. He broke away from the earlier dominant tradition in Indian *taṣawwuf* by opposing *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of existence/being or existential monism) and put forth his own theory of *waḥdat al-shuhūd* (experiential unity or unity of witnessing). As Ibn ‘Arabī’s towering figure had sustained *waḥdat al-wujūd*, Sirhindī sharply criticized his views. Later, however, Shāh Walī Allāh attempted to harmonize the two theories.

His prominent contemporary was Shaykh ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Muḥaddith Dehlavī who can be rightly regarded as the *mujaddid* of his time with respect to the science of *ḥadīth*. He was primarily a disciple of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Muttaqī and later, on his return to India, became a disciple of Bāqī Billāh. He was very close to Sirhindī and the two held each other in high esteem. However, later they developed some differences regarding Sirhindī’s comments about the Prophet (pbuh) in one of his letters and ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq wrote a treatise in his refutation.

Generally, Naqshbandī Mujaddidī sources have mentioned that their mutual differences were resolved or that ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq retracted his objections. Some say he even sought to benefit spiritually from Sirhindī.<sup>18</sup> However, others claim that the differences remained till their respective deaths.<sup>19</sup> Their disagreement can be boiled down to a difference of emphasis. Sirhindī’s focus was *tawḥīd* and ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s focus was the person of the Prophet (pbuh). Interestingly, these differences, which were marked with mutual respect and scholarly etiquette, were to resurface in the differences between the elders of Deoband and Aḥmad Razā Khān Barelvī. However, in the case of the latter, the differences went beyond scholarly debate and ended up in

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<sup>18</sup> See the letters of Shāh Ghulām ‘Alī cited in *Ibid.*, 258-260.

<sup>19</sup> See the extensive debate regarding these differences and their eventual retraction or not in *Ikrām, Rūd-e-Kausar*, 361-379.

Razā Khān's declaring most of the Deobandī elders as either *fāsiq* (evil-doer) or *kāfir* (disbeliever).<sup>20</sup>

### **Scholarly Contributions**

The main vehicle for the spread of Sirhindī's thought was his letters. These were written to different people, mostly his disciples that included notable officials of the state, as well as scholars. Originally written in Persian, they were later compiled as *Maktūbāt-e-Imām Rabbānī Mujaddid Alf-e-Sānī* [Letters of the Renewer of the second millennium, Imām Rabbānī] and translated into various languages.<sup>21</sup> There are three *daftars* (collections) of these letters. The first one is called "Dār-ul-Ma'rifat." It has 313 letters. The second is called "Nūr al-Khalā'iq." It has 99 letters. The third one is called "Ma'rifat al-Ḥaqā'iq." It has 124 letters.

These are a prescribed course of reading for the followers of the Naqshbandī-Mujaddidī *ṭarīqah*. Most Deobandī shaykhs who may have Chishtī as their primary *ṭarīqah* also show keen interest in these letters. These are read out in their Sufi gatherings.

### **Sirhindī's Identification of his role**

While others have written about his being a *mujaddid* including his biographers, he was also conscious of it himself. He identified his own purpose of existence in a letter to his son Khawājah Muḥammad Ma'sūm. This appears as letter number 6, in Daftar 2.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See the footnote by the translator of *Anfās al- 'arīfīn* in Walī Allāh, *Anfās al- 'arīfīn*, 398.

<sup>21</sup> The Urdu translation is published in two thick volumes. See Aḥmad Sirhindī, *Maktūbāt-e-Imām Rabbānī*, translated from Persian into Urdu by 'Ālim al-Dīn Naqshbandī, (Lahore: Idāra-e-Islāmiāt, n.d.).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:41.

In it, he asserts that he is the true heir of the prophets who focuses on the basic task of their prophethood. Thus, his ambit goes well beyond regular master-disciple relationships. He makes this clearer in another letter where he also declares himself to be the renewer of the second millennium. He wrote in letter 4, Daftar 2:

My spiritual insights (*ma'ārif*) are beyond the reach of the people of *wilāyat*. Rather, they [*ma'ārif*] are directly derived from the lamp of prophethood.... *Mujaddid* is the one that whoever receives spiritual grace (*fayḍ*) in the *ummah* during his time, he has to receive it through him whether that [other] person is [one] of the *aqṭāb*, *awṭād*, *abdāl* or *nujabā*.<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, his being a *mujaddid*; in fact, even his being orthodox, was contested during his time. The most prominent amongst these critics was Sayyid Barzinjī Madanī who wrote a treatise against him. However, pretty soon all of this opposition waned. Later, the great Farangi Mahalli<sup>24</sup> scholar 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Lakhnawī wrote a refutation of Barzinjī's treatise titled *al-Kalām al-munjī* [The delivering speech].<sup>25</sup>

### ***Sunnah and Bid'ah***

Islamic scholars have maintained that the role of the *mujaddid* is to establish *Sunnah* and to eliminate *bid'ah*.<sup>26</sup> That is why the definition of these two terms takes on more significance. Moreover, the words *Sunnah* and *ḥadīth* are often used interchangeably which at times leads to some confusion. We start by looking at the definitions of

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 2:39.

<sup>24</sup> Farangi Mahall (palace of the European) was the name of a building in Lucknow, which had been owned by Europeans, hence the name. Later, it was confiscated by the Mughal Emperor Awrangzeb who gave it to Mullā Niẓām al-Dīn Sihālvī's family. This was an Anṣārī family well noted for its scholarship. It continued to produce prominent scholars for more than two centuries. For an in-depth account of Farangi Mahall and its line of scholars see Francis Robinson, *The ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic culture in South Asia*, (London: Hurst & Co., 2001).

<sup>25</sup> Lakhnavī, 283.

<sup>26</sup> See the discussion of a *mujaddid* and his role in Nu'māni, "Ḥadīth-e-tajdid...", 13-24. This theme is also maintained in all the classical commentaries on the *ḥadīth* of *mujaddid*. Also see 'Azīm Ābādī, 11:388-400; and Sahāranpūrī, 17:201-203.

*Sunnah* and *ḥadīth*. For this purpose, we quote N. H. M. Keller at length on the subject. He writes:

The word *sunna* has three separate meanings that are often mixed up by Muslims when the term arises in discussions.

The first sense of *sunna* is in the context of *sharīʿa* rulings, in which *sunna* is synonymous with the *mandūb* or “recommended,” meaning something that one deserves a reward in the next life for doing—such as using the *miswāk* to clean one’s teeth before prayer—but is not punished for not doing. It can be contrasted in this context with the “*wājib*” or obligatory, meaning something that one is rewarded in the next life for doing—such as performing the prescribed prayers—and deserves punishment in the next life for not doing. The *sunna* in this sense is at the second level of things Allah has asked of us, after the *wājib* or obligatory.

A second sense of *sunna* is in the context of identifying textual sources, as when the *Kitāb*, meaning the Qur’an, is contrasted with the *sunna*, meaning the *ḥadīth*. In this sense, *sunna* is strictly synonymous with *ḥadīth*, and is used to distinguish one’s evidence from that of the Qur’an. One should note that this is quite a different sense from the above-mentioned meaning of the word *sunna*, though sometimes people confuse the two, believing that the Qur’an determines the obligatory, while the *ḥadīth* determines what is merely *sunna* or recommended—but in fact, rulings of both types are found in the Qur’an, just as they are in the *ḥadīth*.

A third sense of *sunna* is the way of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), embodied in the things he said, did, and in his noble states of heart; together with the things he approved of in others (whether by explicit confirmation, or by allowing them to be done in his presence without condemning them), and the things that he intended to do but did not get the chance, such as fasting on the ninth of Muḥarram (*Tāsua*). Here, *sunna* simply means the Prophet’s way (Allah bless him and give him peace), and is not to be confused with either of the two senses mentioned above. In contrast to the first sense, his *sunna* or way (Allah bless him and give him peace) includes not just the recommended, but rather the whole *sharīʿa*, the entire spectrum of its rulings, whether obligatory (*wājib*), recommended (*sunna*), permissible (*mubāh*), or avoiding the offensive (*makrūh*) or unlawful (*ḥarām*).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> N.H.M. Keller, “What is the distinction between *Ḥadīth* and *Sunna*?,” Mas’ūd Aḥmad Khān’s Home Page, <<http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/nuh/hadith.htm>> (accessed 26 July, 2009).

The great Shāfi‘ī jurist ‘Izz al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Salām (d. 660 AH) has summarized the various types of innovations in a comprehensive manner.<sup>28</sup> He defines innovation as “doing that which was not known during the time of the Messenger of Allah.” He then goes on to divide innovations into five types: obligatory, prohibited, desirable, undesirable, and permissible. The way to identify these is that an innovation should be compared with the maxims of *Shari‘ah*. If it falls under the category of the maxims of obligation, then it is obligatory; and if falls under the category of the maxims of prohibition, then it is prohibited; and so on for desirable, undesirable, and permissible innovations. He then lists examples of each.<sup>29</sup> At the end of his discussion, he also acknowledges that:

Sometimes, some of these things are differed upon. Thus, some scholars declare some of these to be undesirable innovations. Others consider them to be *Sunnahs* practiced during and after the era of the Prophet....And Allah knows best.<sup>30</sup>

Generally, it is thought that Sirhindī even denied the existence of *bid‘ah ḥasanah* (praiseworthy innovation). However, this is not true. On the contrary, in his letter 54 of Daftar 2, he has elaborated the seven levels of following the *Sunnah*. Here, at the fourth level he states there are two ways to achieve contentment of the soul and to carry out the reality of good deeds. “One is of the path of *wilāyat*; and the other is that of following the *Sunnah* to such an extent that one avoids *bid‘ah ḥasanah*

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<sup>28</sup> ‘Izz al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Salām, *al-Qawā‘id al-kubrā*, eds. Nazīh Kamāl Ḥammād and ‘Uthmān Jumu‘ah Ḍamīriyyah, (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 2000), 2:337-339. [Arb]. Keller quotes this same text at length in his discussion of the subject in his *Reliance of the traveller*. See Nūḥ Ḥā Mīm Keller, *Reliance of the traveller*, (Beltsville: Amana Publications, 2008), 916-917.

<sup>29</sup> Below, we give some of the examples that ‘Izz al-Dīn gave in his book in the section on innovations. Examples of obligatory innovations include learning Arabic grammar through which the speech of Allah and His Messenger (pbuh) is understood. This is obligatory because preservation of *shari‘ah* is obligatory. Examples of prohibited innovations include the heretical schools of creed such as those of the Qadariyyah and the Jabriyyah. Examples of desirable innovations include building of schools and bridges; and all good things, which were unknown in the first era. Examples of undesirable innovations include adorning mosques and embellishing copies of the Qur’an. Examples of permissible innovations include shaking hands after *fajr* and *‘aṣr* prayers. See *Ibid.*, 337-339.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 339.

(praiseworthy innovation) as much as *bid'ah sayyi'ah* (evil innovation).” He is tactitly admitting the existence of *bid'ah hasanah* but also states his preference to even leave it. He goes on to assert that “this is specific to *al-‘ulamā al-rāsikhūn* (well-grounded scholars).”<sup>31</sup>

An extension of the debate about *Sunnah* and *bid'ah* is the conflict between two paths of *taṣawwuf*: the path of friendship (*tarīq al-wilāyah*) and the path of prophethood (*tarīq al-nubuwwah*). Although, Sirhindī, Walī Allāh, Sayyid Aḥmad and the Deobandī elders were trained in traditional *taṣawwuf*, which gives precedence to the path of friendship; yet their practice indicated a desire to give precedence to the path of prophethood. The result is a combination of the two. Here, they partially overlap with the Salafis who insist on the sole validity of the path of prophethood and completely deny the validity of the path of friendship.

## Legacy

Sirhindī’s understanding of *Sunnah*, *Shari‘ah*, and *taṣawwuf* gradually affected the political elite and also changed the direction of the Mughal empire beginning with Jahāngīr and culminating in Awrangzeb ‘Ālamgīr (d. 1707). Sirhindī’s successors advised Mughal rulers and officials and were responsible for far-reaching changes in the Mughal polity. His legacy did not end there; rather, it continues to influence South Asian Islam until today.

‘Abd al-Shukūr Lakhnavi writes:

In this millennium, Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī is the means for divine blessings. Perhaps, this is the reason why true followers of Ḥāji Imdād Allāh Muhājir Makkī have a special relationship with Imām Sirhindī and his family, and *mujaddidiyyat* [being a follower of Sirhindī] is dominant over all of them.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Sirhindī, 2:186-191.

<sup>32</sup> Lakhnavi, 250.

Initially, Jahāngīr was not well disposed towards Sirhindī. Those jealous of the latter caused the King to grow in his dislike towards him which eventually led to his incarceration. However, the King finally became enamoured with him. This took place after his release from prison when the King forced him to stay in the royal camp. This stay turned the tables. Jahāngīr developed a strong affinity towards him.

After Jahāngīr, his son Shāh Jahān became the emperor and was more religious than the former. After him, his son ‘Alāmgīr became emperor and was a well-trained religious scholar and Sufi. He asked Sirhindī’s son Muḥammad Ma‘śūm to send someone to the royal court for the Emperor’s spiritual training. He sent his son Sayf al-Dīn. The results were positive. ‘Alāmgīr successfully completed *sulūk* at his hands and received Naqshbandī *nisbah*.<sup>33</sup>

Sirhindī had a number of successors; most prominent amongst them were his son Muḥammad Ma‘śūm (d. 1668) and Ādam Binnorī (d. 1643-44). However, with regard to our objective, the next major personality who appears in the Naqshbandī-Mujaddidī line is Shāh Walī Allāh. It is to him that we now turn.

### **SHĀH WALĪ ALLĀH (1703-1762)**

Shāh Walī Allāh, the son of Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-‘Umarī (d. 1718) was descended from ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, the second caliph. On his mother’s side, he was descended from ‘Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib, the fourth caliph. His family had moved to India during the period of Delhi Sultanate. They lived in different places until his father and uncles settled down in Delhi.

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<sup>33</sup> See the correspondence that took place between ‘Alāmgīr and Khawājah Muḥammad Ma‘śūm regarding the former’s request for a spiritual teacher, as well as the letters sent by Sayf al-Dīn to his father regarding ‘Alāmgīr’s spiritual states, cited in *Ibid.*, 256-257.

## Education and Spiritual Training

He received almost all of his education at the hands of his father. His other prominent teachers included Muḥammad Fāḍil Sindhī and Muḥammad Afḍal Siālkoṭī. At the age of 15, he had completed the prevalent course of studies, in both traditional and rational sciences. It was at this time that he pledged allegiance (*bay'ah*) to his father in the Naqshbandī *ṭarīqah*. Two years later, when he was 17, his father fell ill and on his deathbed, authorized him to guide others on the spiritual path of the Naqshbandīs, Qādirīs, and Chishtīs. He also succeeded his father as the principal of Madrasah Raḥīmiyyah, which his father had founded in Delhi. Here, he taught for more than ten years until he decided to go for the annual pilgrimage to Makkah in 1731. He spent 14 months in Hijaz, performed the pilgrimage twice and benefitted from the scholars of the two blessed cities. While in Madinah, he furthered his *ḥadīth* studies with the foremost *ḥadīth* scholar of that city Abū Ṭāhir Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Kurdī al-Madanī. Walī Allāh has himself acknowledged the extreme debt that he felt towards this teacher of his. It is also important to note here that Abū Ṭāhir's father Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī al-Kurdī, who was an erudite scholar himself, was “salafī in matters of creed and used to defend Ibn Taymiyyah while also making allowance for the Sufis whose statements could be taken to mean incarnation and physical union with God.”<sup>34</sup>

## Walī Allāh as a *Mujaddid*

To our knowledge, all Sunni groups in India agree that Walī Allāh was the *mujaddid* of the twelfth century.<sup>35</sup> Walī Allāh considered Aḥmad Sirhindī to be his

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<sup>34</sup> Sayyid Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadvī, *Tārīkh-e-da‘wat-o-‘azīmat*, (Karachi: Majlis Nashriāt-e-Islām, n.d.), 5:111-112. [Urd]

<sup>35</sup> ‘Amīd al-Zamān Qāsmī Kīrānvī, “Shāh Walī Allāh kī tajdīdī khidmāt: chand pehlū,” in *Imām Shāh Walī Allāh aur un kay afkār aur nazariāt*, edited by ‘Atā al-Raḥmān Qāsmī, (Lahore: Maktaba Khalīl, 2005), 90. [Urd]



forerunner.<sup>36</sup> In *Tafhīmat-e-Ilāhia* [Divine explanations], he asserts that he is the *qayyim* (literally, custodian) of his time.<sup>37</sup> Here, he is using a term coined by Sirhindī.

His reform efforts spanned the whole spectrum of Islamic faith and practice beginning with matters of creed especially *tawhīd* (oneness of Allah), and extending to the Qur'an, *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, political theory, economic reform and his most original contribution namely, *‘ilm al-asrār* (knowledge of the secrets of *Shari‘ah*). His theory of political economy was revolutionary for his time and place and was even more surprising coming from a traditional scholar Sufi. For him, Islam was not confined to those things, which were traditionally considered the preserve of the scholars. Rather, it extended to all aspects of human existence.

Overall, there were two aspects to his *tajdīd* effort. One was the establishment of the outward *khilāfah* (the political dimension), the other was the establishment and renewal of internal *khilāfah* (the social, spiritual and intellectual dimension).<sup>38</sup> For the external dimension, he made efforts to stabilize the Muslim government. He did realize that this was a short-term solution to the political problem. The long-term solution lay in the second dimension, which would lead to the formation of a popular government firmly grounded in Islamic principles.

Walī Allāh combined in him different streams of thought and was especially disposed to harmonization (*taṭbīq*). This extended from the intellectual domain into the spiritual one. At the same time, his Naqshbandī heritage and Shāfi‘ī teachers had

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<sup>36</sup> He uses the term *irhās*, which means the one who clears the way. See ‘Ubayd Allāh Sindhī, *Shāh Walī Allāh kī siyāsī teḥrīk*, ed. Muḥammad Sarwar, (Lahore: Sindh Sāgar Academy, 2002), 71. [Urd]. This book was originally a treatise written by ‘Ubayd Allāh Sindhī. His student Nūr al-Haqq ‘Alvī added his detailed commentary to it. Later, Muḥammad Sarwar combined the two and simplified the language. Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain how much of the final version is Sindhī’s and ‘Alvī’s and how much of it is Sarwar’s interpretation. It is further complicated by the fact that the whole book seems to have been written with a strong underlying current of Indian nationalism.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 185-186.

<sup>38</sup> Kīrānvī, 93.

inspired in him a strong desire to engage in the kind of activities that a *mujaddid* engages in viz., insistence on *Sunnah* and opposition to *bid'ah*.

### ***Tawhīd (Oneness of God)***

The starting point for all of this was the re-invigoration of the concept of *tawhīd*. Like Sirhindī before him in India and Ibn Taymiyyah in Syria, Walī Allāh's time was characterized by an over-indulgence in *taṣawwuf* by the uneducated masses. This had led to wide-spread anti-*Shari'ah* or *Shari'ah*-indifferent tendencies which occasionally led to corruption in creed.<sup>39</sup> Walī Allāh sought to remedy this disease by reconnecting Muslims to Qur'an and *Sunnah*. He translated the Qur'an into Persian, which was the main language of the educated classes in his time. About fifty years later, his son Shāh 'Abd al-Qādir took a step further and translated the Qur'an into Urdu, which was gradually replacing Persian and was already the main language of the general Muslim population in Northern India. Later, his brother Shāh Rafī' al-Dīn did a literal translation of the Qur'an. These translations were supplemented by the Qur'anic lessons delivered by their brother Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, which continued for more than half a century.

### ***'Aqīdah (Creed)***

Although Walī Allāh was a Ḥanafī yet he had strong Salafī tendencies and this showed in matters of creed as well. He wrote *al-'Aqīdah al-ḥasanah* [Sound creed] in which he emphasized that one should follow the pious predecessors in matters of

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<sup>39</sup> In order to fully understand the environment in which Walī Allāh was operating, it will be helpful to take an overview of the prevalent creedal ideas and Sufi practices. See the relevant discussion in 'Alī Nadvī, *Tārīkh-e-da'wat-o-'azīmat*, 5:135-140; and Ikrām, *Rūd-e-Kausar*, 528-534 & 551-567; and Sayyid Muḥammad Miān, *'Ulamā Hind ka shāndār māzi*, (Karachi: Maktaba Rashīdia, n.d.), 2:1-6. [Urd]

creed and should not follow speculative theology of the later *mutakallimūn* (dialecticians).<sup>40</sup> At the same time, he did not engage in the kind of anthropomorphism, which extremist Ḥanbalīs had gotten into. Here, we see a link with the later Deobandī movement. Even though the Māturīdī *‘aqīdah* is taught in all Deobandī institutions but this is merely an academic exercise. Similarly, even though Ibn Taymiyyah is respected, however, in matters of *‘aqīdah*, the Deobandīs stick to the safe approach of the pious predecessors, which was free of anthropomorphism of the later Ḥanbalīs.

### ***Ḥadīth and Fiqh***

*Ḥadīth* is the main source of *Sunnah* (the Prophet’s way) after the Qur’an.<sup>41</sup> In fact, Qur’an tends to be quite general while *ḥadīths* go into specifics. Thus, *ḥadīth* plays a major role in defining the Prophet’s way. Any reform movement, which seeks to bring Muslims close to the Prophet’s way, will have to popularize and bring closer to the public the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet (pbuh) as a way to make him accessible to everyone.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, Walī Allāh focused on the propagation of *ḥadīth*. His work was continued, most notably, by his eldest son Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz who can rightly be considered the greatest *ḥadīth* scholar of India of his time. He was instrumental in propagating *ḥadīth* throughout the sub-continent.

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<sup>40</sup> ‘Alī Nadvī, *Tārīkh-e-da‘wat-o-‘Azīmat*, 5:164-165. The same treatise appears as Tafhīm 65 in Shāh Walī Allāh, *al-Tafhīmāt al-Ilāhiyyah*, translated from Persian into Arabic by Ghulām Muṣṭafā Qāsimī (Hyderabad: Shāh Walī Allāh Academy, 1970), 196-202.

<sup>41</sup> See the discussion above regarding the various meanings of *Sunnah*.

<sup>42</sup> Walī Allāh’s attitude towards *ḥadīth* is easily visible from his introduction to his magnum opus *Ḥujjat Allāh al-bāliḡah*, where he writes: “The pillar and the heart of the sciences of certainty, and the foundation of religious sciences is the science of *ḥadīth* in which whatever took place at the hands of the Master of Messengers—may Allah send his mercy upon him and his family and all of his companions—is mentioned viz., statements, actions, and approvals. Thus, these are the lights for a dark night and beacons of guidance.” See Shāh Walī Allāh, *Ḥujjat Allāh al-bāliḡah*, ed. Sa‘īd Aḥmad Pālanpūrī, (Karachi: Zamzam Publishers, 2006), 1:29. [Arb]

Walī Allāh strongly felt the need for a well-grounded understanding of *ḥadīth* and *fiqh* for the *mujaddid* to perform his function effectively. Muḥammad Sarwar has explained his trip to Hijaz for studying *ḥadīth* with the scholars of that area on this basis.<sup>43</sup> Walī Allāh did not stop at that but went further to bridge the apparent gap between *ḥadīth* and *fiqh* and attempted to harmonize them. This can be seen in his commentaries on *ḥadīth* works especially his two commentaries on Mālik’s Muwaṭṭā, *al-Musawwā* [The straightened] (in Arabic) and *al-Muṣaffā* [The purified] (in Persian). These efforts of his finally matured in the form of the “*Daura-e-Ḥadīs*” started by the Deobandīs, and the *ḥadīth* commentaries penned by them and Ahl-e-Ḥadīs scholars.

### **Walī Allāh and *Taṣawwuf***

Walī Allāh’s father Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥīm had benefited from a number of Sufī masters. In the beginning, he sought to pledge allegiance to Bāqī Billāh’s son Khawājah Khurd. However, the latter suggested that he should find one of the successors of Ādam Binnorī and pledge allegiance to him. Thus, he pledged allegiance to Ḥāfīz Sayyid ‘Abd Allāh who was a successor of Binnorī. Binnorī himself was one of the principal successors of Sirhindī. Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥīm received authorization to take disciples on the spiritual path from Sayyid ‘Abd Allāh.

Later, after the latter’s death, he pledged allegiance to another Naqshbandī shaykh Abū al-Qāsim of Akbarabad, who had a spiritual chain going back to Khawājah ‘Ubayd Allāh Aḥrār and Amīr Nūr al-‘Alā of Akbarabad, which by-passed Sirhindī and Baqī Billāh. Exposure and influence from these people had caused Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥīm to be swayed by *waḥdat al-wujūd* and he showed extreme deference to

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<sup>43</sup> See Muḥammad Sarwar’s introduction in Sindhī, 35. Also, see Ibid., 127-129.

ibn ‘Arabī. However, it did not lead to his abandoning the *Shari‘ah* or being lax in its observance.

Walī Allāh was the recipient of all of these influences. *Tawhīd wujūdī* (unity of being) and *shuhūdī* (unity of witnessing), as well as respect for ibn Taymiyyah combined with his own penetrating insight and erudition resulted in a scholar who sought to harmonize all the various manifestations of *Shari‘ah* and *taṣawwuf*.

### ***Tawhīd and Taṣawwuf***

As we discussed above, his main reform effort was directed at clearly demarcating the boundary between *tawhīd* and polytheism. Over time, the Sufi-inspired Muslim public had begun to lose sight of the difference between the two. People were falling in the same trap in which the polytheists of Makkah had fallen. Shaykhs were being given the respect and attention due to Allah. In his works such as *al-Fawz al-kabīr* [The great success] and *Hujjat Allāh al-bālighah* [Conclusive argument from God], Walī Allāh re-iterated the fact that the Qur’an declares the polytheists of Makkah to be disbelievers even though they believed in Allah and regarded their semi-gods as merely the chosen ones of Allah whom they had adopted saying “We do not serve them save that they may make us nearer to Allah” (Qur’an, *al-Zumar*: 3). Walī Allāh compared this idea of the polytheists of Makkah to the similar notions propounded by the pseudo-Sufis and the Sufi-inspired uneducated masses of his time.<sup>44</sup>

### ***The Spiritual Path***

Walī Allāh displays originality of thought and depth of insight when he acknowledges the existence of other means to achieve *nisbah* besides the prevalent Sufi methods. In

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<sup>44</sup> Shāh Walī Allāh, *al-Fawz al-kabīr*, translated from Persian into Arabic by Salmān al-Ḥusaynī al-Nadwī (Karachi: Majlis Nashriāt-e-Islām, 1999), 26.

the process, he also defines *nisbah*. It is relevant to quote him at length. In *al-Qawl al-jamīl fī bayān sawā' al-sabīl* [The beautiful word explaining the straight path], he writes:

The goal of all of the methods/ways of the Sufi masters is to acquire a certain condition in the rational soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqah*) of the seeker. It is this state, which the Sufis call *nisbah*. The reason for calling it *nisbah* is that it is a bond and a connection with Allah, the Exalted through *sakīnah* (tranquility) and light.<sup>45</sup>

Then he goes on to say:

It should not be assumed that this *nisbah* cannot be achieved except through these (Sufi) devotions. Rather, the truth is that this is just a method of achieving these and is not the only one. I am inclined to believe that the companions (Allah be pleased with them all) used to acquire *sakīnah* (or *nisbah*) through other means. Amongst these was persevering in prayers (*ṣalawāt*) and invocations (*tasbīhāt*) in isolation along with observing the requisites of humility (*khushū'*) and consciousness (*huḍūr*). Amongst these [methods] was maintaining constant purity (*tahārah*) and constant remembrance of the destroyer of enjoyments [death] and of the reward, which Allah has prepared for the obedient, and of the punishment, which Allah has prepared for the disobedient. This observance and remembrance led to their giving up and withdrawing from sensual enjoyments. Another of these [methods] is constant recitation of the Qur'an and pondering over it, and listening to the speech of the admonisher, and those *ḥadīths*, which melt the hearts. In short, they would persevere with these things for a long time thereby acquiring the firm habitus (*malakah rāsikhah*) and state of the soul. Then they would [strive to] protect it for the rest of their lives.<sup>46</sup>

### **His Main Sufi Works**

Walī Allāh's magnum opus, of course, is *Hujjat Allāh al-bālighah*. As stated earlier, this book deals with *'ilm al-asrār* (science of the secrets of *Sharī'ah*). However, the theme of *taṣawwuf* is interwoven throughout this book. Moreover, he has also devoted a full section specifically to it. Interestingly, he has only rarely used the term *taṣawwuf* in this book. Mostly, he uses the terms *iḥsān* (God-consciousness) and

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<sup>45</sup> Shāh Walī Allāh, *al-Qawl al-jamīl fī bayān sawā' al-sabīl*, translated from Arabic into Urdu by Khurram 'Alī, (Lahore: Islāmī Academy, n.d.), 115.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 117-118.

*sulūk* (spiritual journey) both of which have their origins in the Qur'an and *ḥadīth*. This indicates a conscious attempt to differentiate between *Shari'ah*-ordained Islamic spirituality and its popular understanding, which occasionally had admixtures of other philosophies.

In *Hujjat Allāh al-bālighah*, he has identified four principal sets of opposing human qualities.<sup>47</sup> These are *ṭahārah* (purification) and *ḥadath* (impurity), *ikhbāt* (humility) and *istikbār* (arrogance), *samāḥah* (generosity) and *inqiyād li al-dawā'ī al-bahīmiyyah* (following one's beastly impulses), and lastly *'adālah* (justice) and *zulm* (oppression). The first ones amongst these pairs are the desirable qualities and their opposites are the undesirable ones. This is different from the standard classification of human qualities as explained by al-Ghazālī and most other scholars.

Apart from *Hujjat Allāh al-bālighah*, he composed other treatises on different aspects of *taṣawwuf*. These include *al-Qawl al-jamīl fi bayān sawā' al-sabīl* (henceforth *al-Qawl al-jamīl*), *Saṭ'āt* [Radiances], *Altāf al-Quds* [Divine graces], *Ham'āt* [Floods] and *Lamaḥāt* [Glances]. Amongst these, *al-Qawl al-jamīl* can be termed as the first level in which he provides detailed account of the invocations, devotions and etiquettes that a *sālik* (a traveler on the Sufi path) needs to practice. In this, he confines himself to the four main *ṭarīqahs* of India viz. Chishtiyyah, Naqshbandiyyah, Qādiriyyah, and Suhrawardiyyah. Then, in *Saṭ'āt* he has tried to explain the high levels of *taṣawwuf* which involves man's establishing a bond with the *ḥazīrat al-quds* (the sacred court).<sup>48</sup> In *Altāf al-Quds*, he has discussed the effects of *taṣawwuf* upon man's internal faculties viz., intellect, will, and bodily management;

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<sup>47</sup> Walī Allāh, *Hujjat Allāh al-bālighah*, 2:183-187.

<sup>48</sup> Walī Allāh defines *ḥazīrat al-quds* as the place where the lights (*anwār*) of exalted angels gather with the Great Spirit and become one. His translator and commentator Sa'īd Aḥmad Pālanpūrī has discussed it in further detail in his Urdu commentary on the said book. See Sa'īd Aḥmad Pālanpūrī, *Raḥmat Allāh al-wāsi'ah*, (Karachi: Zamzam Publishers, 2004), 1:209-211. [Urd]

and how these faculties are inter-related. In *Ham'āt*, he has presented his philosophy of the history of *taṣawwuf*. He compares the methods of the classical masters, such as al-Junayd and Bāyazīd with the later masters such as 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, Mu'īn al-Dīn Chishtī and Bahā' al-Dīn Naqshband. Furthermore, he has tackled the concepts of humanity according to the ancient Greeks and Indians and how these can be incorporated into *taṣawwuf* in a logical way.

Sindhī has suggested that *al-'Abaqāt* [Fragrances] written by Walī Allāh's grandson Shāh Ismā'īl serves as an introductory text to these five texts. He goes on to say that, these five texts are primers, which are taught to the beginning level student of Walī Allāh's philosophy.<sup>49</sup>

Walī Allāh's Salafī tendencies are visible here as well. For example, while counseling the beginner level seeker in *Ham'āt*, he reminds him that he should stick to the simple and straightforward understanding of creedal matters as done by the pious predecessors. Furthermore, he reminds the seeker that if he can, he should directly study the *ḥadīths* and *āthār* (reports) and should avoid the unnecessary hair-splitting of the jurists.<sup>50</sup>

He discusses the claim of the Naqshbandīs regarding their path being the closest to *Sunnah*. He says that this has to do with the fact that unlike other Sufi orders, Bahā' al-Dīn Naqshband preferred those invocations that have basis in the Qur'an and *Sunnah* to those which were devised by later Sufis. In this sense, he claims there are no additional invocations amongst the Naqshbandīs.<sup>51</sup>

He explains that all Sufi *ṭarīqahs* agree on loud *dhikr*. The only exception is the Naqshbandī *ṭarīqah*. Before Bahā' al-Dīn, his masters used to do loud *dhikr*.

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<sup>49</sup> See Sindhī's preface to the Urdu translation of *Ham'āt* in Shāh Walī Allāh, *Ham'āt*, translated from Persian into Urdu by Muḥammad Sarwar, (Lahore: Sindh Sāgar Academy, 2003), 7-8.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 60.



However, since it is undesirable (*makrūh*) in the Ḥanafī *madhhab*; therefore, Bahā' al-Dīn forbade it. Moreover, his *nisbah* was so strong that loud *dhikr* was not needed. He goes on to state that since times have changed and the *nisbahs* are not as strong; therefore, loud *dhikr* should not be disallowed.<sup>52</sup>

### **Descendants: Spiritual and Physical**

After his death, his sons took up the mantle of scholarship left vacant by their father. Among them, Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (d. 1823) was the most prominent and lived the longest. He is rightfully credited with spreading his father’s knowledge especially with regards to *ḥadīth* throughout the Indo-Pak sub-continent. However, his reform movement found its fullest expression in the jihad effort of Sayyid Aḥmad of Rae Bareli and Shāh Ismā‘īl, Walī Allāh’s grandson. Sayyid Aḥmad is also the vital link between Walī Allāh and the Deobandī elders.

### **SAYYID AḤMAD OF RAE BARELI (1786 – 1831)**

Sayyid Aḥmad’s followers regard him as the *mujaddid* of the thirteenth century of Islam. He was the leader of “Tehrīk-e-Mujāhidīn” (the Mujāhidīn movement). His reform effort was mainly directed at ridding Muslims’ lives of all un-Islamic influences. For him, this included Hindu, Christian and Shī‘ī influences. The Hindus were the dominant group in India and long periods of co-existence with them had had its effect upon Muslims. The British were the emergent power in India and as Sayyid Aḥmad saw it, they had to be dealt with militarily, eventually. The Shī‘īs were an Islamic sect that was hard to battle since Sunnis had many things in common with them and both staked a claim to Islamic orthodoxy. Since, the time of Humāyūn (d.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 67.

1556), the Shī'īs had always had influence in the Mughal Empire. Many states in southern India had been ruled by Shī'ī dynasties until they were conquered by Awrangzeb. Since, the end of the “Great Mughals,”<sup>53</sup> the Shī'īs had been able to carve out for themselves a strong state in Oudh in Eastern India.<sup>54</sup> In the age of overall Muslim political decline, this was perhaps the strongest Muslim state. Its influence extended over a wide region. Sayyid Aḥmad's renewal effort focused on removing what he perceived to be its influence from people's lives and bringing them back to the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah.

Sayyid Aḥmad combined in him the two important *nisbahs* (connections) of Walī Allāh and Sirhindī; the former through his teachers and shaykh, and the latter through his own family. He was descended from Shāh 'Alam Allāh (d. 1684) who was the principal successor of Ādam Binnorī (himself a prominent successor of Aḥmad Sirhindī) in the eastern lands of India. Sayyid Aḥmad's maternal grandfather Shāh Abū Sa'īd was a successor of Shāh Walī Allāh.

### **Education and Spiritual Training**

Not much is known about his early life. However, this much is established that he was not inclined towards studies.<sup>55</sup> He spent a few years in a *maktab* (local Qur'an school) but did not gain much. By temperament he was more inclined towards physical and martial sports. Simultaneously, he was inclined towards *dhikr* and other Sufi practices. His father died when he was young. Poverty forced him to look for

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<sup>53</sup> “Great Mughals” is a term used to refer to the first six Mughal Emperors of India. These are, in chronological order, Bābar, Humāyūn, Akbar, Jahāngīr, Shāh Jahān and Awrangzeb. These are the first and the greatest of all Mughal Emperors. The empire reached its zenith with Awrangzeb, and after his death began her decline, which ended with the capture of the last Mughal emperor Bahādur Shāh Zafar at the hands of the British in 1857.

<sup>54</sup> For a detailed discussion of Shī'ī states in Northern India, see Juan Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism: Religion and state in Awadh*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

<sup>55</sup> Muḥammad Hamzah Ḥasanī, *Tazkira Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd*, (Lucknow: Maktaba-e-Islām, 1995), 27. [Urd]

employment in the nearest major city, Lucknow. Failing to secure employment, he finally decided to go to Delhi to seek religious knowledge and *fayḍ* (spiritual blessing) from Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. His family had been constantly in touch with the Walī Allāhī family. Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz handed him over to his younger brother Shāh ‘Abd al-Qādir for education and training. He studied basic Arabic language, its grammar, some books of *ḥadīth*, and Urdu translation of the Qur’an but failed to make any significant progress beyond these.

Shortly thereafter, at the age of twenty-two, he pledged allegiance to Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz in the Naqshbandī *ṭarīqah*. This pledge was followed by his quick spiritual rise. Shāh Ismā‘īl refers to his experiences of that time and opines that he was given *nisbah* of *ṭarīq al-nubuwwah* (the way of prophet hood).<sup>56</sup> He spent four years in Delhi with his shaykh and other teachers. Finally, he was given *ijāzah* (permission to teach disciples the Sufi way) and *khilāfah* (successorship) by Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz.

### **Sayyid Aḥmad as *Mujāhid* and *Mujaddid***

In 1811, Sayyid Aḥmad joined a regional Pathān military force led by Amīr Khān as a fighter. During this time, he was exposed to European weaponry including artillery. Sindhī has asserted that Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was the leader (Imam) of a movement started by his father Walī Allāh.<sup>57</sup> He had seen the potential in Sayyid Aḥmad and was positioning him to eventually start the military and political struggle necessary for establishing an Islamic government in India. Sayyid Aḥmad left Amīr Khān’s militia after six years due to policy differences. The reason why he left Amīr Khān’s militia is important. Amīr Khān had chosen to make peace with the British in return for a

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

<sup>57</sup> This theme exists in many of Sindhī’s works especially in his *Shāh Walī Allāh kī siyāsī teḥrīk*.

small estate in the deserts of Rajputana. For Amīr Khān, it was a wise tactical move. From Sayyid Aḥmad's perspective, this was a strategic disaster, which amounted to surrendering to the greatest threat that Muslims faced in India.

Sayyid Aḥmad returned to Delhi. Here, he was warmly greeted by Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, and many of the graduates and students of Madrasah Raḥīmiyyah were instructed to become his disciples. These included two important young scholars of the Walī Allāhī family, Mawlānās Shāh Ismā'īl and 'Abd al-Ḥayy. They were later followed by the grandson of Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz (from his daughter), Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq.

Sayyid Aḥmad's years in the militia had been useful. He had carried on his work of *da'wah* and reform while also fulfilling his martial duties. Amīr Khān himself was transformed but not enough to stop him from making peace with the British. Even though Sayyid Aḥmad strongly opposed this decision and finally left the militia, Amīr Khān still held him in high regard.

### ***Tehrīk-e-Mujāhidīn (Mujāhidīn Movement)***

After his departure from the militia, the contours of Sayyid Aḥmad's eventual struggle began to emerge. He started off by a number of missionary tours, the first of which is most important from our point of view. This was to the region immediately north of Delhi, Doaba. After the tours, he decided to go for Hajj. This was a high-profile event and included an extensive tour of the eastern regions of Northern India. After Hajj, final preparations for jihad began. Finally, in 1826, with his few hundred followers, he undertook an arduous trek through the deserts of Rajputana, Sindh, Balochistan and Afghanistan. Although, he considered the British to be his real opponents, circumstances forced him to deal with the Sikhs first. Once, in the frontier

regions of present-day Pakistan, he established a short-lived Islamic emirate and engaged in a number of battles with the Sikhs, as well as the latter's local allies. After a number of ups and downs including many betrayals by his local allies,<sup>58</sup> Sayyid Aḥmad was martyred in the famous battle of Balakot in 1831. With his death (or disappearance as some of his followers came to believe),<sup>59</sup> the movement essentially ended, although a low-intensity conflict continued well into the twentieth century.

Although, the political and military dimensions of his movement also connect Sayyid Aḥmad to the Deobandīs, these are not directly relevant to our discussion. It is the *fiqhī* and *taṣawwuf* aspect that concerns us. For that, we begin with his first missionary tour.

### **First Missionary Tour: Doaba**

On this first missionary tour, Sayyid Aḥmad took Shāh Ismā'īl and 'Abd al-Ḥayy with him with the permission of Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz. His focus was the Doaba region in the north of Delhi and other parts of North Western Uttar Pradesh. It was a successful tour. He was received warmly wherever he went and thousands pledged allegiance to him in the Sufi path. Hagiographical sources are filled with accounts of miraculous transformations in people's lives upon encounter with Sayyid Aḥmad.

Here, in Nanauta, the three year old Imdād Allāh (future shaykh of the elders of Deoband) was put in Sayyid Aḥmad's lap and the latter accepted him in *bay'at al-tabarruk* (pledging allegiance to a shaykh for blessing). In Saharanpur, Sayyid Aḥmad was received by Shāh 'Abd al-Raḥīm Wilāyatī (d. 1831) (a Chishtī Ṣābirī shaykh), who was based there. More importantly, the latter pledged allegiance to

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<sup>58</sup> For a balanced analysis of the reasons why his local allies turned against him, see Shaykh Muḥammad Ikrām, *Mauj-e-Kausar*, (Lahore: Idāra Saqāfat-e-Islāmīa, 2000), 30-32. [Urd]

<sup>59</sup> Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī, *Hekāyāt-e-awliyā*, (Karachi: Dār-ul-Ishā'at, n.d.), 130. [Urd]

Sayyid Aḥmad and ordered his disciples to do the same. Amongst them was Miānjī Nūr Muḥammad (d. 1843) (the future shaykh of Ḥājī Imdād Allāh) who was especially called from Lahori (a village in the same area) to come to Saharanpur for this. In that same sitting, Sayyid Aḥmad gave him *ijāzah* in all the four *tarīqahs* as well. It will be pertinent for us to quote Wilāyatī regarding this event.

In reality, I do not find myself in need of pledging allegiance to anyone. However, I see that the pleasure of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) lies in this. That is why I am pledging allegiance.<sup>60</sup>

Later, the two met in private to benefit from one another. After a while, when the two emerged from the meeting room, the Chishtī *nisbah* showed upon Sayyid Aḥmad. He was overwhelmed with crying (a sign of the Chishtīs); while the Naqshbandī *nisbah* showed on Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥīm. He was calm (a sign of the Naqshbandīs).<sup>61</sup>

It is also interesting to note here that during his tour of Kandhla, Muftī Ilāhī Bakhsh (d. 1829/1830), forefather of the later Kāndhlavī scholars (Ismā‘īl, his sons Yaḥyā and Ilyās, and his grandsons Zakariyyā and Yūsuf), who was a student and successor of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, and was quite aged at that time, welcomed Sayyid Aḥmad to Kandhla and pledged allegiance to him. He also composed hagiographic poetry in the Sayyid’s honour.<sup>62</sup>

### **Jihad Supplants *Sulūk***

After the first tour, Sayyid Aḥmad returned to “Dā’irah Shāh ‘Alam Allāh,” a *khānqah* established by his ancestor Shāh ‘Alam Allāh near Rae Bareli. Here,

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<sup>60</sup> Sayyid Nafīs al-Ḥusaynī, *Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd say Ḥājī Imdād Allāh kay rūḥānī rishtay*, (Lahore: Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd Academy, 2003), 59. [Urd]

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 59 and Sayyid Maḥbūb Rizvī, *Tarīkh Dār al-‘Ulūm Deoband*, (Deoband: Idāra-e-Ihtimām, 1992), 1:32-33. [Urd]. For a slightly different version, see Ashraf Thānvī, *Hekāyat-e-awliyā*, 149-150.

<sup>62</sup> Nūr al-Ḥasan Rāshidī, *Hazrat Muftī Ilāhī Bakhsh Kāndhlavī*, (Kandhla: Hazrat Muftī Ilāhī Bakhsh Kāndhlavī Academy, 2001), 41. [Urd]

gathered with him were prominent Sufis and scholars. These included ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Wilāyatī, Shāh Abū Sa‘īd Mujaddidi<sup>63</sup> (the main successor of Shāh Ghulām ‘Alī<sup>64</sup> in India), Muḥammad Yūsuf Phulti,<sup>65</sup> Shāh Ismā‘īl and ‘Abd al-Ḥayy. This period was characterized by intensive jihad training and less focus on traditional Sufi activities. When some of Sayyid Aḥmad’s disciples complained to him of not being able to continue with their Sufi activities, he replied:

These days we face a more virtuous task than that.<sup>66</sup> Our heart is engaged in it. It is preparing for jihad in the way of Allah. The spiritual state (associated with Sufi practices) has no value compared to this. Seeking the knowledge of *sulūk* is subordinate to this (jihad)... That work (*sulūk* and *taṣawwuf*) is for the time when one does not need to prepare for jihad. The heightened spiritual *anwār* (lights) during prayers and meditations that we have been perceiving for the past couple of weeks are due to this activity (jihad).<sup>67</sup>

### ***Ṣirāṭ-e-mustaqīm* [The straight path]<sup>68</sup>**

No known scholarly work of Sayyid Aḥmad exists. The only one that has come down to us has been put together by his two main disciples Shāh Ismā‘īl and ‘Abd al-Ḥayy who compiled his utterances and sayings in the form of a book and named it *Ṣirāṭ-e-mustaqīm* [The straight path]. This book can be considered the primary exposition of

<sup>63</sup> He was a direct descendant of Aḥmad Sirhindī. His son was Shāh ‘Abd al-Ghanī, the main *ḥadīth* teacher of many Deobandi elders.

<sup>64</sup> He was based in Delhi and many Naqshbandīs consider him to be the *mujaddid* of the thirteenth century. His successors were to be found in almost every city in India. Amongst his successors was Khālīd Shahrzūrī Kurdī (d. 1827) who represents another major figure in the growth of the Naqshbandiyyah so much so that after him it came to be called Naqshbandiyyah Khālīdiyyah. Like the Mujaddidiyyah in the sub-continent, the Khālīdiyyah over-shadowed all other Naqshbandi sub-orders in the Middle East.

<sup>65</sup> He was the grandson of Shāh Ahl Allāh who was the brother of Shāh Walī Allāh. He was considered a *quṭb* (pole) of his time.

<sup>66</sup> The Urdu word in the original is “*ham*.” This normally means “we” or “us.” However, people living in and around Lucknow also use it for the first person. In this passage, it is not clear which meaning is intended. The context can accommodate both meanings. Therefore, we have retained the generally used plural meaning.

<sup>67</sup> ‘Alī Nadvī, *Tarikh-e-da‘wat-o-‘azīmat*, vol. 6, part 1, 237-238.

<sup>68</sup> The edition that we have before us has been attributed to Shāh Ismā‘īl by the publisher. See Shah Ismā‘īl, *Ṣirāṭ-e-Mustaqīm*, translated from Persian into Urdu by anonymous, (Lahore: Idāra Nashriyat-e-Islām, n.d.).

his thought. The book comprises an introduction and four chapters. The first and the fourth chapters were compiled by Shāh Ismā‘īl and the second and the third were compiled by ‘Abd al-Ḥayy. The first chapter deals with the difference between the path of prophet hood (*ṭarīq al-nubuwwah*) and the path of friendship (*ṭarīq al-wilāyah*). In the second one, innovations are dealt with in extensive detail. These include the innovations that had crept in due to the influences of pseudo-Sufis, Shī‘īs and the Hindus. The third chapter deals with the methodology of the various Sufi *ṭarīqahs*. In the last one, “Ṭarīqah Muḥammadiyyah” is presented. It is called the *sulūk* of the path of prophet hood.

### **Ṭarīqah Muḥammadiyyah (Muḥammadi Order)**

Although Naqshbandī by training, Sayyid Aḥmad’s emphasis upon *tawḥīd* and *Sunnah* led him to finally articulate his “Ṭarīqah Muḥammadiyyah” which was very close to the external dimension of the *Sharī‘ah*. The term “Ṭarīqah Muḥammadiyyah” had its roots in eighteenth century Naqshbandī masters of Delhi and was also promoted by Shaykh Aḥmad Tījānī in North Africa.<sup>69</sup> From the beginning, Sayyid Aḥmad was more amenable to the path of prophet hood as opposed to the path of friendship.<sup>70</sup> He had been exposed to the latter and saw the problems associated with it. The word *taṣawwuf* was normally used for it. He was not against it *per se* but he wanted to reform it and to bring about a rapprochement between it and *Sharī‘ah* (i.e., its external dimension).

As he saw it, Muslims had come far from the simplicity of the times of the Companions of the Prophet (pbuh). Complex philosophical notions had crept into

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<sup>69</sup> Zachary Wright has traced the use of the term “Ṭarīqah Muḥammadiyyah” in history by different Sunni scholars. See his discussion of the subject in Wright, 39-44.

<sup>70</sup> See the incident that took place between Shah ‘Abd al-‘Aziz and Sayyid Aḥmad in Ashraf Thānvī, *Hekāyāt-e-awliyā*, 127.



*taṣawwuf*. People were disconnected from the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. Seeing this, Walī Allāh and Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz had sought to connect the common person to the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. Sayyid Aḥmad took this idea a step further. He gave it more concrete shape by propagating his “Ṭarīqah Muḥammadiyyah.”

In this *ṭarīqah*, *Shari‘ah* was dominant over *taṣawwuf*. The focus was the external aspects of the *Shari‘ah* with an emphasis upon purifying one’s intention. Sayyid Aḥmad was trying to re-create the atmosphere of the early generations when the Companions and the Followers used to achieve *nisbah* and protected it through acting upon the *Shari‘ah* while maintaining purity of intention.<sup>71</sup> However, the customary pledge of allegiance (*bay‘ah*) was retained. In fact, this helped in organizing the members of Tehrīk-e-Mujāhidīn.

He would take people’s pledge in the four main *ṭarīqahs* viz. Chishtī, Naqshbandī, Suhrawardī, and Qādirī and then ask them to pledge allegiance in Ṭarīqah Muḥammadiyyah. Thus, this name spread amongst the people. He himself used to say that the other four *ṭarīqahs* connect to the Prophet (pbuh) internally while Ṭarīqah Muḥammadiyyah connects outwardly. Therefore, the external deeds should be in conformity with the *Shari‘ah* of Muḥammad.

## **REFORM CONTINUED: DEOBANDĪ LINKS WITH WALĪ ALLĀH, SAYYID AḤMAD AND THEIR ASSOCIATES**

### **Ḥāji Imdād Allāh**

Imdād Allāh (d. 1899) is the main shaykh of most early Deobandī figures. Initially, he pledged allegiance to Sayyid Naṣīr al-Dīn Dehlavī (d. 1840) in the Naqshbandī *ṭarīqah*. Naṣīr al-Dīn was a member of the extended Walī Allāhi family. He was also

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<sup>71</sup> See the quotation from Walī Allāh’s book *al-Qawl al-jamīl* above.

the son-in-law of Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq, who was the head of the jihad effort in Delhi. Naṣīr al-Dīn was an active member of his war council. While the former would be giving sermon inside the *madrasah*, the latter would be collecting funds outside at the door. After the death of Sayyid Aḥmad, Naṣīr al-Dīn was chosen to lead the jihad effort in the Frontier region. He died there in 1840. Although, Imdād Allāh did not get to spend much time with Naṣīr al-Dīn because of his jihad activities; nevertheless he got *ijāzah* from him in the Naqshbandī *ṭarīqah*.

Later, Imdād Allāh turned to Miānjī Nūr Muḥammad Jhinhānvī for spiritual guidance and eventually became his principal successor. Miānjī was in turn the main successor of ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Wilāyatī. The relationship between these two shaykhs and Sayyid Aḥmad has already been touched upon in the context of Sayyid Aḥmad’s first missionary tour, which took him to the Doaba region. Now, let us look at it in more detail.

### **Sayyid Aḥmad’s Influence on Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Wilāyatī**

‘Abd al-Raḥīm Wilāyatī was an established shaykh with hundreds of disciples. He had had two shaykhs and had gotten *ijāzahs* from both. The first was a Qādirī, Sayyid Raḥam ‘Alī Shāh (d. 1204 AH). The second was a Chishtī Ṣābirī, Shah ‘Abd al-Bārī Amrohī (d. 1226 AH).

Wilāyatī pledged allegiance to Sayyid Aḥmad during the latter’s first missionary tour (1818 – 1819) in which he visited Saharanpur. After pledging allegiance to him, Wilāyatī remained with him until his own death in the battle of

Mayar in 1831.<sup>72</sup> His main successor Miānjī Nūr Muḥammad also accompanied Sayyid Aḥmad to the frontier area and was later sent back to help with logistics.<sup>73</sup>

In the context of people complaining to Sayyid Aḥmad that intensive jihad training was limiting their Sufi activities, he instructed them to seek advice from Wilāyatī. Upon their asking, Wilāyatī said:

When I had not pledged allegiance to Ḥazrat (Sayyid Aḥmad), I was on the way of my shaykhs. I engaged in *chillās* (forty-day retreats), ate bread of barley, and wore coarse clothes. I had hundreds of disciples. Whoever came to me seeking the path of *darveshī* (*taṣawwuf*), I instructed him. I did not seek anything from anyone. ... My *nisbah* was such that if I applied spiritual attention to anyone from a distance of a *kaus* (an Indian unit for distance equaling about 2.25 miles) or half-*kaus*, he would achieve high spiritual state there and then. There were other things in me superior to this. I was happy with my condition. Some of my disciples were themselves people of effect (*ṣāḥib-e-ta'sīr*). In spite of all this, when Allah caused this Sayyid Ṣāḥib (referring to Sayyid Aḥmad) to reach Saharanpur and made him meet me and gave me the power to pledge allegiance to him and I saw his way; at that time, I thought that if I had died in my previous state I would have died a bad death. I said to all of my disciples that if you desire a good end for yourselves then pledge allegiance to this Sayyid Ṣāḥib or pledge allegiance to me with this idea. [After this], the one who does not do so, that is his affair. I have already informed you. I will not be asked about him on the day of judgement. Thus, everyone should pledge allegiance again. I left all ease and luxury and fame and adopted the hard work and hardship of Sayyid Ṣāḥib's company. I make bricks, build walls, peel grass, cut wood, and do all sorts of labour. However, the blessing and grace that Allah has given me due to this work is more than ten times the blessing and grace of my previous activities. Had it not been for this, why would I have forsaken all ease for this hardship? Therefore, my advice regarding this is that you should entrust everything to Ḥazrat (Sayyid Aḥmad). Whatever he considers good and tells you to do, you should accept it and consider your well-being to lie in this. Do not let your faulty opinion interfere in this.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Nafīs al-Ḥusaynī asserts that Wilāyatī died in the battle of Mayar and not in Balakot as some have suggested. He goes into extensive detail to prove his contention. For details, see al-Ḥusaynī, *Sayyid Aḥmad...*, 70-74.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>74</sup> 'Alī Nadvī, *Tārīkh-e-da'wat-o-'azīmat*, vol. 6, part 1, 238-239.

Someone asked Wilāyatī why he pledge allegiance to Sayyid Aḥmad even though he was himself accomplished spiritually and was at least his equal spiritually.

He answered:

All of this is true. However, we neither knew how to pray *ṣalāh* nor fast. With the blessing of Sayyid Ṣāhib, we have learned to pray *ṣalāh*, as well as to fast.<sup>75</sup>

Ashraf ‘Alī comments on this by saying that the spiritual level of *iḥsān* that Wilāyatī possessed before was greatly enhanced after his pledging allegiance to Sayyid Aḥmad.<sup>76</sup>

### **Change of Strategy**

Many scholars who had been trained in the Walī Allāhi tradition and had been a part of Sayyid Aḥmad’s movement had remained in Delhi. After the death of Sayyid Aḥmad in the battle of Balakot in 1831, Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq, the head of the Walī Allāhi movement in Delhi, re-organized it. He had spent considerable time pondering over the mistakes made and the problems encountered. His solution was to remove those elements from within the movement who did not fully comply with Shāh Walī Allāh’s manifesto. Thus, he insisted on following the Ḥanafī *madhhab* and practicing *taṣawwuf*.<sup>77</sup> This marks the break between the two main factions of the Walī Allāhi movement. The other group which was against *taqlīd* (following one particular jurist in matters of *fiqh*) and *taṣawwuf*, also organized itself and decided to continue the jihad movement started by Sayyid Aḥmad.<sup>78</sup> They were led by the ‘ulamā of Sadiqpur. As for the first group, it is not clear how actively it was involved in the

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<sup>75</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *Hekāyāt-e-awliyā*, 149.

<sup>76</sup> See the footnote, *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>77</sup> Those people and groups who called for a complete disavowal of *taṣawwuf* came to be labeled as little Rāfiqīs (little Shī‘īs). See Sindhī, 97.

<sup>78</sup> Not all those who subscribed to these ideas joined the jihad. However, the vast majority of those who joined the jihad subscribed to these ideas, and thus, were Ahl-e-Ḥadīs.

jihad effort. Apparently, links were maintained with the jihadist group, but the focus became peaceful activities. These two factions later crystallized into the Deobandī and the Ahl-e-Ḥadīs respectively.

Sindhī asserts that when Muḥammad Ishāq moved to Makkah with his brother and second-in-command Muḥammad Ya‘qūb, he made Mamlūk ‘Alī Nānautvī the head of the Walī Allāhī movement in India.<sup>79</sup> The latter presided over a board, which comprised of Quṭb al-Dīn Dehlavī,<sup>80</sup> Muẓaffar Ḥusayn Kāndhlavī and Shāh ‘Abd al-Ghanī. There is not enough information to confirm Sindhī’s claims. At the same time, there is no reason to doubt him. Circumstances seem to support his contention. These people were operating against the British under their very eyes. The need for secrecy is understandable and that can explain the lack of sufficient information other than the claims of a few individuals.

In any case, all of these individuals are important. Each one of them has important links to the Deobandīs. Mamlūk ‘Alī was the main teacher of the two main elders of Deobandīs, viz., Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautvī and Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī. The other three were also their teachers and elders. Amongst them, the last mentioned, was their main *ḥadīth* teacher and was the son of the afore-mentioned Shāh Abū Sa‘īd (the main successor of Shāh Ghulām ‘Alī) who had accompanied Sayyid Aḥmad in his jihad.

After Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq’s death in 1846, his brother Muḥammad Ya‘qūb became the head of the movement at the international level until his own death in 1865/1866. In India, upon Mamlūk ‘Alī’s death in 1851, Imdād Allāh was made the head of the Indian branch. The sequence that we have mentioned above is the one

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<sup>79</sup> He was the student of Rashīd al-Dīn who in turn was a student of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz.

<sup>80</sup> He was a successor of Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq. He died in Madinah in 1289 AH.

provided by Sindhī in his *Shāh Walī Allāh ki siyāsī tehrīk* [Shāh Walī Allāh's political movement].<sup>81</sup> Other sources seem to confirm this albeit ambiguously.<sup>82</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The shaykhs of Deobandīs namely, Ḥājī Imdād Allāh himself, his first shaykh Sayyid Naṣīr al-Dīn Dehlavī, his second shaykh, Miānjī Nūr Muḥammad Jhinhānvī and his grand-shaykh Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Wilāyatī are all directly linked with Sayyid Aḥmad.<sup>83</sup> The first one was Naqshbandī while the latter two were Chishtī. Furthermore, all of the teachers of the elders of Deoband were affiliated directly or indirectly with the Walī Allāhī family and Sayyid Aḥmad's movement.<sup>84</sup> Sayyid Aḥmad and his movement serve as the main link between the spiritual shaykhs of the elders of Deoband and Walī Allāh. Thus, we find the two strands of Chishtī and Naqshbandī *taṣawwuf* and scholarship coming together in these individuals where the Naqshbandī element dominates the Chishtī one.

Here we also see a gradual change. Shāh Walī Allāh was a philosopher and the same can be said about Sirhindī. Their works on *taṣawwuf* are fused with philosophical and metaphysical details. However, in the elders of Deoband, we find a new trend. These scholars had no taste for speculative thought. Their focus was solely the practical aspect of *taṣawwuf*. They deemed theoretical discussions without apparently practical implications useless and unnecessary. Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī ordered the removal of books of logic and philosophy from the curriculum in Dār

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<sup>81</sup> Sindhī, 98.

<sup>82</sup> Another useful source is al-Ḥusaynī, *Sayyid Aḥmad....* However, the author focuses only on the spiritual links between Sayyid Aḥmad and Imdād Allāh.

<sup>83</sup> See *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>84</sup> Imdād Allāh's actual name was Imdād Ḥusayn. It was changed to Imdād Allāh by Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq.

al-‘Ulūm Deoband<sup>85</sup> and Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī acknowledged that he had no affinity for the sciences of *kashf* (spiritual unveiling).<sup>86</sup> Although, the origins of this shift can be traced back to Walī Allāh himself, but Sayyid Aḥmad’s “Ṭarīqah Muḥammadiyyah” signaled the shift in a more pronounced way. Deobandis enhanced it further.

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<sup>85</sup> Metcalf, *Islamic Revival...*, 101. To get an idea of Gangohī’s distaste for philosophy, see the incident mentioned in ‘Āshiq Ilāhī Mīrathī, *Tadhkirat al-Rashīd*, (Lahore: Idāra-e-Islāmiāt, 1986), 1:94. [Urd]

<sup>86</sup> Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Al-Tanbīh al-ṭarabī fī tanzīh Ibn al-‘Arabī*, (Thana Bhavan: Maṭba‘ah Ashraf al-Maṭābi‘, 1346 AH), 1. [Urd]

## CHAPTER THREE

### HISTORICAL STAGES OF THE DEOBANDĪ MOVEMENT: CRYSTALLIZATION, EXPANSION AND REVIVAL

#### DOABA AND ITS SCHOLARLY FAMILIES

The birthplace of the Deobandī *jamā'at* and their headquarters if any are the Doaba region of Northwestern Uttar Pradesh. As discussed before, it comprises the districts of Meerut, Muzaffarnagar and Saharanpur. Within these are located the towns of Deoband, Saharanpur, Nanauta, Gangoh, Ambahta, Jhijnjhana, Kairana, Thana Bhawan and Kandhla. Amongst these towns, the two main Islamic *madrasahs* in India, Dār al-‘Ulūm at Deoband and Mazāhir al-‘Ulūm at Saharanpur were set up. These two were the first ones to be established, and they are still the two most important *madrasahs* in the whole Indo-Pak sub-continent.

Historically, a large number of Muslim families of noble origin including the Sayyids,<sup>1</sup> Şiddīqīs,<sup>2</sup> Fārūqīs,<sup>3</sup> ‘Usmānīs<sup>4</sup> and Anşārīs inhabited this region.<sup>5</sup> The last four are also referred to as Shaykhs. These families had also inter-married amongst themselves extensively. Amongst these, the families that are significant for our analysis are the Şiddīqīs of Nanauta, Jhijnjhana and Kandhla; Anşārīs of Gangoh, Saharanpur and Ambahta; Sayyids and ‘Usmānīs of Deoband; and Fārūqīs of Thana Bhawan.

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<sup>1</sup> Descendants of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace).

<sup>2</sup> Descendants of the first caliph Abu Bakr al-Şiddīq (Allah be pleased with him).

<sup>3</sup> Descendants of the second caliph ‘Umar al-Fārūq (Allah be pleased with him).

<sup>4</sup> Descendants of the third caliph ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān (Allah be pleased with him). The appellation is ‘Uthmānī in the original Arabic. We have used the Urdu pronunciation.

<sup>5</sup> Descendants of the companion Abū Ayyūb al-Anşārī (Allah be pleased with him).



The main figures in the Deobandī movement came from these towns. The family links that many had amongst themselves were reinforced through their common teachers and shaykhs. The Deobandī *jamā'at* had its origins in the scholarly and spiritual tradition coming from Aḥmad Sirhindī, the Walī Allāhī family and Sayyid Aḥmad's movement. However, it is with the founding of the Dār al-'Ulūm at Deoband that the Deobandī *jamā'at* began to emerge as a distinct group. This process was further accelerated by the numerous debates that ensued between Deobandīs and their Barelvī and Ahl-e-Ḥadīs detractors.

We have chosen four major Deobandī Sufis for detailed analysis. These are Mawlānās Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī, Muḥammad Ilyās Kāndhlavī and Muḥammad Zakariyyā Kāndhlavī. These represent three distinct stages of Deobandī *taṣawwuf*.<sup>6</sup> These are “crystallization of Deobandī thought,” “expansion of the movement,” and “revival of Deobandī *taṣawwuf*.” During each of these periods, other important Deobandī Sufi figures also existed but their impact vis-à-vis Deobandī *taṣawwuf* was not as great as that of these four.

During the first phase, which lasted from before 1866 (the year of Dār al-'Ulūm's founding) until 1905, the year of Rashīd Aḥmad's death, Imdād Allāh, Shāh 'Abd al-Ghanī, Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautvī, Muḥammad Ya'qūb Nānautvī, and Muḥammad Maḥzar Nānautvī were also active. The second phase began in 1905 and

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<sup>6</sup> A somewhat different categorization of the Deobandī *akābir* (elders) has been done by Sayyid Muḥammad Miān in his *'Ulamā-e-ḥaq kay mujāhidāna kārnāmay* [The heroic achievements of righteous scholars]. However, his approach is primarily political and the categorization reflects that. Thus, some important Sufis are left out while prominent political figures are included. Interestingly, all of the political figures that are included were also prominent Sufis. He has divided the *akābir* of Deoband into four categories. He declares the first phase to be from 1857 until the founding of the Dār al-'Ulūm at Deoband in 1866. In this period, the *akābir* were Imdād Allāh, Shāh 'Abd al-Ghanī, Muḥammad Qāsim and Rashīd Aḥmad. The second period is from 1866 till 1880, the year of Muḥammad Qāsim's death. The *akābir* during this period are Muḥammad Qāsim, Rashīd Aḥmad, Muḥammad Ya'qūb Nānautvī, Haji 'Ābid, Rafī'-ud-Dīn, Zulfiqār 'Alī and others. The third period is from 1880 until 1920, the year of Maḥmūd-ul-Ḥasan's death. During this period, the *akābir* are Rashīd Aḥmad, Maḥmūd-ul-Ḥasan, Aḥmad Ḥasan Amrohī and 'Abd al-Raḥīm Rāipūrī. See Sayyid Muḥammad Miān, *'Ulamā-e-ḥaq kay mujāhidāna kārnāmay*, ed. Abū Salmān Shāhjahānpūrī, (Lahore: Jamī'at Publications, 2005), 102. [Urd]

lasted until Ashraf ‘Alī’s and Muḥammad Ilyās’s deaths in 1943 and 1944 respectively. During this period, other important figures were Mawlānās Khalīl Aḥmad Sahāranpūrī, ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Rāipūrī, Maḥmūd-ul-Ḥasan, ‘Abd al-Qādir Rāipūrī, and Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī. During this phase, Muḥammad Ilyās’s Tablīghī Jamā‘at popularized Sufī principles and expanded the Deobandī movement enormously. Similarly, the *khānqah* at Rāipūr, firstly with ‘Abd al-Raḥīm and later with ‘Abd al-Qādir was a major center of Sufī activity. Although, the second phase ended in 1943, the process that it had set in motion continued especially through ‘Abd al-Qādir Rāipūrī, Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī and the Tablīghī Jamā‘at. These individuals and their associates did not allow Deobandī *taṣawwuf* to decline. The third phase of revival did not begin until the early 1970s when Deobandī *taṣawwuf* faced significant decline. By that time, Muḥammad Zakariyyā had become the undisputed leader of Deobandī *taṣawwuf*. Other prominent personalities of this period included Sayyid Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadvī (d. 1999) and Muftī Maḥmūd Ḥasan Gangohī (d. 1996), a prominent successor of Muḥammad Zakariyyā.

It is an interesting fact of history that all the main Sufis amongst the Deobandīs were also great scholars and they excelled in all the main branches of Islamic learning. The four that we have chosen for our detailed analysis are typical examples of this pattern. Each one of these was a *mufassir* (Qur’anic exegete), a *muḥaddith* (*ḥadīth* expert), a *faqīh* (jurist) and an insightful Sufī master.

In order to maintain the flow of the historical narrative, we will begin our analysis by presenting a brief account of the two main teachers of Deobandīs, their main shaykh and then the prominent Sufī figures amongst them while focusing on the four who represent the three distinct phases of Deobandī *taṣawwuf*. We will look at their relationship with one another and how that helped to reinforce their attitudes

towards *taṣawwuf*. We will also examine their individual spiritual paths and the spread of their teachings.

## **THE TEACHERS & THE SHAYKH**

Deobandīs have produced a huge body of literature regarding almost all Islamic sciences. Much of this is in Urdu. A significant portion of this belongs to the hagiography genre. Here, we can find detailed biographies of most Deobandī elders. Similarly, a large body of literature exists about Sayyid Aḥmad, Shāh Walī Allāh and Aḥmad Sirhindī written by Deobandīs and others. What is not as extensive is the literature about their two main teachers and their shaykh. There are only a few slim volumes on Imdād Allāh including biographies *Imdād al-mushtāq ila ashraf al-akhlāq* [Help for the eager towards noble morals] by Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī and *Ḥayāt-e-Imdādia* [Life of Imdād] by Anwār-ul-Ḥasan Shayrkotī. As for Mamlūk ‘Alī, there is a work titled *Sīrat-e-Ya‘qūb-o-Mamlūk* [Biography of Ya‘qūb and Mamlūk], also by Anwār-ul-Ḥasan Shayrkotī. However, only a small portion of it deals with Mamlūk ‘Alī while the main part of the book is dedicated to his son Muḥammad Ya‘qūb Nānautvī. The information regarding Shāh ‘Abd al-Ghanī is similarly less. To be sure, there are references to these personalities in the biographies of Rashīd Aḥmad and Muḥammad Qāsim, as well as in other compilations. However, these do not seem to do justice to them and to their role as the main bridge between the Deobandī elders and their intellectual and spiritual forebears, namely, Sirhindī, Walī Allāh, and Sayyid Aḥmad.

This poses a tough question. Is this merely a case of unintended oversight or is there more to it? We do not have enough information to determine why the two teachers were ignored. However, we can speculate why the shaykh was partially

ignored. From the information that we have, it is obvious that there were aspects to Imdād Allāh's orientation and practice, which the Deobandīs did not approve of, or at least thought that they were not suited for the general public. They did not censure him publicly but made sure that this part of his biography was not highlighted. Thus, the references to him generally focus on his spiritual greatness and insights, and downplay his positions on legal issues.

Based upon the information that we have, we will now look at each of these personalities. We begin with the teachers.

### **Mawlānā Mamlūk 'Alī Nānautvī (1789-1851)**

Mamlūk 'Alī was a Ṣiddīqī from Nānauta. He was the student of Rashīd al-Dīn who was himself one of the prominent students of Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz. He was a respected scholar of Arabic in Delhi. This was mentioned by Sayyid Aḥmad Khān in his *Āthār al-ṣanādīd* [Imprints of the valiant], as well as by the British visitors to the city.<sup>7</sup> Eventually, he became the head of the Oriental Studies department of Delhi College where he had been teaching since 1825.<sup>8</sup> He remained in this position until his death in 1851.

Manāzīr Aḥsan Gīlanī credits him with opening the way for the students of Doaba towns to come to Delhi and study.<sup>9</sup> This appears to be an exaggeration. Before him, others had been studying in Delhi and had made a name for themselves there. These include Muftī Ilāhī Baksh of Kandhla. Nevertheless, this much should

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<sup>7</sup> Anwār-ul-Ḥasan Shayrkotī, *Sīrat-e-Ya'qūb-o-Mamlūk*, (Karachi: Maktabat Dār al-'Ulūm Karachi, 2007), 30. [Urd]

<sup>8</sup> Delhi College was initially a *madrasah*, which was established by Nawāb Ghāzī al-Dīn Khān in 1792 as Madrasah Ghāzī al-Dīn. In 1825, it was renamed Delhi College under British control. It was the first major institution in India, which simultaneously had departments for traditional Arabic and Persian Studies, as well as Modern Studies. The college was shut down in 1877 under orders of the British. After India's independence, it was reconstituted as Zakir Hussain College.

<sup>9</sup> Sayyid Manāzīr Aḥsan Gīlanī, *Sawānīḥ Qāsmī*, (Lahore: Maktaba Raḥmānīa, n.d.), 1:210. [Urd]

be acknowledged that his being in Delhi College and being the head of department made it easy for many boys from Doaba towns to feel comfortable in a big city like Delhi.

He would teach at Delhi College, as well as privately. The texts that he taught dealt with almost all Islamic sciences including Arabic language, literature, rhetoric, *fiqh*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *tafsīr*, *kalām*, etc. However, there is no clear reference to his teaching *ḥadīth*. During his stay at Delhi College, a large number of students studied from him, both in the college and privately. Many of these were destined to become major leaders of the Indian Muslim community in the nineteenth century. These included on the one extreme, the afore-mentioned modernist Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, the founder of the Muslim University at Aligarh; and on the other extreme, Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī and Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautvī, the founder of the Dār al-‘Ulūm at Deoband. His other students included:

1. Aḥmad ‘Alī Sahāranpūrī, a prominent *muḥaddith* of his time. He was also a student of Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq, the grandson of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. In 1867, he joined Mazāhir al-‘Ulūm in his native Saharanpur and began teaching *ḥadīth* there, which continued until his death in 1880.
2. Shaykh Muḥammad Thānvī, one of the three shaykhs at the *khānqāh* at Thana Bhawan.
3. Muḥammad Mazḥar Nānautvī, the first head teacher<sup>10</sup> of Mazāhir al-‘Ulūm. His two brothers, Muḥammad Aḥsan and Muḥammad Munīr were also Mamlūk ‘Alī’s students.

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<sup>10</sup> The actual Urdu term is *ṣadar mudarris*. It means “head teacher.” This is the top academic position in Dār al-‘Ulūm, Deoband. The top administrative position is variably the *muhtamim* or *nāẓim*. Both mean “administrator.”

4. Zulfiqār ‘Alī of Deoband, who in turn was the father of Maḥmūd-ul-Ḥasan, the future Shaykh al-Hind.
5. Mamlūk ‘Alī’s own son Muḥammad Ya‘qūb Nānautvī, who became the first head teacher of Dār al-‘Ulūm, Deoband.

Many of these later became great scholars in their own right. Nevertheless, they regarded their teacher with extreme respect and acknowledged his erudition.

Rashīd Aḥmad is reported to have said:

In the beginning, we studied with other teachers in Delhi but were not satisfied. ...When we reached Mawlānā Mamlūk ‘Alī, we were satisfied. [With him], we completed the books in a very short period of time.<sup>11</sup>

As for Mamlūk ‘Alī’s spiritual connections, there is not much information. He is mentioned as a pious individual who strictly adhered to the *Sharī‘ah*. There are also references to his close personal ties with Muftī Muḥaffar Ḥusayn Kāndhlavī (d. 1866) and Imdād Allāh, who were major spiritual figures of the Walī Allāhī *jamā‘at*. But that is it. His accounts generally focus only on his academic excellence and erudition. However, from this we do get an important clue. His teacher was Rashīd al-Dīn, a student of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. This establishes his close links with the Walī Allāhī family. This is further strengthened by what Sindhī has mentioned regarding him. Sindhī asserts that that he became the head of the Walī Allāhī *jamā‘at* in Delhi after Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq and Shāh Muḥammad Ya‘qūb moved to Hijaz in 1841.<sup>12</sup> As we discussed earlier, Sindhī’s claims cannot be verified independently.

### **Shāh ‘Abd al-Ghanī Dehlavī (1820-1878)**

He was a descendant of Aḥmad Sirhindī through his son Muḥammad Ma‘ṣūm. His father was Shāh Abū Sa‘īd who was a student of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, and also a

<sup>11</sup> Mīrathī, *Tadhkirat al-Rashīd*, 1:30.

<sup>12</sup> Sindhī, 98.

member of Sayyid Aḥmad's *jamā'at*.<sup>13</sup> 'Abd al-Ghanī studied most of the books of *ḥadīth* with him and studied *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* with Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq and *Mishkāt al-maṣābīḥ* with Makhṣūṣ Allāh, Walī Allāh's grandson through his son Rafī' al-Dīn. He also studied with Muḥammad 'Ābid Sindhī in Madīnah. In *taṣawwuf*, he did *bay'ah* with his father and got *ijāzah* from him. He migrated to Madinah after the war of 1857 and died there in 1878.

He was the foremost *ḥadīth* teacher of his time in Delhi. A list of his students includes the who's who of all prominent scholars of that time. His prominent students include: Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautvī, Muḥammad Mazhar Nānautvī and his brothers, and Muḥammad Ya'qūb Nānautvī. It is mentioned that Rashīd Aḥmad had also studied a few books with 'Abd al-Ghanī's older brother, Shāh Aḥmad Sa'īd.<sup>14</sup>

Both 'Abd al-Ghanī and Aḥmad Sa'īd were on the way of their ancestor Aḥmad Sirhindī. However, the older one was generally overwhelmed with different spiritual states (the Sufī term is *istighrāq*, which means drowned). Moreover, he was extremely accommodating. As a result, different groups thought he approved of them. On the other hand, 'Abd al-Ghanī was sober and in control of his spiritual states. He was strictly opposed to all that he considered to be *bid'ah*. It is reported that he was so strict that he did not give *ijāzah* for *ḥadīth* to one of his students who had completed the books with him but used to participate in 'urs (celebrating the death anniversary of a saint) and *qawwālī* (musical audition).<sup>15</sup> Similarly, at times he would avoid the *majlis* (assembly) of his older brother when he felt that some *bid'ah* was being committed there. These differing qualities of the two brothers are mentioned by

<sup>13</sup> Mīrathī, *Tadhkirat al-Rashīd*, 1:29.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 1:30.

<sup>15</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *Hekāyāt-e-awliyā*, 136.

Rashīd Aḥmad's biographer and he indicates that Rashīd Aḥmad was more inclined towards 'Abd al-Ghanī because of his self-control and strict adherence to *Sharī'ah*.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Shaykh: Ḥājī Imdād Allāh Muhājir Makkī (1817/1818-1899)**

Ḥājī Imdād Allāh Muhājir Makkī or Ḥazrat Ḥājī Ṣāhib as he is referred to in Deobandī circles is the shaykh or *pīr* of most Deobandī elders. He belonged to a Fārūqī family of Thana Bhawan and his mother belonged to the same Ṣiddīqī family of Nanauta as Mamlūk 'Alī's. It is there that he was born in 1817/1818. Due to his family circumstances, his education was delayed. It eventually started when he traveled to Delhi with Mamlūk 'Alī. Mamlūk 'Alī was 30 years his senior and was already an established scholar. It is not clear whether he studied anything with Mamlūk 'Alī. However, this much is clear that he studied Arabic and Persian with various teachers in Delhi and proceeded to the level of *Mishkāt al-maṣābīh* (a major work of *ḥadīth*). He also studied other books on *taṣawwuf* and *kalām* with different scholars. However, he did not complete the then prevalent curriculum and is therefore, not regarded as a scholar by Deobandī writers. In fact, his not being scholar is something which was cited by Rashīd Aḥmad as the reason for disregarding Imdād Allāh's opinions on the legal issues that divided Indian Muslims of that time.<sup>17</sup>

Even though he was not recognized as a formally trained scholar, his high spiritual rank was acknowledged by everyone. As mentioned in the previous chapter, his first shaykh was the Naqshbandī Sayyid Naṣīr al-Dīn who was a follower of Sayyid Aḥmad. Later, he did *bay'ah* with Miānjī Nūr Muḥammad and the latter's Chishtī *ṭarīqah* became his main *ṭarīqah*. Biographers have debated whether he was himself a great shaykh or was it his famous successors (*khalīfahs*) who made him

<sup>16</sup> Mīrathī, *Tadhkirat al-Rashīd*, 1:32-35.

<sup>17</sup> 'Abd al-Ra'ūf Raḥīmī, *Irshādāt-e-Gangohī*, (Multan: Idāra Tālīfāt-e-Ashrafia, 2002), 119. [Urd]



famous. In this context, it is important to see what opinion his two main successors, Muḥammad Qāsim and Rashīd Aḥmad had of him.

Muḥammad Qāsim was asked whether Imdād Allāh was a scholar or not. He replied: “He was not a scholar but a scholar-maker.”<sup>18</sup> When Rashīd Aḥmad was asked that why did he do *bay‘ah* with Imdād Allāh while the latter was not a scholar, he replied: “We had knowledge but we did not have that fire which he had. We went to him to get that fire.”<sup>19</sup> Imdād Allāh’s opinion of these two successors of his has already been documented in chapter one.

These quotations illustrate that he was a great shaykh and was also lucky to have great scholars as his disciples who in turn became great shaykhs. That is why Khalīq Aḥmad Nizāmī in his history of the shaykhs of the Chishtī *ṭarīqah* has declared that the rise of the Deobandī *jamā‘at* was in fact, the renaissance of the Chishtī Ṣābirī *ṭarīqah*.<sup>20</sup> There is no doubt that Imdād Allāh was aided by his illustrious successors who were great scholars and attracted many more scholars to the fold. According to one source, apart from the general Muslim public, approximately 500 scholars were his disciples.<sup>21</sup> His main successors include Muḥammad Qāsim, Rashīd Aḥmad, Ḥājī ‘Ābid, Muḥammad Ya‘qūb Nānautvī, Aḥmad Ḥasan Amrohī, Fayz-ul-Ḥasan Sahāranpūrī, and Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī. Amongst these Rashīd Aḥmad and Muḥammad Qāsim stood out. In later years, Ashraf ‘Alī was acknowledged by Imdād Allāh as having surpassed them both.<sup>22</sup> Rashīd Aḥmad had hundreds of followers. Most of these were scholars. Later, Ashraf ‘Alī expanded the *ṭarīqah* enormously. His

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<sup>18</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *Hekāyāt-e-awliyā*, 166.

<sup>19</sup> Muḥammad Iqbāl Qurayshī, *Ma‘ārif al-akābir*, (Saharanpur: Kutub Khāna Yaḥyawī, n.d.), 37. [Urd]

<sup>20</sup> Khalīq Aḥmad Nizāmī, *Tārīkh mashā‘ikh-e-Chisht*, (Lahore: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1:275-276. [Urd]

<sup>21</sup> Shayrkotī, 91.

<sup>22</sup> Sayyid Maḥmūd Ḥasan, *Ḥakīm-ul-ummat: akābir aur mu‘āsirīn kī naẓar main*, (Karachi: Kutub Khāna Mazharī, 1976), 23. [Urd]

disciples numbered in thousands. As for those who were connected to him indirectly, their number is even greater. Rashīd Aḥmad’s impact had been confined to the elect while Ashraf ‘Alī affected the common Muslims as well. Because of this, the latter was considered the *mujaddid* of his time.<sup>23</sup>

Imdād Allāh was a known figure for the people of Nanauta. He was born there and his maternal side of the family belonged to Nanauta. Moreover, his sister was married there. Thus, he was a frequent visitor to Nanauta and Muḥammad Qāsim was already familiar with him and regarded him as a *bazurg* (a saint-like person). On the other hand, Rashīd Aḥmad did not know him from before and came to know his status through Muḥammad Qāsim in Delhi. In the beginning, Rashīd Aḥmad was not sure whether he should do *bay‘ah* with Imdād Allāh. However, later, he became firm in his resolve and did *bay‘ah* with him after the completion of his studies.

Imdād Allāh is a complex figure, someone who cannot be termed as Deobandī or Barelvī. Rather, he was a plain Sunni. He is himself reported to have said, “People think I am like them. [The truth is] I am different from everyone. It is as if you fill a coloured bottle with water. The water appears to be of the same colour [as the bottle] even though it is colourless.”<sup>24</sup> Ashraf ‘Alī said of him:

We have never seen anyone with the propensity to giving people the benefit of the doubt as in Ḥazrat Ḥājī Ṣāhib. Ḥazrat [Imdād Allāh] would declare those whom we thought were disbelievers as *ṣāhib-e-bāṭin* (people of inner states)...Our Ḥazrat used to say the more one’s horizon broadens the more his objections decrease. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb Sha‘rānī has written regarding Zamakhsharī, “Do you think Allah will punish Zamakhsharī? As for this belief of his regarding [man’s] creation of [his own] actions, its only purpose is purification of Allah; although, he made a mistake in this.”<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> This is especially true of his followers. All of his followers and their followers use the title “*Mujaddid al-millah*” (renewer of the nation) for him.

<sup>24</sup> Qurayshī, *Ma‘ārif al-akābir*, 65.

<sup>25</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *Hekāyāt-e-awliyā*, 172.

The truth is that Imdād Allāh had the kind of comprehensiveness (*jāmi‘iyyat*), which allowed all of the various Sunni groups to consider him as their elder. Thus, the relationship between Imdād Allāh and his Deobandī disciples became an interesting one. They extolled their shaykh’s virtues and downplayed his differences with them. We will touch upon it in the account of Rashīd Aḥmad and will have opportunity to discuss this in detail in the later chapters.

## **LEADING LIGHTS OF THE DEOBANDĪ MOVEMENT**

### **Mawlānā Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautvī (1832-1880)**

The founder of the greatest Islamic seminary in India, Dār al-‘Ulūm Deoband, Muḥammad Qāsim was born in 1832 in a Ṣiddīqī family of Nanauta. He was a distant relative of Mamlūk ‘Alī. After his basic education in Nanauta and adjoining towns, he went to Delhi in 1844 for further studies and started his studies with Mamlūk ‘Alī. Here, a year later, he was joined by Rashīd Aḥmad who had also arrived in Delhi for further studies. The two were the most outstanding students of their class and bonded well together. From then on, the two became close friends and later on came to be known as the two main elders of the Deobandī *jamā‘at*. The two studied most of the then prevalent curriculum with Mamlūk ‘Alī. Later, the two learned *ḥadīth* from the above-mentioned Shāh ‘Abd al-Ghanī. Later still, the two did *bay‘ah* with Imdād Allāh who made them his principal successors.

Under the leadership of his shaykh, Imdād Allāh, Muḥammad Qāsim fought against the British in 1857. He was the military chief of this small group while Rashīd Aḥmad was the *qāḍī* (judge). This episode is known as the “Jihad of Shāmlī” (Shamli is a small town near Thana Bhawan). After Muslims lost to the British on the political and military front in this war, Muḥammad Qāsim sought to preserve their religion

through preservation of Islamic knowledge. He envisioned a chain of *madrasahs* throughout India that would provide Muslim children with the necessary Islamic learning which they needed to survive in the new colonial environment.<sup>26</sup> He began by the *madrasah* at Deoband, which was established in 1866. Soon thereafter, inspired by his example, other *madrasahs* were set up including one at Saharanpur and another (Madrasah Shāhī) at Moradabad. The one in Saharanpur (Maẓāhir al-‘Ulūm) was founded by Sa‘ādat ‘Alī Sahāranpūrī,<sup>27</sup> who was a well-known jurist (*faqīh*), a participant of the 1857 jihad and a devoted follower of Sayyid Aḥmad.

Muḥammad Qāsim did not stay in one place for too long. By temperament, he sought to avoid prominence. Even though he was the main founder of Dār al-‘Ulūm, Deoband; he was not formally attached to it.<sup>28</sup> Others handled administrative affairs. He did not even teach there. Others were appointed to teach there. Moreover, his mission of setting up *madrasahs* required that he keep moving around. However, a select group of students studied with him in different places. Only the best of the best could study with him. One of these was Maḥmūd-ul-Ḥasan, the future Shaykh al-Hind, who was formally a student at Dār al-‘Ulūm but still managed to find time to study with him in Deoband and in other cities.<sup>29</sup> Muḥammad Qāsim’s main area was *kalām* and the rational sciences, although he excelled in all the other Islamic sciences as well. In *taṣawwuf*, a number of people became his disciples. However, he was not destined to live a long life. He passed away in 1880. Before his passing away, he

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<sup>26</sup> See Gīlānī’s analysis of this aspect of his life in Gīlānī, *Sawāniḥ Qāsmī*, 1:3-6. Gīlānī has also dealt with alternative viewpoints, which claim that Muḥammad Qāsim was not the founder of the *madrasah*. See *Ibid.*, 2:242-260.

<sup>27</sup> Muḥammad Zakariyyā Kāndhlavī, *Tārīkh-e-Maẓāhir*, (Saharanpur: Kutub Khāna Ishā‘at al-‘Ulūm, 1972), 1:5. [Urd]

<sup>28</sup> Gīlānī, *Sawāniḥ Qāsmī*, 2:273.

<sup>29</sup> Sayyid Aṣghar Ḥusayn, *Ḥayāt Shaykh al-Hind*, (Lahore: Idāra-e-Islāmiāt, 1977), 19. [Urd]

instructed his disciples to take Rashīd Aḥmad as their shaykh. Rashīd Aḥmad also regarded his disciples as his own.

### **Mawlānā Aḥmad ‘Alī Muḥaddith Sahāranpūrī (1810-1880)**

Aḥmad ‘Alī was born in an Anṣārī family in Saharanpur. After memorization of the Qur’an he began studying *ḥadīth* with Sa‘ādat ‘Alī of Saharanpur. Later, he traveled to Delhi and studied most books with Mamlūk ‘Alī. His other teacher in Delhi was Wajīh al-Dīn Sahāranpūrī and Muftī Ilāhī Baksh Kāndhlavī. Afterwards, he traveled to Makkah and studied *ḥadīth* with Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq. He was one of the top scholars of *ḥadīth* in his time and was senior to both Muḥammad Qāsim and Rashīd Aḥmad. After completing his studies, he started teaching. Later, he set up a printing press in Delhi called “Maṭba‘ Aḥmadī” and started publishing books of *ḥadīth*. He spent eight years verifying the manuscripts of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and wrote a detailed marginalia on it. For the last portion of this marginalia, he contracted Muḥammad Qāsim who was a fresh graduate at that time and was little known. Most editions of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* in the sub-continent are based upon this original edition with its then prepared marginalia. In 1867, Aḥmad ‘Alī joined Maẓāhir al-‘Ulūm in Saharanpur as the main *ḥadīth* teacher there. He continued in this position until his death at the age of 72 in 1880.

### **Mawlānā Muḥammad Maẓhar Nānautvī (1821/1822-1886) and His Brothers**

Muḥammad Maẓhar was amongst the leading scholars of *fiqh* and *ḥadīth* in his time. Born and raised in Nanauta, he had two younger brothers Muḥammad Aḥsan and Muḥammad Munīr, each of whom was also an accomplished scholar. They received their education in Delhi College at the hands of the afore-mentioned Mamlūk ‘Alī.

Their other teachers in Delhi included Ṣadr al-Dīn Dehlavī, Rashīd al-Dīn, Aḥmad ‘Alī Sahāranpūrī, Shāh ‘Abd al-Ghanī and Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq. Muḥammad Maḥzar and Muḥammad Munīr participated in the Jihad of Shāmlī in 1857 against the British under the leadership of Imdād Allāh, and alongside other scholars such as Rashīd Aḥmad and Muḥammad Qāsim. However, Muḥammad Aḥsan actively opposed it and was forced to leave Bareilly, his town of residence, because of the public opposition to his stance.

In February 1867, Muḥammad Maḥzar was appointed head teacher at Maḥāhir al-‘Ulūm. When this *madrasah* progressed and an exclusive building was established for it, it was named Maḥāhir al-‘Ulūm in his honour. During his stay there, he had many outstanding students; most prominent amongst them were Khalīl Aḥmad Sahāranpūrī, ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Ḥaqqānī, ‘Abdullāh Tonkī, Mahar ‘Alī Shāh, Tajammul Ḥusayn Dasnawī, and Pīr Jamā‘at ‘Alī Shāh. It is reported that Muḥammad Qāsim had also studied some books with him while Muḥammad Maḥzar was still a student. Although he was older than Rashīd Aḥmad, he did *bay‘ah* with the latter. The latter respected him because of his seniority in age and high rank as a scholar but Muḥammad Maḥzar’s attitude was that of a humble disciple’s to his shaykh. Although, his busy schedule did not allow him to engage in Sufi practices intensively, yet he progressed on the spiritual path and was given *ijāzah* by Rashīd Aḥmad, as well as by Imdād Allāh.

Muḥammad Aḥsan and Muḥammad Munīr were actively involved in translations of classical works from Arabic into Urdu. Of these, Muḥammad Aḥsan was more active. After the war of 1857, he established a publishing house called Maṭba‘ Ṣiddīqia in Bareilly with the help of his brothers. His translations include al-

Ghazālī's *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* [Revival of the religious sciences],<sup>30</sup> as well as the translation and annotation of al-Nasafi's *Kanz al-daqa'iq* [Treasure of subtleties] and Shāh Walī Allāh's *Izālat al-khifā' 'an khilāfat al-khulafā'* [Removing the ambiguity regarding the caliphate of the caliphs] and *Ḥujjat Allāh al-bālighah* [Conclusive argument from God]. Muḥammad Munīr translated al-Ghazālī's *Minhāj al-'ābidīn* [Methodology of the worshippers]. These were all first published by Maṭba' Ṣiddīqia. Muḥammad Aḥsan had done *bay'ah* with Shāh 'Abd al-Ghanī.<sup>31</sup> Muḥammad Munīr had a very close relationship with Muḥammad Qāsim and was particularly known for his knowledge, piety, honesty and integrity. He was also appointed as the *muhtamim* of Dār al-'Ulūm, Deoband for some time.<sup>32</sup>

### **Mawlānā Muḥammad Ya'qūb Nānautvī (1833-1886)**

He was the son of Mamlūk 'Alī and was only a few months younger than Muḥammad Qāsim. He also studied most of the curriculum with his father Mamlūk 'Alī in Delhi; and studied *ḥadīth* books with Shāh 'Abd al-Ghanī and Aḥmad 'Alī Sahāranpūrī. He also mentions in the biography of Muḥammad Qāsim that after the war of 1857, he studied a portion of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* with Muḥammad Qāsim.<sup>33</sup> Initially, he worked for the British government in the Department of Education. As for the war of 1857, there is no mention of his participation in it. At the same time, there is no evidence of his opposing it.

Sometime after the war and prior to the setting up of Dār al-'Ulūm at Deoband, he left his high-paying government job and began doing private jobs. A few months after Dār al-'Ulūm opened, Muḥammad Qāsim approached him and appointed him the

<sup>30</sup> Henceforth called *Iḥyā'* only.

<sup>31</sup> Shayrkotī, 91.

<sup>32</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *Hekāyāt-e-awliyā*, 399.

<sup>33</sup> Muḥammad Ya'qūb Nānautvī, "Sawāniḥ 'umarī," in Gīlānī, *Sawāniḥ Qāsmī*, 1:24. [Urd]

head teacher (*ṣadar mudarris*) of Dār al-‘Ulūm. He remained in this position until his death in 1884. He was the main teacher of all the second generation of Deobandī scholars. These include Maḥmūd-ul-Ḥasan, the later Shaykh al-Hind; Aḥmad Hasan Amrohī; Fakhr-ul-Ḥasan Gangohī; ‘Azīz-ur-Raḥmān, the later Muftī of Dār al-‘Ulūm; and Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī. Ashraf ‘Alī was especially devoted to him.

Muḥammad Ya‘qūb was a major pillar of the Deobandī *jamā‘at*. Apart from his role as the main teacher at Dār al-‘Ulūm, his spiritual rank was also well noted. Like other Deobandīs, he had done also *bay‘ah* with Imdād Allāh who eventually made him his successor.<sup>34</sup> All Deobandī biographers speak highly of his *kashf* (spiritual unveiling) powers. The main source of his views on *taṣawwuf* is his aforementioned biography *Sīrat-e-Ya‘qūb-o-Mamlūk* and the compilation of his correspondence with one of his disciples Muḥammad Qāsim Niyānagrī titled *Maktūbāt-e-Ya‘qūbi* [Letters of Ya‘qūb].

### **Deoband Families**

According to the official history of Dār al-‘Ulūm Deoband compiled by Sayyid Maḥbūb Rizvī at the behest of Muḥammad Ṭayyib, the then *muhtamim* (rector) of Dār al-‘Ulūm; besides Muḥammad Qāsim, the other founders of the Dār al-‘Ulūm at Deoband were Zulfiqār ‘Alī (d. 1904), Rafī‘-ud-Dīn (d. 1890/1891), Fazl-ur-Raḥmān ‘Usmānī (d. 1907), Ḥāji Sayyid Muḥammad ‘Ābid (d. 1912) and Muḥammad Ya‘qūb Nānautvī (d. 1886). Except for the last, all of these were from Deoband. Some of these we have already dealt with above; others we shall deal with now.

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<sup>34</sup> Anwār-ul-Ḥasan Shayrkotī has speculated that this took place in 1282 AH (1865/1866). This is the year of the writing of Imdād Allāh’s book *Ḍiyā al-qulūb* [Light of the hearts]. At the end of this book, Imdād Allāh has declared Rashīd Aḥmad and Muḥammad Qāsim to be his main successors in India. Shayrkotī speaks of a footnote to this text in which Muḥammad Ya‘qūb is mentioned as one of the successors. However, the edition of *Ḍiyā al-qulūb* that we have before us does not contain this. See Shayrkotī, 94-95; and Imdād Allāh, “Ḍiyā al-qulūb,” 72-73.



Zulfiqār ‘Alī was a student of Mamlūk ‘Alī. He was known for his extraordinary expertise in Arabic language and literature. He was also the father of Maḥmūd-ul-Ḥasan, the future Shaykh al-Hind.<sup>35</sup>

Fazl-ur-Raḥmān was also a student of Mamlūk ‘Alī. He was known for his poetry skills in Urdu and Persian. He remained a member of Dār al-‘Ulūm’s *majlis al-shūrā* (board of trustees) until his death.<sup>36</sup> His sons include three outstanding scholars who also held important administrative positions in Dār al-‘Ulūm. These were: Muftī ‘Azīz-ur-Raḥmān, who became the Grand Muftī of Dār al-‘Ulūm; Ḥabīb-ur-Raḥmān ‘Usmānī who became the *muhtamim* (rector) of Dār al-‘Ulūm, and Shabbir Aḥmad ‘Usmānī who was appointed as *ṣadar muhtamim* (president) of Dār al-‘Ulūm.

Rafī‘-ud-Dīn was also an ‘Usmānī and twice became *muhtamim* (1868-1869 & 1872-1889) of Dār al-‘Ulūm. He had done *bay‘ah* with Shāh ‘Abd al-Ghanī in the Naqshbandī *ṭarīqah* and had been designated by him as a successor. Iḥtishām-ul-Ḥasan has also counted him amongst the successors of Muftī Muḥaffar Ḥusayn Kāndhlavī.<sup>37</sup> The above-mentioned Muftī ‘Azīz-ur-Raḥmān was his principal successor.

Ḥājī ‘Ābid was a Sayyid notable from Deoband. He was not a scholar but had done *bay‘ah* with Imdād Allāh who made him his successor. Enough information is not available regarding his life. Mostly he is mentioned in the context of the founding of Dār al-‘Ulūm and regarding the difference of opinion that developed between him and Muḥammad Qāsim. The former regarded Dār al-‘Ulūm as just a local *madrasah* while the latter envisioned it as the main *madrasah* of India. Initially, these

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<sup>35</sup> Rizvī, 1:123.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 1:125.

<sup>37</sup> Iḥtishām-ul-Ḥasan Kāndhlavī, *Ḥālāt mashā’ikh Kāndhla*, (Karachi: Maktabat al-Shaykh, n.d.), 111. [Urd]

differences threatened to disrupt the *madrasah* but were soon resolved in Muḥammad Qāsim's favour.<sup>38</sup>

### **Kandhla Families**

In Kandhla, the important family was also that of Şiddīqīs. These were descended from scholar Sufis who had settled in the area hundreds of years ago. It had two branches, one in Kandhla and the other in Jhinjhana. Over the centuries, it had been known for the large number of prominent scholars and Sufis that were born in it. The family was also known for its piety and close links to the Walī Allāhī *jamā'at*. Of the two branches mentioned above, the former became famous because of the likes of Muftī Ilāhī Bakhsh (d. 1829/1830) and his nephew Muftī Muẓaffar Ḥusayn (d. 1866) and later because of In'ām-ul-Ḥasan (d. 1996) (third *amīr* (leader) of the Tablīghī Jamā'at). Ilāhī Baksh was a student and successor of Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz; and later, did *bay'ah* with his shaykh's young successor, Sayyid Aḥmad when he was himself seventy-one.<sup>39</sup> Other members of his family also did *bay'ah* with Sayyid Aḥmad and joined his militia some of whom eventually died in the jihad against the Sikhs. These links and especially the attitude of Ilāhī Bakhsh towards Sayyid Aḥmad in spite of former's age and rank is documented in all biographies of the various Kāndhlavī scholars and is provided as proof of their strong links with the Walī Allāhī *jamā'at*.<sup>40</sup> Muẓaffar Ḥusayn, the nephew of Ilāhī Bakhsh was the top student of Shāh

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<sup>38</sup> See the relevant discussion in Gīlānī, *Sawānīḥ Qāsmī*, 2:227-228. For a more detailed version, see Ashraf Thānvī, *Hekāyāt-e-awliyā*, 227-231.

<sup>39</sup> Sayyid Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī Nadvī, *Sawānīḥ Ḥazrat Shaykh Mawlānā Muḥammad Zakariyyā*, (Lucknow: Maktaba-e-Islām, 1982), 28. [Urd]

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Iḥtishām Kāndhlavī, 84.

Muḥammad Ishāq and considered the most pious amongst them.<sup>41</sup> He is also reported to have been a successor of Ilāhī Bakhsh.<sup>42</sup> He was also close to Mamlūk ‘Alī.

The other branch of the family, which was based in Jhinhana, was also linked to the Walī Allāhī *jamā‘at*, as well as Sayyid Aḥmad. Amongst this branch appeared Muḥammad Ismā‘īl (d. 1898) who was based in Bastī Niẓām al-Dīn in Delhi. He married the granddaughter of Muẓaffar Ḥusayn (through his daughter) and re-established links with the Kandhla branch. This link became so strong that from then on, he and his sons came to be known as Kāndhlavīs. His sons are part of the second generation of Deobandī elders. These were Muḥammad (d. 1918) who was also based in Bastī Niẓām al-Dīn in Delhi; Muḥammad Yaḥyā (d. 1916) who lived in Gangoh and Saharanpur; and Muḥammad Ilyās (d. 1943) who founded the Tablīghī Jamā‘at in Bastī Niẓām al-Dīn. The last two were followed by their sons Muḥammad Zakariyyā (d. 1982) and Muḥammad Yūsuf (d. 1965) respectively. Muḥammad Zakariyyā became the Shaykh al-Ḥadīth at Mazāhir al-‘Ulūm in Saharanpur. Muḥammad Yūsuf became the second *amīr* of the Tablīghī Jamā‘at after his father’s death in 1943 and remained in that position until his own death in 1965.

### **CRYSTALLIZATION OF DEOBANDĪ TAŞAWWUF: RASHĪD AḤMAD GANGOHĪ (1828-1905)**

Rashīd Aḥmad is the pivotal figure who should be credited with defining Deobandī *taşawwuf* vis-à-vis other forms of *taşawwuf* prevalent within the Indian Muslim society of his time. It was his strong personality and forthright attitude, which ensured that his views would become entrenched in those associated with him. He set the limits in which Deobandī Sufis would operate after him. Born in 1828 in an Anṣārī

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<sup>41</sup> This was stated by Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī. See *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

family of Gangoh, he was a descendant of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Quddūs Gangohī (d. 1537),<sup>43</sup> the most important figure in Chishtī Ṣābirī *ṭarīqah* after ‘Alī Ṣābir of Kalyar. However, Rashīd Aḥmad’s both parents were Naqshbandī. His father, Hedāyat Aḥmad was a successor of Shāh Ghulām ‘Alī Naqshbandī<sup>44</sup> and his mother had done *ba‘yah* with Sayyid Aḥmad. After his basic education in Gangoh, he travelled to Delhi at the age of seventeen and studied with Mamlūk ‘Alī. Here, he met Muḥammad Qāsim who had been studying with Mamlūk ‘Alī for a year. As discussed above, Rashīd Aḥmad and Muḥammad Qāsim studied most books of the then prevalent curriculum together. These included books of *ḥadīth* and exegesis of the Qur’an, the majority of which he studied with Shāh ‘Abd al-Ghanī. Both Rashīd Aḥmad and Muḥammad Qāsim excelled and superseded their peers in the rational (*ma‘qūl*) and the transmitted (*manqūl*) sciences. The partnership between the two that started in Delhi continued until their deaths. After completion of studies, Rashīd Aḥmad settled down in Gangoh and after a long career died there in 1905.

### **Spiritual Training**

As mentioned above, Rashīd Aḥmad had been introduced to Imdād Allāh by Muḥammad Qāsim. In the beginning, he had oscillated between taking Shāh ‘Abd al-Ghanī or Imdād Allāh as his shaykh but finally decided to do *bay‘ah* with the latter. After his return from Delhi to Gangoh, Rashīd Aḥmad had come across a treatise written by Shaykh Muḥammad Thānvī in which the latter had sought to establish a creedal matter through *ẓannī* evidence (speculative, i.e., less than 100% certainty). Rashīd Aḥmad objected to it and pointed out that this requires *qaṭ‘ī* (definitive)

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<sup>43</sup> Mīrathī, *Tadhkirat al-Rashīd*, 2:9.

<sup>44</sup> As mentioned before, he is regarded by Naqshabndī Muajaddidīs as the *mujaddid* of the thirteenth century.

evidence, which did not exist. It should be mentioned here that three main successors of Miānjī Nūr Muḥammad, namely, Ḥāfiẓ Zāmin, Imdād Allāh and Muḥammad Thānvī stayed together in their *khānqah* at Thana Bhawan. Hagiographical sources call it the “dokān-e-ma‘rifat” (shop of gnosis) and the three were together called “Aqṭāb-e-Salāsa” (the three poles).<sup>45</sup> As a part of his exchange with Shaykh Muḥammad, Rashīd Aḥmad decided to visit Thana Bhawan to have a face-to-face debate with him. There, he also met Imdād Allāh who upon coming to know of his intention stopped him from the debate. In this visit, Rashīd Aḥmad requested to do *bay‘ah* with Imdād Allāh who after his initial reluctance accepted it upon the recommendation of Ḥāfiẓ Zāmin.

At that time, Rashīd Aḥmad was 25 years old. After *bay‘ah*, his spiritual rise was extremely quick. Merely eight days after his *bay‘ah*, Imdād Allāh informed him that he had acquired the *nisbah* saying, “Rashīd! I have given to you the blessing that Allah had given me. Now, it is up to you to increase it.”<sup>46</sup>

Rashīd Aḥmad stayed with his shaykh for only 42 days. On the last day, Imdād Allāh made him his successor and told him to accept disciples in all the *ṭarīqahs* that Imdād Allāh had permission in.<sup>47</sup> These included the four main *ṭarīqahs* prevalent in the sub-continent, namely, Chishtī, Qādirī, Naqshbandī and Suhrawardī. Rashīd Aḥmad returned to Gangoh and re-activated the long defunct *khānqah* of his ancestor, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Quddūs Gangohī. Imdād Allāh’s main *ṭarīqah* was Chishtī Ṣābirī; therefore, Rashīd Aḥmad’s main *ṭarīqah* also became Chishtī Ṣābirī.

<sup>45</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *Hekāyāt-e-awliyā*, 172-173. This is the Urdu-ized version of the Arabic term, *al-aqṭāb al-thalāthah*.

<sup>46</sup> Mīrathī, *Tadhkirat al-Rashīd*, 1:50.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:51.

## Main Contributions

Rashīd Aḥmad excelled in all branches of Islamic sciences including *taṣawwuf*. He was especially known for his acumen in *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*. In the beginning, he taught all the books of the then prevalent curriculum. Interestingly, the first group of students to study with him included Mullah Maḥmūd who later became the first teacher at Dār al-‘Ulūm Deoband. Later, however, he dedicated himself to teaching *ḥadīth*. He would complete the six books of *ḥadīth* called “*Ṣiḥāḥ Sittah*” in one year. This was called “*daura-e-ḥadīs*.” He discontinued this until 1308 AH when he lost his eyesight. After that, he focused on *taṣawwuf*.

His *ḥadīth* lessons enjoyed great popularity throughout India and people came from far to study with him. Many of the students of Dār al-‘Ulūm, Deoband and Mazāhir al-‘Ulūm, Saharanpur would skip the *daura* year at their *madrasahs* and would go to Gangoh to study with him. Some would do the *daura* twice, once at their respective *madrasah* and then at Gangoh. Furthermore, officially, he was the patron of Dār al-‘Ulūm and privately, he was the shaykh of most Deobandī ‘*ulamā*’ and their associates. In 1311 AH, his main successor Khalīl Aḥmad Sahāranpūrī requested that he teach the *daura* again for Muḥammad Yaḥyā Kāndhlavī. This was the last such *daura*. It was completed in two years because of Rashīd Aḥmad’s poor health. Muḥammad Yaḥyā recorded his lectures and these were later published with the marginalia of his son, Muḥammad Zakariyyā. Muḥammad Yaḥyā stayed on after *daura*, did *ba‘yah* with Rashīd Aḥmad, and served him as his right hand man until the latter’s death in 1905.

## *Fiqh*

Like other matters, Rashīd Aḥmad was also undisputedly the Imam of his *jamā'at* in *fiqh*. Anwar Shāh Kashmīrī (d. 1933), himself a great *muḥaddith* and *faqīh*, considered him to be the greatest Ḥanafī scholar of the time and used to call him “*faqīh al-naḥs*” (the one who has natural aptitude for *fiqh*). This was a title that he had not even used for ibn ‘Ābidīn (d. 1838)<sup>48</sup> even though he acknowledged ibn ‘Ābidīn’s excellence in *fiqh*. Rashīd Aḥmad was a strict Ḥanafī. This is something that had been instituted in the Walī Allāhī *jamā'at* by Shāh Muḥammad Ishāq. Rashīd Aḥmad held on to it. He was known all over India for his *fatwās*. Most of these tended to be brief; the detailed ones were for the ‘*ulamā*’. He did not consider it proper to share all the proofs with the common person who was untrained in *fiqh* and other *Sharī'ah* sciences. His biographer had another explanation for this. Rashīd Aḥmad need not look up the proofs. His spiritual insight guided him; hence the lack of proofs in his *fatwās*.<sup>49</sup>

Many of these *fatwās* were not recorded. As a result, only a single volume of his *fatwās* has reached us, titled *Fatawa Rashīdia*. In the beginning, he would answer all questions himself. Later, when he lost his eyesight, his confidant, Muḥammad Yaḥyā answered on his behalf. These *fatwās* encompass the entire spectrum of Islamic faith and practice. However, certain themes tend to re-occur and occupy a disproportionately larger part of his *fatwā* collection. These deal with issues that were current at that time in North India. Examples include *milād*, ‘*urs*, reciting Sūrat al-Fātiḥah behind the Imam, etc. Moreover, some questions revolve around certain personalities. The main figure happens to be that of Shāh Ismā‘īl whose book

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<sup>48</sup> Ibn ‘Ābidīn is the foremost Ḥanafī scholar from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His *Radd al-muḥtār* [Returning the perplexed] (commonly called *Fatāwā Shāmīa* in the sub-continent because ibn ‘Ābidīn was from Syria) is the standard reference for *fatwā* in Ḥanafī *fiqh*.

<sup>49</sup> Mīrathī, *Tadhkirat al-Rashīd*, 2:17.

*Taqwiyat al-īmān* [Strengthening faith] had caused bitter divisions in the North Indian Sunni community. Deobandīs and Ahl-e-Ḥadīs strongly supported it for its forthright description of *tawḥīd* while the ‘*ulamā*’ of Badaun and Khayrabad had objected to it because of perceived insults to the Prophet (pbuh) and saints. Shāh Ismā‘īl had emphasized *tawḥīd* and had gone to the extent of declaring that Allah is capable of creating anything including another Muḥammad (pbuh) if He so desired.<sup>50</sup> Of course, he did not mean that there was to be a new prophet after Muḥammad (pbuh). He was only emphasizing the power of Allah. However, his opponents condemned him for the perceived disrespect shown to the Prophet (pbuh) by him. Rashīd Aḥmad defended him in his *fatwās* and considered him to be a *walī* of Allah.

### ***Taşawwuf***

Rashīd Aḥmad was in the line of Aḥmad Sirhindī, Shāh Walī Allāh and Sayyid Aḥmad before him.<sup>51</sup> Thus, he belonged to a long tradition of scholar Sufis who considered *taşawwuf* to be inseparable from *Sharī‘ah*. Each of these in his own way had battled what he considered to be un-Islamic practices of his time. Moreover, like Sayyid Aḥmad, Rashīd Aḥmad went a step further. While the first two had been philosophers as well, Sayyid Aḥmad had begun the process of divorcing philosophy from *taşawwuf*. With Rashīd Aḥmad, this process reached its climax. There was to be no more room for speculative thought in *taşawwuf*.<sup>52</sup> Everything had to be rooted in the Qur’an and *Sunnah* and bound by the limits of *Sharī‘ah* as understood by the

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<sup>50</sup> It is called *imkān-e-naẓīr* (the possibility of Allah creating someone similar to the Prophet (pbuh)). See Metcalf’s analysis of the issue in Metcalf, *Islamic Revival...*, 65-66.

<sup>51</sup> See Muftī ‘Azīz-ur-Raḥmān’s description of Rashīd Aḥmad, cited in Mīrathī, *Tadhkirat al-Rashīd*, 2:25.

<sup>52</sup> ‘Āshiq Ilāhī Mīrathī, *Makātīb-e-Rashīdia*, ed. Maḥmūd Ashraf ‘Usmānī, (Lahore: Idāra-e-Islāmiāt, 1996), 52. [Urd]. Imdād Allāh had the same opinion. See Sayyid Muḥammad al-Ḥasanī, *Sīrat Mawlānā Muḥammad ‘Alī Mūngīrī*, (Lucknow: Maktabah Dār al-‘Ulūm Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’, 1964), 72. [Urd]



Ḥanafī school. This was sure to put him on a collision course with other Sufis who dabbled in philosophy and took dispensations using the opinions found in other Sunni schools.

This is not to say that he separated from his parent order. His statements and utterances (*malḥūzāt*) indicate that he held his *ṭarīqah* in high esteem. He had great affinity with Shaykh ‘Abd al-Quddūs Gangohī whose *khānqah* he had re-activated. Once, explaining the methodology of the later Chishtī masters, he said:

The later masters especially those of our *ṭarīqah* have preferred that the seeker should do *dhikr* so abundantly that the evil traits are suppressed by it and *dhikr* dominates everything.<sup>53</sup>

The tone indicates his respect for and appreciation of their methodology. Rashīd Aḥmad was himself a thoroughly spiritual person. His own shaykh was all praise for him. His comments regarding him and Muḥammad Qāsim have been mentioned before. In another place, he advised those associated with him to consider Rashīd Aḥmad to be a great blessing for India and a substitute for Imdād Allāh there.<sup>54</sup> The main focus in Rashīd Aḥmad’s *ṭarīqah* was *tawḥīd* and following the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace). He also insisted on having good opinion of all *awliyā’* (plural of *walī*, which means a friend of Allah) and *ṭarīqahs* and to not have rancour towards any of them. His approach to *taṣawwuf* will be dealt with in detail in the next chapters. For now, suffice it to say that his disciples and those associated with him considered him to be the *mujaddid* and *quṭb al-irshād* (the pole of guidance) of his time.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Mīrathī, *Tadhkirat al-Rashīd*, 2:27.

<sup>54</sup> Imdād Allāh, *Faisla haft mas’ala*, (Karachi: Ṣiddīqī Trust, n.d.), 23. [Urd]

<sup>55</sup> See the correspondence between Muftī ‘Azīz-ur-Raḥmān and Khalīl Aḥmad regarding this in Mīrathī, *Tadhkirat al-Rashīd*, 2:26. Also, see Ḥabīb-ur-Raḥmān Laylpūrī, *Irshādāt Quṭb al-Irshād Ḥazrat Mawlānā Shāh ‘Abd al-Qādir Rāipūrī*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh, (Lahore: Maktaba Sayyid Aḥmad Shāhīd, 1997), 230. [Urd]

## His Own Understanding of His Position

Rashīd Aḥmad was conscious of his role. On one occasion, he is reported to have said: "Listen! The truth is that which comes on the tongue of Rashīd Aḥmad. By Allah, I am nothing. However, salvation and guidance in this time is dependent upon following me."<sup>56</sup> It is difficult to accept such a statement coming from a Sufi who has supposedly annihilated his *nafs* in the way of Allah. However, precedents exist. Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī is reported to have said that his foot was over the neck of all *awliyā’*.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, Walī Allāh’s works include many references to his greatness.<sup>58</sup> Muḥammad Zakariyyā has provided an explanation for this. He says that sometimes, the *walī* is commanded by Allah or the Prophet (pbuh) to announce this. In this case, the *walī* is under command. He is merely following orders.<sup>59</sup>

In Deobandī literature, we find an attempt to draw parallels between the role of Rashīd Aḥmad as a *mujaddid* and the role of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as a prophet. Just as the Prophet (pbuh) was accepted by some and rejected by some; similarly, the *mujaddid* of his time, Rashīd Aḥmad, was accepted by some and rejected by some.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, just as the miracles performed by a *walī* are indirectly the miracles of the prophet of whose *ummah* he is a member; similarly, the work done by the associates of a *mujaddid* is indirectly the work of that *mujaddid*.<sup>61</sup> Instances such as these are likely to provide opportunity to Deobandīs’ opponents to accuse them of heresy and of engaging in the same kind of hyperbolic praise which when engaged in by Barelvīs leads to charges of polytheism by Deobandīs.

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<sup>56</sup> Mīrathī, *Tadhkirat al-Rashīd*, 2:17. The actual words in Urdu are:

"سن لو! حق وہی ہے جو رشید احمد کی زبان سے نکلتا ہے اور بقسم کہتا ہوں کہ میں کچھ نہیں ہوں مگر اس زمانے میں ہدایت اور نجات موقوف ہے میرے اتباع پر۔"

<sup>57</sup> Muḥammad Zakariyyā Kāndhlavī, *Āp bīṭī*, (Karachi: Maktabat al-Shaykh, n.d.), 5:174. [Urd]

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 5:176.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Mīrathī, *Tadhkirat al-Rashīd*, 2:19.

<sup>61</sup> Muḥammad Manzūr Nu‘mānī, *Malḥūzāt Mawlānā Muḥammad Ilyās*, (New Delhi: Idāra Ishā‘at Dīniāt, 1991), 122-123. [Urd]

## Rashīd Aḥmad and Imdād Allāh

After the initial forty-two days that Rashīd Aḥmad spent with his shaykh, he remained continuously in touch with him if not in constant company. During the 1857 jihad, they had been together. When Imdād Allāh was migrating to Makkah, Rashīd Aḥmad had sought him out. Moreover, after Imdād Allāh migrated to Makkah, Rashīd Aḥmad visited him each time he went for Hajj. Furthermore, there is an anecdote mentioned about Rashīd Aḥmad in which he said:

For three full years, the face of Ḥazrat Imdād [Imdād Allāh] was in my heart and I did not do anything except with his permission.... Then for (this) many years I did not do anything except after asking the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace).... Then I remained at the level of *ihsān*.<sup>62</sup>

It appears that the bond between the two was strong. However, this bond was to be severely tested when their divergent opinions on certain issues became obvious. One of these was the perceived “carelessness” of Imdād Allāh in giving legal advice.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, Imdād Allāh subscribed to *tawḥīd wujūdī*,<sup>64</sup> while Rashīd Aḥmad adhered to *tawḥīd shuhūdī*; thus, mirroring the difference between Sirhindī and his shaykh Bāqī Billāh. Many of these differences had strong symbolic, as well as practical importance.

Rashīd Aḥmad had been trained in the Naqshbandī scholarly and Sufi tradition. His father was a successor of the Naqshbandī shaykh Ghulām ‘Alī. His mother had done *bay‘ah* with Sayyid Aḥmad. His main teacher Mamlūk ‘Alī was steeped in the Walī Allāhī tradition. His *ḥadīth* teacher, Shāh ‘Abd al-Ghanī was a Naqshbandī shaykh and he had considered doing *bay‘ah* with him. Moreover, he had extreme love and devotion for Sayyid Aḥmad and firmly held on to the latter’s perspective on

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<sup>62</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *Hekāyāt-e-awliyā*, 265.

<sup>63</sup> Mīrathī, *Tadhkirat al-Rashīd*, 2:287.

<sup>64</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *Hekāyāt-e-awliyā*, 169.

*Sunnah* and *bid'ah*. In fact, on one occasion while expressing his devotion to Sayyid Aḥmad, he is reported to have said that he was superior to his shaykh, Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz.<sup>65</sup> This aspect of his personality is also proven by what 'Abd al-Qādir Rāipūrī is reported to have said about him that Naqshbandī *nisbah* was dominant upon Rashīd Aḥmad.<sup>66</sup>

Imdād Allāh was also trained in the Naqshbandī scholarly and Sufī tradition; and was also a dedicated member of the Walī Allāhī *jamā'at*. However, Deobandī sources maintain that since he had not completed the formal course of study; therefore, he could not be considered a proper 'ālim (scholar). On the other hand, Rashīd Aḥmad was an accomplished *muftī* and *faqīh* (jurist). One one occasion, someone asked him why he called *mawlid* a *bid'ah* when Imdād Allāh celebrated it.

He replied:

To begin with, you do not understand the reality of this; and if you do think [that we are opposed] then [remember that] we did *bay'ah* to Ḥājī Ṣāhib in *taṣawwuf*. In matters of *Sharī'ah*, he should follow us.<sup>67</sup>

Later on, this person conveyed this to Imdād Allāh. He replied that “Rashīd Aḥmad is correct. In matters of *fīqh*, I should follow him.”<sup>68</sup>

### ***Faisla haft mas'ala* [Decision on seven issues]**

The main issues where Deobandīs differed with the Barelvis and other Sufis is succinctly summed up in Imdād Allāh's *Faisla haft mas'ala* [Decision on seven issues]. This short treatise was written and published by Ashraf 'Alī under the orders of Imdād Allāh and in his name. Imdād Allāh who had migrated to Makkah tried to

<sup>65</sup> Sayyid 'Abd al-Ḥayy Lakhnawī, *Dehlī aur us kay aṭrāf*, (Karachi: Majlis Nashriāt-e-Islām, 1998), 98-99. [Urd]

<sup>66</sup> He is reported to have said the same thing about 'Abd al-Raḥīm Rāipūrī. See Laylpūrī, 253.

<sup>67</sup> Qurayshī, *Ma'ārif al-akābir*, 394.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 394-395.

calm the tensions of the Indian Muslim community through this treatise. Importantly, at that time Ashraf ‘Alī fully agreed with Imdād Allāh. His opinion was to change later after a protracted correspondence with Rashīd Aḥmad. In this work, Imdād Allāh has identified seven issues that were dividing his *jamā‘at* at that time. By *jamā‘at*, he seems to be referring to those associated with him in anyway. Thus, this would include people who could be called Deobandī, Barelvī, or Ahl-e-Ḥadīs in South Asian terms. These issues are: *maulūd* (also called *mīlād* or *mawlid*, celebration of the birth of the Prophet (pbuh)), Fātiḥah (reciting Surat al-Fātiḥah upon the deceased), ‘*urs* (celebrating the death anniversary of a saint) and *samā‘* (poetic audition, with or without music), calling other than Allah, second *jamā‘ah* in a single mosque, *imkān-e-nazīr* (possibility of Allah creating another Muḥammad), and *imkān-e-kidhb* (possibility of Allah lying).

In this treatise, Imdād Allāh displays his insightful understanding of these issues and suggests a practical course of action. This belies the claim that he was not a proper scholar. He was definitely not at the same level as Rashīd Aḥmad and Muḥammad Qāsīm; however, he was still sufficiently educated. With the publication of the treatise, the divisions only increased. The Barelvīs declared that it was supportive of their stand and against the Deobandī position. When it was presented to Rashīd Aḥmad, he said: “It is good for burning in winter. Throw it into the stove.”<sup>69</sup> Later, Ashraf ‘Alī, the actual writer and publisher, published a supplement with it in which he took pains to explain that the original treatise was in no way supportive of the Barelvī position; rather, it opposed it.

In fact, the treatise is a balanced document. The issues that it deals with have proofs for both sides. That is why the difference of opinion exists in the first place.

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<sup>69</sup> Muḥammad Abū Bakr ‘Alvī, *Muḥammad ‘Alawī Makkī kī kitāb Iṣlāḥ-e-Mafāhīm par teḥqīqī naẓar*, (Lahore: Madrasah Khuddām Ahl-e-Sunnat, 2006), 171. [Urd]

Since the document can be seen to support both groups; therefore, the dissension did not end. In fact, it continues to this day. Barelvīs publish it without the supplement claiming it to be an add-on and not from Imdād Allāh himself, whereas, the Deobandīs always publish it with the supplement. In one case, Muftī Rashīd Aḥmad (d. 2002), a prominent Deobandī Muftī based in Karachi published a separate clarification of this treatise. In it, he also cited a dream seen by Muḥammad Aḥmad (d. 1928), the son of Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautvī and the then *muhtamim* of Dār al-‘Ulūm, Deoband.<sup>70</sup> This dream was narrated by his son Qārī Muḥammad Ṭayyib, the later *muhtamim* of Dār al-‘Ulūm. It is also included in *Ashraf al-sawāniḥ* [The most noble biography], the official biography of Ashraf ‘Alī.

This dream is a classic example of Sufī issues being decided in a decidedly Sufī way. Thus, in the dream, Muḥammad Aḥmad sees Imdād Allāh and a debate ensues between the two regarding these issues. Imdād Allāh complains that ‘*ulamā*’ are being too strict. Muḥammad Aḥmad replies that this strictness is required. Finally, the matter is decided by the Prophet (pbuh) himself who appears in the dream at the request of Imdād Allāh and takes side with Muḥammad Aḥmad.

There are many important themes that should be noticed in this dream. First is the acknowledgement of the differences between Imdād Allāh and his Deobandī disciples. Second is the Prophet’s (pbuh) intervention at the behest of Imdād Allāh, which shows his high spiritual standing. Third is his siding with Muḥammad Aḥmad and by extension, the Deobandīs. Fourthly, Muḥammad Aḥmad wrote this dream to Imdād Allāh who is reported to have wept at it and expressed his gratitude.

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<sup>70</sup> Rashīd Aḥmad, *Faisla Haft Mas’ala kī wazāḥat*, (Karachi: Dār al-Iftā’ wa al-Irshād, 1995), 8-11. [Urd]

## Legacy

Rashīd Aḥmad had a large number of scholars and common Muslims as his disciples. He was very strict in giving successorship. In spite of this, he had many successors. Amongst these, the five main ones were Khalīl Aḥmad Sahāranpūrī, Şiddīq Aḥmad Ambehtvī, Maḥmūd-ul-Ḥasan, ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Rāipūrī, and Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī. Each of these had hundreds if not thousands of disciples. Many of the other successors also became prominent shaykhs. Moreover, all Deobandī scholars and rank and file including those who had not done *bay‘ah* with him considered Rashīd Aḥmad to be the leader of their *jamā‘at*. Thus, his influence spread far and wide.

Other prominent people who were his disciples even though they did not receive successorship from him include the Kāndhlavī brothers, Muḥammad Yaḥyā and Muḥammad Ilyās. The former was so much trusted by Rashīd Aḥmad that he was allowed to use Rashīd Aḥmad’s stamp on his own *fatwās*. Muḥammad Ilyās had been brought to Gangoh by his brother when he was very young. He spent 10 years in Rashīd Aḥmad’s company. After Rashīd Aḥmad’s demise, both did *bay‘ah* with his principal successor Khalīl Aḥmad and immediately received successorship. The two will be discussed later.

## **EXPANSION OF THE ṬARĪQAH AND ARTICULATION OF DEOBANDĪ TAŞAWWUF: MAWLĀNĀ ASHRAF ‘ALĪ THĀNVĪ (1863-1943)**

Ashraf ‘Alī Thanvī marks a watershed in the history of the Deobandī movement in general and Deobandī *taşawwuf* in particular. In Deobandī circles, he is called “Mulḥiq al-Aşāghir bi al-Akābir” (the one who joined the juniors to the seniors). Although junior in age to most of Imdād Allāh’s successors, he received *ijāzah* from him and became one of his top three successors; the other two being Muḥammad

Qāsim Nānautvī and Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī. He can easily be termed as the “Main Articulator” of Deobandī ideas and his period of activity marks the second phase of Deobandī *taṣawwuf*. His works run into hundreds and his impact upon the Indian Muslim community was huge. Therefore, his life, his works, his teachers, his shaykhs, and his associates need to be studied in detail.

### **Origins and Family**

Born in 1863 at Thana Bhawan in Doaba, he belonged to a Fārūqī family which traced its descent to Aḥmad Sirhindī and then on to Caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. His father was the manager of a feudal estate in Meerut. Older of two brothers, only Ashraf ‘Alī was chosen to pursue traditional Islamic education. During his early education in Thana Bhawan, his main teacher was Fateh Muḥammad (d. c. 1904) who was a successor of Imdād Allāh. After his basic education, he traveled to Deoband to enroll in the Dār al-‘Ulūm there. He stayed there for five years and graduated in 1883. His main teachers there were Muḥammad Ya‘qūb Nānautvī and Maḥmūd-ul-Ḥasan. The former was a successor of Imdād Allāh and also the head teacher there, while the latter was a main successor of Rashīd Aḥmad. Ashraf ‘Alī benefitted a lot from them and held them in extreme respect. His teachers trusted him so much that even before graduation, Muḥammad Ya‘qūb had assigned Ashraf ‘Alī the responsibility for giving *fatwās*.<sup>71</sup> Later, Ashraf ‘Alī would reminisce that Muḥammad Ya‘qūb’s lectures were in fact a gathering of *tawajjuh* (a shaykh giving focused spiritual attention to someone).

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<sup>71</sup> Sayyid Sulaymān Nadvī, “Āsār ‘ilmiā,” in Ghulām Muḥammad, *Ḥayāt-e-Ashraf*, (Karachi: Maktaba Thānvī, 2003), 106. [Urd]



## Spiritual Training

Thana Bhawan had been the seat of the three principal successors of Miānjī Nūr Muḥammad, namely, Shaykh Muḥammad, Ḥāfiẓ Zāmin, and Imdād Allāh. Upon Ashraf ‘Alī’s birth, Shaykh Muḥammad is reported to have said, “Alhamdulillah, my replacement has arrived.”<sup>72</sup> Imdād Allāh was also a Fārūqī and was Ashraf ‘Alī’s distant relative. Later, when Ashraf ‘Alī was 19, he did *bay‘ah* to him. At about the same time, he had finished his studies at Dār al-‘Ulūm, Deoband. Ashraf ‘Alī had been keen to do *bay‘ah* with Rashīd Aḥmad. However, the latter refused, probably to test his resolve. When Rashīd Aḥmad was going for Hajj in 1882, Ashraf ‘Alī requested him to take his letter to Imdād Allāh. In this letter, he had requested Imdād Allāh to intercede on his behalf with Rashīd Aḥmad so that the latter would accept him in *bay‘ah*. Upon this, Imdād Allāh himself accepted him in *bay‘ah*. Three years later, Ashraf ‘Alī traveled to Makkah for Hajj and did *bay‘ah* with Imdād Allāh face to face.

The period from 1882 till 1889/1890 marks a period of low Sufi activity for Ashraf ‘Alī. He did correspond regularly with his shaykh during this period. However, his scholarly engagements hindered his progress. Beginning in 1889/1890, he started devoting himself to Sufi practices. Finally, in 1892/1893, he decided to go to Makkah and spend time with his shaykh as per the latter’s wishes. This stay lasted for six months. During this stay, he received a lot of attention from his shaykh and his spiritual rise was quick. At the end of this stay, just before leaving for India, Imdād Allāh made him his successor.

After returning from Makkah, Ashraf ‘Alī engaged in teaching for a while but later withdrew from everything and settled down in Thana Bhawan to dedicate himself

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<sup>72</sup> Qurayshī, *Ma‘ārif al-akābir*, 200.

fully to Sufi activities. This was in 1897. This marks the re-activation of “Khānqah Imdādiā” which remained active until his death in 1943.

Ashraf ‘Alī’s outlook was very similar to his shaykh’s. Imdād Allāh is reported to have said of him: “He is fully like me.”<sup>73</sup> However, Ashraf ‘Alī’s personality was also deeply affected by Rashīd Aḥmad. Whereas, he had formally done *bay‘ah* with Imdād Allāh, his first intention had been Rashīd Aḥmad. After the *bay‘ah*, his devotion to Rashīd Aḥmad did not go away. He still regarded Rashīd Aḥmad as a shaykh and behaved like a disciple with respect to him. In fact, Imdād Allāh reinforced this attitude of his by declaring that Rashīd Aḥmad was his substitute in India. However, the otherwise harmonious relationship between Ashraf ‘Alī and Rashīd Aḥmad was put to the test when Rashīd Aḥmad came to know of Ashraf ‘Alī’s somewhat non-Deobandī tendencies. These were in line with Imdād Allāh’s viewpoints. As a result, a lengthy correspondence ensued between Ashraf ‘Alī and Rashīd Aḥmad.<sup>74</sup> Finally, Ashraf ‘Alī relented and even though initially he had fully agreed with Imdād Allāh, after this correspondence, he became fully Deobandī-ized.

### **Main Contributions**

Ashraf ‘Alī was a prolific writer and a frequent speaker. His focus was *taṣawwuf*. However, a survey of his works shows that he dealt with almost all Islamic sciences. At the same time, he commissioned some of his prominent scholar disciples to produce works on *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth* and *fiqh*. These include the *ḥadīth* cum *fiqh* masterpiece *I‘lā’ al-Sunan* [Raising the *Sunnahs*], which was prepared by his nephew Zafar Aḥmad ‘Usmānī at his uncle’s behest.

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<sup>73</sup> Muḥammad, *Ḥayāt-e-Ashraf*, 67.

<sup>74</sup> See Mīrathī, *Makātib-e-Rashīdia*, 150-173.

Many of his speeches and utterances including those dealing with *taṣawwuf* were transcribed and later published in his lifetime. This resulted in dozens of works. Moreover, many of his works were summarized or simplified. The result is the huge number of works that bear his name. These reportedly number almost a thousand. Some of these were penned in Arabic and Persian but the vast majority is in Urdu. Through this extensive literature, he made an attempt to present a comprehensive understanding of *dīn*. His copious output and huge following led his devotees to call him the “*Mujaddid-e-Millat*” (*mujaddid* of the nation).

### ***Qur’an, Ḥadīth and Fiqh***

Ashraf ‘Alī composed a number of works on Qur’anic sciences as well as *tafsīr*. These range from basic texts for teaching rules of *tajwīd* to his master-piece in *tafsīr*, *Bayān al-Qur’ān* [Exposition of the Qur’an], which was written for ‘*ulamā*’ in Urdu. In *ḥadīth*, he primarily focused on *fiqh al-ḥadīth*, i.e., providing proofs for legal opinions from *ḥadīth*. Although this kind of work was long over-due in the Ḥanafī school but it had acquired greater importance in the milieu of colonial India where a group amongst the Ahl-e-Ḥadīs had been consistently saying that Ḥanafī *fiqh* was disconnected from the main sources of Islamic law, namely, Qur’an and *Sunnah*. Through *I’lā’ al-Sunan*, which he commissioned, he sought to disprove that. This work prepared by Zafar Aḥmad ‘Usmānī built upon a previous shorter work by Ashraf ‘Alī. It is arranged in the order of *al-Hidāyah* [The guidance], the main Ḥanafī text used in the sub-continent. It contains *ḥadīth* proofs for all the *fiqh* rulings that appear in *al-Hidāyah* along with scholarly *ḥadīth* analysis. Moreover, Ashraf ‘Alī wrote *Behishtī Zewar* [Heavenly Ornaments] to serve as a handbook for Muslim women. He claimed to have filled it with all that a Muslim woman needs to know. His *fatwās*

were compiled together in four volumes and were published as *Imdād al-fatāwā* [Help for legal rulings].

### ***Works on Taṣawwuf***

As mentioned above, his focus was *taṣawwuf*. His Sufi works range from the beginner level text *Qasd al-sabīl* [The optimal way] to the advanced level *al-Takashshuf ‘an muhimmat al-taṣawwuf* [Unveiling of the important matters of *taṣawwuf*] (henceforth *al-Takashshuf*) and *al-Tasharruf bi ma‘rifat aḥādīth al-taṣawwuf* [Honour through knowing the *ḥādīths* of *taṣawwuf*] (henceforth *al-Tasharruf*). *Al-Takashshuf* is a collection of various short treatises on different aspects of *taṣawwuf*. Some of these are in Persian while most are in Urdu. *Al-Tasharruf* is a collection of the various *ḥādīths* related to *taṣawwuf*. The first part is a translation of al-‘Irāqī’s *takhrīj* (identifying the sources) of the *ḥādīths* occurring in al-Ghazālī’s *Iḥyā’*. The second part consists of *ḥādīths*, which appear in *Mathnawī* of Rūmī. The third part is based on *ḥādīths* selected from *al-Maqāsid al-ḥasanah* [The good goals]. In the copy of *al-Tasharruf* that we have before us, there is no mention of the author of *al-Maqāsid al-ḥasanah*. Our guess is that this is the work of al-Sakhāwī. The third and fourth part consists of selected *ḥādīths* from *al-Jāmi‘ al-ṣaghīr* [The small collection] of al-Suyuṭī and *Kunūz al-ḥaqā’iq* [Treasure of realities]. Again there is no mention of the author of *Kunūz al-ḥaqā’iq*. Apparently, Ashraf ‘Alī assumed that the ‘*ulamā*’ would already be familiar with these books and the common people were not in need of these details. Ashraf ‘Alī’s correspondence with his disciples was also collected and published as *Tarbiyyat al-sālik* [Training the wayfarer].

The *malfūzāt* (utterances) genre is a prominent feature of South Asian *taṣawwuf*. Many such compilations exist, some authentic some apocryphal. Most of these were published without being reviewed by the shaykh himself. Ashraf ‘Alī’s case is different. Not only were his utterances recorded by his disciples but he also reviewed them before publication. One such publication is the ten volume *al-Ifādāt al-yawmiyyah min al-ifādāt al-qawmiyyah* [Daily effulgences from effulgences of the nation] (the shorter Urdu version is *Ifāzāt-e-yaumia*) which itself is a major source of guidance for those aspiring on the spiritual path. More of such compilations continue to be published. In at least one case, a prominent publishing house, Idāra Tālīfāt-e-Ashrafia has been set up in Multan, Pakistan that is dedicated to Ashraf ‘Alī’s works. It continues to bring forth newer publications based upon previous ones. So far, twenty-five volumes of his utterances have been published by it titled *Malfūzāt-e-Ḥakīm-ul-ummat* [Utterances of the Sage of the nation]. These have incorporated the afore-mentioned *Ifāzāt-e-yaumia*, as well as other collections.

Ashraf ‘Alī’s shaykh Imdād Allāh had a special relationship with *Mathnawī* of Rūmī and used to teach it to his chosen disciples. Ashraf ‘Alī wrote an eighteen volume Urdu commentary on it titled *Kalīd-e-Masnavī* [Key to the *Mathnawī*]. In this, he harmonized the apparent conflicts between *taṣawwuf* and *Sharī‘ah*. Furthermore, he wrote *‘Irfān-e-Ḥāfiẓ* [Gnosis of Ḥāfiẓ] to explain the subtleties found in Ḥāfiẓ’s *Dīvān* [Collection of poems]. The purpose of these commentaries was to dispel and clarify the misunderstandings and misinterpretations of pseudo-Sufis.

He also commissioned a number of translations of Arabic Sufi works. These include *Tablīgh-e-dīn* [Preaching of religion], which is the translation of three out of four parts of al-Ghazālī’s *al-Arba‘ūn* [The forty]. It was done by ‘Āshiq Ilāhī Mīrathī at Ashraf ‘Alī’s behest. Others are some of the works of the Egyptian scholar Sufi

‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha‘rānī. These include *al-Durr al-maḥḥūd* [Layered pearl], *Ādāb al-‘ubudiyyah* [Etiquettes of worship], and *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* [The great ranks]. Some of these were translated completely while sections of others were translated. He also summarized and translated al-Qushayrī’s famous work, *al-Risālah al-qushayriyyah*.

Amongst the Sufi *ṭarīqahs* prevalent in the sub-continent, the Naqshbandīs have had a reputation for strict adherence to *Sharī‘ah* and upholding the *Sunnah*. On the other hand, the Chishtīs are notorious for engaging in musical auditions, ignoring the Qur’an and *ḥadīth* and sidestepping the *Sunnah*. Ashraf ‘Alī decided to address this perception and composed a work titled *al-Sunnah al-jaliyyah fi al-Jishtiyyah al-‘aliyyah* [The manifest tradition regarding the sublime Chishtiyyah]. In this book, he has sought to demonstrate that mainstream Chishtī masters have always been upholders of *Sharī‘ah* and have adhered to the *Sunnah*. He starts by engaging in a comparative analysis of the salient features of the Chishtī system and the Naqshbandī system. This is followed by proofs from the statements and actions of famous Chishtī masters. Lastly, he provides explanations for the apparent violations of *Sharī‘ah* found in their actions or statements.<sup>75</sup>

### **Opinion Regarding ibn ‘Arabī and ibn Taymiyyah**

Ashraf ‘Alī articulated the balanced opinion that Deobandī elders and scholars had towards the two apparently irreconcilable figures of ibn ‘Arabī and ibn Taymiyyah. He regarded ibn ‘Arabī as a great Sufi and penned a short treatise titled *al-Tanbīh al-ṭarabī fī tanzīh ibn al-‘Arabī* [Delightful notification for the exoneration of ibn ‘Arabī]. He states that based on the combined testimony of so many Sufis it would be

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<sup>75</sup> Ernst & Lawrence, 121-123.

improper to not regard him as a *walī* of Allah. At the same time, his statements that are misleading should not be accepted at face value. Rather, they should be interpreted in a way that they are harmonious with his other statements regarding the supremacy of *Sharī‘ah*.<sup>76</sup> In this work, he has relied heavily upon the works of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha‘rānī. Similarly, even though he disagreed with ibn Taymiyyah on a number of issues, he still regarded him with great respect. This is indicated by his use of the title “Shaykh al-Islam” (literally, master of Islam) for him.

### Reforms

Most of his works had a reformist element in one form or another. He also wrote certain works specifically to address the social problems plaguing Muslim society. The main work in this regard is the compilation of his lectures, which were transcribed in real-time and reviewed by him. To date, twenty-seven volumes have been published. The whole collection is called *Mawā‘iz Ḥakīm-ul-ummat* [Sermons of the Sage of the nation]. Another work is *Ḥayāt al-Muslimīn* [Life of Muslims] of which he was especially proud. He used to say that “of all my books I think this will be the means for my deliverance.”<sup>77</sup> Other works which belong to the same category are *Iṣlāḥ al-rusūm* [Reformation of customs], *Safā‘-e-mu‘āmalāt* [Transparency of dealings], and *Iṣlāḥ inqilāb-e-ummat* [Reform of the revolution of the nation].

Ashraf ‘Alī presented a new approach to *taṣawwuf* within the bounds set by Rashīd Aḥmad. It was simplified and made practical for every Muslim to follow no matter what his or her occupation. Staying in a *khānqah* for sometime was still considered important but withdrawing permanently from society was not advocated.

<sup>76</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *al-Tanbīh al-ṭarabī...*, 1-2.

<sup>77</sup> Muḥammad Iqbāl Qurayshī, *Ḥazrat Ḥakīm-ul-ummat Mawlānā Ashraf ‘Alī Ṣāhib Thānvī kay ‘ilmī aur ‘amalī mujaddidāna kārnāmay*, (Harun Abad: Idāra Tālīfāt-e-Ashrafīa, n.d.), 215. [Urd]

Deobandī sources always mention that Thānvī did away with a number of old Sufi customs and traditions such as the elaborate rituals for *khānqahs* and for interacting with the shaykh, which were seen to be impeding the way of the seeker. They don't normally give details about these rituals apart from their hindering effect. In any case, the attitude was in line with the Deobandī understanding of *taṣawwuf*, which tended to focus on the goals and was willing to do away with means that were perceived to be no longer necessary. Thus, *taṣawwuf* which had historically been synonymous with the path of friendship (*tarīq al-wilāyah*) came closer to the path of prophet hood (*tarīq al-nubuwwah*). In this, Ashraf 'Alī was following in the footsteps of Sirhindī, Shāh Walī Allāh, Sayyid Aḥmad and Rashīd Aḥmad.

### **Successors and Associates**

Ashraf 'Alī had thousands of followers. Like Rashīd Aḥmad before him, most of the top scholars of his time were affiliated with him. These included Sayyid Sulaymān Nadvī (head of Dār al-'Ulūm Nadwat al-'Ulamā', Lucknow), Muftī Muḥammad Ḥasan (founder of Jāmi'a Ashrafia, Lahore), Muftī Muḥammad Shafī' (first the head *muftī* at Dār al-'Ulūm Deoband; later the founder of Dār al-'Ulūm Karachi), Muḥammad Ṭayyib (the *muhtamim* of Dār al-'Ulūm Deoband), Khayr Muḥammad Jālandharī (the founder of Jāmi'a Khayr al-Madāris, Multan), Masīḥ Allāh Khān, Waṣī Allāh Khān, 'Abd al-Ghanī Phūlpūrī, Faqīr Muḥammad and others. Through his successors, whose numbers reached more than a hundred, and through the many thousands who were affiliated with him in some way, his teachings spread. Because Ashraf 'Alī had been tacitly pro-Pakistan, many of his scholar disciples were active in Pakistan movement; and after the creation of Pakistan, they moved there. Thus, many of the prominent Islamic *madrasahs* in Pakistan were founded by his associates.



These include the afore-mentioned Jāmi‘a Ashrafia, Lahore; Jāmi‘a Khayr al-Madāris, Multan; and Dār al-‘Ulūm, Karachi.

Each of his successors had large number of followers. Some of these included prominent political and business figures. However, Ashraf ‘Alī’s following was not confined to the elect and embraced in its fold thousands of ordinary Muslims. Moreover, his lectures and short treatises targeted the general Muslim audience; many of whom became devoted to him without formally doing *bay‘ah* with him.

### **Political Stances**

Ashraf ‘Alī had remained aloof from politics. However, his focus on *taṣawwuf* also affected the way he viewed politics. He firmly believed that active political participation without adequate character reformation was a recipe for disaster from an Islamic perspective. During the Khilafat Movement which was being supported by prominent Doebandī ‘*ulamā*’, he remained aloof stating that this political agitation without character reformation amounted to putting the cart before the horse. He remained firm in this position at the cost of virulent opposition and strictly avoided all kinds of political action.<sup>78</sup>

### **MUḤAMMAD ILYĀS KĀNDHLAVĪ (1885/1886-1943)**

The story of Muḥammad Ilyās appears to be somewhat of a digression when it comes to *taṣawwuf*. His Tablīghī Jamā‘at (Preaching Society) is not really known for its whole-hearted support of *taṣawwuf*. Nevertheless, it is important to study his linkages with other Doebandī shaykhs and to see how that affected his work. Although, he was

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<sup>78</sup> For a somewhat detailed exposition of his political approach as well as dealings with various political issues, see ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Khān, *Sīrat-e-Ashraf*, (Multan: Idāra Tālīfāt-e-Ashrafia, n.d.), 2:214-264. [Urd]

a designated successor of Khalīl Aḥmad in the four main *ṭarīqahs* and had many disciples of his own; yet he did not go the usual route of typical Sufi shaykhs. Rather, he started something which popularized Deobandī *maslak* and which was destined to have a mixed effect upon *taṣawwuf*, both positive and negative. The Tablīghī Jamā‘at that he founded is today, perhaps, the largest Muslim organization in the world. Its annual gatherings in Pakistan and Bangladesh rival the Hajj in terms of numbers.

### **Early Years, Education and Spiritual Training**

Born in 1885/1886, he was the younger brother of Muḥammad Yaḥyā Kāndhlavī (d. 1916) and was 15 years his junior. At the age of 10, Muḥammad Yaḥyā took him with himself to Gangoh where he was based. For the next 10 years, Muḥammad Ilyās studied there primarily with his brother and enjoyed the company and attention of Rashīd Aḥmad and the many scholars and Sufis who thronged Gangoh then. From the beginning, Muḥammad Ilyās had poor health. At one point, it even threatened his studies but he pressed on and completed his studies. Most of this was done with Muḥammad Yaḥyā but a few books of *ḥadīth* were also done with Maḥmūd-ul-Ḥasan, a prominent successor of Rashīd Aḥmad and the head teacher at Dār al-‘Ulūm, Deoband.

Muḥammad Ilyās formally did *bay‘ah* with Rashīd Aḥmad during the course of his studies. This was unusual for Rashīd Aḥmad. Normally, he would not accept any student as a disciple, but Muḥammad Ilyās was an exception. His biographers mention that Rashīd Aḥmad gave him special status and did not consider him to be a distraction from his *khalwah* (isolation).<sup>79</sup> However, Rashīd Aḥmad passed away before Muḥammad Ilyās could complete his spiritual journey. He approached

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<sup>79</sup> Sayyid Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadvī, *Mawlānā Muḥammad Ilyās aur unkī dīnī da‘wat*, (Karachi: Majlis Nashriāt-e-Islām, n.d.), 54. [Urd]

Maḥmūd-ul-Ḥasan but the latter suggested Khalīl Aḥmad Sahāranpūrī. Muḥammad Ilyās did *bay‘ah* with Khalīl Aḥmad and started his spiritual journey with him.

*Tawḥīd-e-maṭlab* [oneness of goal] is an important element of Sufi methodology. It means that the disciple believes his shaykh to be the most beneficial for him even though there might be other legitimate shaykhs in the world. In other words, this concept requires complete dedication to one shaykh and absolutely no seeking of benefit from other shaykhs except with the permission of one’s shaykh. This was true of Deobandī shaykhs as well. However, since they all shared a similar outlook; therefore, they would allow their followers to maintain links with other Deobandī shaykhs and even seek benefit from them. Thus, while Muḥammad Ilyās was formally a disciple of Khalīl Aḥmad, he also maintained very close contact with Maḥmūd-ul-Ḥasan, ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Rāipūrī and Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī.<sup>80</sup> It is also reported that he did *bay‘ah* with Maḥmūd-ul-Ḥasan for jihad.<sup>81</sup>

### **Beginnings of *Tablīgh***

Both Muḥammad Ilyās and his shaykh taught at Mazāhir al-‘Ulūm, Saharanpur. Khalīl Aḥmad was the head teacher there while Muḥammad Ilyās had joined as a regular teacher in 1910. He taught there for the next 8 years until he moved to Bastī Nizām al-Dīn where his elder brother’s death had left his father’s *madrasah* and mosque unattended. This was with the advice and approval of his shaykh.

Once in Bastī Nizām al-Dīn, Muḥammad Ilyās set out to carry the task, which his brother and father had been engaged in. This included managing the mosque and its associated *madrasah*. But more importantly, this involved sporadic trips to the nearby region of Mewat with whom both had developed contacts and which continued

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

to supply most of the students in the *madrasah*. Muḥammad Ilyās began to expand this work. He went about setting up *maktabs* (local part-time schools for teaching basics of Islam and Qur'an recitation). The idea was to expand the scope of Islamic education with the hope that people will become better Muslims through education. However, the results were not according to his expectations. Gradually, he grew disillusioned.

### **Tablīghī Jamā'at**

In 1926, he performed Hajj in the company of his shaykh and upon his return laid the foundation of Tablīghī Jamā'at. By this time, he had already been made a successor by Khalīl Aḥmad. Biographical sources point out the inspirational origin of the Tablīghī Jamā'at. An incident is mentioned that while Muḥammad Ilyās was in Madinah, he received inspiration (*ilhām*) for some important task.<sup>82</sup> At the time, he was confused. What could the task be? Later, upon his return to India, ideas began coming to him. These were the beginnings of the now well-known *tablīgh* activity. We do not have enough information to know whether this inspiration was through a dream or not. One thing is for sure, though, the divinely inspired nature of *tablīgh* work continues to legitimate *tablīgh* activity for many of his followers. Muḥammad Ilyās is reported to have said that he would wonder what good could be achieved by merely acting like a typical shaykh with a few hundred followers.<sup>83</sup> The whole *ummah* was submerged in a sea of darkness and ignorance. Something more far-reaching had to be done. This was to be the *tablīgh* work.

He utilized the psychological principle of Chishtīs which was to focus on the good in people thereby causing the evil in them to become weak. Similarly, the idea

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 245.

of keeping good company was employed to create mobile *khānqahs* where everyone got a chance to change his company for a while.<sup>84</sup> Commenting on this, Khaliq Aḥmad Nizami has stated that Muḥammad Ilyās had absorbed the principles of Chishtī *ṭarīqah* perfectly and disseminated them through his Tablīghī Jamā‘at.<sup>85</sup> The basic principles of *tablīgh* were laden with Deobandī Sufi ideas. There was strong emphasis on seeking religious knowledge, on doing *dhikr* (whether *Sunnah*- or shaykh-prescribed) and on giving all Muslims respect.

For his *tablīgh* activity, Muḥammad Ilyās decided to focus on the Mewātīs. He and his family had a long history with them and he felt that they were in immediate need of his help. Long before he started his movement, his father Muḥammad Ismā‘īl had been based in Bastī Niẓām al-Dīn in Delhi, at the very edge of the Mewat region. Muḥammad Ismā‘īl’s shaykh, Muẓaffar Ḥusayn Kāndhlavī had been an itinerant preacher. He would travel to different towns and villages and preach to the Muslims there. Sometimes, he would stay in one place for a few days and remind Muslims of their religious duties. Muḥammad Ismā‘īl changed the method a little bit. He did not undertake any tours. Rather, he paid the Mewātī labourers who had come to Delhi for work, to study Islam with him instead. This was the beginning of his relationship with Mewat and its people.

After his death in 1898, his son, Muḥammad took his position. He continued to run the mosque and the *madrasah* and maintained links with the Mewātīs. After his death in 1918, Muḥammad Ilyās moved there. The pattern of dynastic succession is clearly visible here. In fact, the main reason given for Muḥammad Ilyās’s move to Bastī Niẓām al-Dīn was that the people there wanted someone from the family of Muḥammad Ismā‘īl to take his place. This is similar to the process of *gaddī nashīnī*

<sup>84</sup> Mājīd ‘Alī Khān, *Tasalsulāt-e-Imdādiya*, (Saharanpur: Kutub Khāna Akhtarī, n.d.), 28. [Urd]

<sup>85</sup> Niẓāmī, 275-276.

which takes place at traditional *khānqahs*. *Gaddī nashīnī* is a South Asian term which literally means having someone sit on a cushion. In South Asian *taṣawwuf*, it refers to having the successor of the shaykh of the *khānqah* take his place as the new shaykh of the *khānqah*. For centuries, this has been a dynastic affair. Deobandīs were against this kind of *gaddī nashīnī*; but it seems it was hard to avoid it in the South Asian milieu. To be sure, there were no formal ceremonies and Muḥammad Ilyās was definitely qualified to take this position but the dynastic element cannot be ignored.

There are also other familiar Sufi themes. Once, Muḥammad Ilyās told Rashīd Aḥmad that he feels burdened when he engages in *dhikr*. Upon hearing this, Rashīd Aḥmad told him that Muḥammad Qāsim had said the same to Imdād Allāh and he had told him that Allah will use him for some task of His. This incident is often recounted by his biographers as impending signs of his future greatness.<sup>86</sup>

The work started by Muḥammad Ilyās continues today without any central office or bureaucracy. Yet this organization of millions is functioning smoothly and remains united. The devotees see this as the result of the sincerity and strength of faith of Muḥammad Ilyās.

### ***Methodology of Tablīgh***

Muḥammad Ilyās considered Islam to be a practical way of life. He felt that merely studying books was not enough to make one a good Muslim. Rather, one had to live amongst proper Muslims to see how Islam was to be practiced.<sup>87</sup> The idea was to make the Mewātīs travel to Doaba which Muḥammad Ilyās felt was the most Islamized region in India. They would go around reminding the common Muslims of their faith and their duties towards Allah. They were also instructed to visit the

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<sup>86</sup> ‘Alī Nadvī, *Maulānā Muḥammad...*, 54.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

‘*ulamā*’ and shaykhs in that region with the intention of seeking spiritual benefit from them.<sup>88</sup> It was considered against proper etiquette for the virtually ignorant Mewātīs to go around inviting ‘*ulamā*’ to *tablīgh*. By associating with the ‘*ulamā*’ and shaykhs of Doaba, Mewātīs would be exposed to Islam at a deeper and higher level; and by reminding common Muslims of their faith and their duties, they would be strengthening their own faith and practice. Through these two things, Muḥammad Ilyās felt that Mewātīs could be transformed. He claimed that this constant movement for the sake of *dīn* was directly inspired from the example of the Prophet (pbuh) and his companions.<sup>89</sup>

Muḥammad Ilyās regarded *Tablīghī Jamā‘at* to be a mobile *madrasah* and *khānqah*. The principle was the same; make a person leave his usual environment and cause him to spend time among the pious, learning the knowledge and practice of *dīn*. The difference was that the *madrasah* and the *khānqah* were not in one place any more. Rather, they were constantly on the move.<sup>90</sup> Secondly, there was no one shaykh. Rather, the pious were to serve as shaykhs as a group. This is similar to the way the early generations of Muslims had pursued *taṣawwuf*. Instead of a single shaykh, they would associate with a number of pious people and the cumulative effect was the same as that of a single shaykh. Muḥammad Ilyās realized that people no longer had the commitment necessary for limiting oneself to one shaykh. Therefore, he drew inspiration from the example of the early generations. Like other Deobandīs, Muḥammad Ilyās was more inclined towards the path of prophet hood (*ṭarīq al-nubuwwah*). *Tablīgh* activity was a reflection of this attitude. ‘Abd al-Qādir Rāipūrī says that Muḥammad Ilyās had transformed *tablīgh* into *sulūk* (spiritual path). He

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>89</sup> Nu‘mānī, *Malfūzāt Maulānā...*, 74.

<sup>90</sup> ‘Alī Nadvī, *Maulānā Muḥammad...*, 106-107.

would interchange *khalwat* (isolation) with *jalwat* (being with people) and *jalwat* with *khalwat*.<sup>91</sup>

*Tablīgh* activity was solely focused on personal regeneration.<sup>92</sup> There was no political agenda. This is also a reflection of traditional Sufi behavior. Muḥammad Ilyās regarded religious knowledge and *dhikr* to be the main pillars of his work;<sup>93</sup> and between the two, *dhikr* was the backbone of everything.<sup>94</sup> Many individual members of Tablīghī Jamā‘at were also his disciples. Although, Muḥammad Ilyās regarded *tablīgh* activity as the most important task at hand; he was also conscious of the negative effects of constant mingling with other people. One of the important elements of traditional *taṣawwuf* is constant isolation.<sup>95</sup> *Tablīgh* was its opposite. As a way to undo its negative effects, after every *tablīgh* tour, Muḥammad Ilyās would go and spend three days in *i‘tikāf* in the *khānqah* at Raipur. This echoes a familiar Sufi theme.

Muḥammad Ilyās was conscious of the need for consolidation of *tablīgh* activity. However, in spite of his best intentions, *tablīgh* work’s expansion led to some decline in quality. Muḥammad Ilyās wanted ‘*ulamā*’ to fully commit themselves to *tablīgh*. This would help maintain the quality of this work. In this, he was disappointed. Many ‘*ulamā*’ had objections to his over-emphasis on *tablīgh*. Gradually, many ‘*ulamā*’ did join Tablīghī Jamā‘at but their numbers were still not enough to allow every *tablīgh* group to have a scholar in it. This lack of trained ‘*ulamā*’ still haunts Tablīghī Jamā‘at and is considered by many to be one of the reasons for the deviations of rank and file Deobandīs. Just as there were not enough

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<sup>91</sup> Laylpūrī, 33.

<sup>92</sup> Metcalf, *Traditionalist Islamic...*, 8.

<sup>93</sup> Nu‘mānī, *Malfūzāt Maulānā ...*, 30-40.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>95</sup> See Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, translated from Persian into Urdu by ‘Āshiq Ilāhī Mīrathī, ed. Ismā‘īl Memon, (Buffalo: Dār al-‘Ulūm al-Madania, n.d.), 75.



‘*ulamā*’ in *tablīgh*; similarly, there were not enough Sufis participating in *tablīgh*. This issue has worsened with time.

In this regard, it should be mentioned that the first three *amīrs* of *Tablīghī Jamā‘at*, viz., Muḥammad Ilyās, Muḥammad Yūsuf and In‘ām-ul-Ḥasan were scholar Sufis and the top leadership in India still boasts many Sufis. However, the current head of the *Tablīghī Jamā‘at* in Pakistan, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb is neither a scholar nor a Sufi. In fact, he remains firmly opposed to *taṣawwuf* and sees it as an impediment to *tablīgh* activities.<sup>96</sup> He started out as a disciple of ‘Abd al-Qādir Rāipūrī but soon diverged and openly considers *taṣawwuf* as a distraction for his group members. As to whether this is a case of doubting *taṣawwuf*’s validity or that of its utility for *tablīgh* work remains to be seen.

#### **ATTEMPTS AT REVIVING DEOBANDĪ TAṢAWWUF: MĀWLANĀ MUḤAMMAD ZAKARIYYĀ KĀNDHLAVĪ (1898-1982)**

Muḥammad Zakariyyā can be termed as the “Reviver of Deobandī *taṣawwuf*.” He is the last in the long line of prominent scholar Sufis who epitomized Deobandī characteristics. These were the combination of extreme piety and erudite scholarship, balancing teaching and writing with the rigours of *khānqah* life. He also had the ability to reconcile apparently contradicting personalities and provide guidance in times of difficulty and confusion. He is representative of the third stage of Deobandī *taṣawwuf* when all the great masters had passed away and rank and file Deobandīs were drifting towards a condition of apathy towards *taṣawwuf*. At this stage, he realized the need for restating the case for *taṣawwuf*. However, this time his primary audience was the rank and file Deobandīs. He traveled extensively, inside India and

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<sup>96</sup> Dr. Ismā‘īl Memon, Interview by Author, Buffalo, NY, USA, July 2009.

outside, to Britain, as well as South Africa, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. His successors spread far and wide and established *madrasahs* and *khānqahs*. The new development was that this time *khānqahs* were to be a part of the *madrasah*.

### **Early Childhood and Education**

Examining Muḥammad Zakariyyā's life story is extremely useful. It provides us with the opportunity to see how Sufi concepts were interwoven into the very fabric of these people's lives. The best source for this is his autobiography *Āp bītī* [Autobiography] or *Yād-e-ayyām* [Memoirs]. It is not an organized work; rather, these are accounts of his life-story that he dictated to his disciples at different times. It consists of seven volumes that were initially published separately but were later brought together. The current edition comprises two thick bindings.

Born in 1898 in Kandhla, Muḥammad Zakariyyā was the son of Muḥammad Yaḥyā Kāndhlavī who was the son of Muḥammad Ismā'īl Kāndhlavī. His uncle was Muḥammad Ilyās Kāndhlavī who was twelve years his senior. Zakariyyā tells us that from an early age he was lucky to enjoy the company of Rashīd Aḥmad. His father was Rashīd Aḥmad's confidant and personal assistant and served him for twelve years. When Zakariyyā was two and a half years old, his father brought him and his mother to live with him in Gangoh. At that time, Gangoh was a center of '*ulamā*' and Sufis. A large number of seekers of the Sufi way seeking Rashīd Aḥmad's guidance, and accomplished scholars wanting to learn *ḥadīth* from him had gathered there. Zakariyyā was lucky to be in the midst of this crowd. During this period of his life, he imbibed in himself the ethos of the Deobandī movement. For the next almost 10 years, he lived in Gangoh. Rashīd Aḥmad passed away in 1905 but Muḥammad Yaḥyā continued to stay in Gangoh until 1910. During this time, sometimes

Zakariyyā would go to Kandhla with his mother or father and stop on the way at different places where they had any relatives. Zakariyyā's memories of these trips are vivid and indicate that he was an intelligent and observant child. Kandhla itself was also a center of 'ulamā' and Sufis and the environment there reinforced the Gangoh environment. Other places where they stayed and the families they met were all people of noble descent (Sayyids or shaykhs of Arab origin). These families were characterized with the virtues of devotion to Allah, scholarship, high ambitiousness and hard work. All of these had a positive and lasting impact upon him.<sup>97</sup> However, the main effect was Gangoh and its environment. During this time, he enjoyed the attention and love of not only Rashīd Aḥmad but also his successors and other associates. Later on, he would reminisce about his time spent with Rashīd Aḥmad.

Zakariyyā's education was almost totally at the hands of his father. His father was extremely gifted and had an independent and unique approach to academics. The later academic superiority that Zakariyyā enjoyed over his peers had a lot to do with his father's methods. Only after he had completed the then prevalent course of studies, did he repeat a few books of *ḥadīth* with Khalīl Aḥmad Sahāranpūrī and that too upon the latter's insistence. This was immediately after his father had passed away. Undoubtedly his father was a great teacher and he preferred to teach his only son himself but there was another aspect to it as well. Respect towards the teacher is an extremely important element of the Islamic scholarly tradition. Disrespect towards the teacher is thought to make one lose one's knowledge acquired from that teacher. Respect has to be maintained inwardly, as well as outwardly. This is similar to the respect given to one's shaykh. Here, we see the two strands of academics and *taṣawwuf* coming together. Muḥammad Yaḥyā feared that Zakariyyā would not show

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<sup>97</sup> 'Alī Nadvī, *Sawānīḥ Ḥazrat...*, (Lucknow: Maktaba-e-Islām, 1982), 52.

enough respect towards his other teachers; and if he were to be disrespectful to any of his teachers, he would lose the knowledge acquired from him. The only ones that he actually respected were his father and his shaykh. So he should only be taught by them.<sup>98</sup>

### **Spiritual Training**

Zakariyyā's spiritual training began with his father. Here was a child born in a scholarly Sufi family who was from the beginning brought up by his father as an unruly disciple would be tackled by a stern shaykh. Muḥammad Zakariyyā mentions in *Āp bītī* that "my father was so strict with me that people used to think I was his stepson."<sup>99</sup> Physical beating was a regular feature of his disciplining. Although Muḥammad Yaḥyā's own shaykh Rashīd Aḥmad was against it and would occasionally reprimand him, Yaḥyā considered it necessary for proper disciplining. Zakariyyā has recounted with nostalgia numerous incidences of his childhood detailing his father's strict approach to him. Importantly, we do not find any negative feelings in him regarding this. Rather, we find him thankful to his father for working so hard to make him better. The primary purpose of this particular upbringing was to develop in him *ta'alluq ma'a Allāh* (connection with Allah). When he was 18, his father stopped disciplining him and upon inquiry said: "Oversight by elders is required only as long as *ta'alluq ma'a Allāh* is not achieved. Once that is achieved, it is no longer necessary. Thanks be to Allah, you have achieved it. Now I am not needed."<sup>100</sup>

Amongst the early figures of Deobandī *jamā'at*, *taṣawwuf* and academic activities were mixed and were quite inseparable. Khalīl Aḥmad was Zakariyyā's

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>99</sup> Muḥammad Mas'ūd 'Azīzī, *Sīrat Mawlānā Muḥammad Yaḥyā*, (Saharanpur: Kutub Khāna Yaḥyawī, 1998), 145. [Urd]

<sup>100</sup> Zakariyyā Kāndhlavī, *Āp bītī*, 1:32.

shaykh, as well as teacher. In 1915, a year after the above-mentioned incident in which his father told him he had developed *ta'alluq ma'a Allāh*, without his father's permission, he did *bay'ah* with Khalīl Aḥmad who was one of the principal successors of Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī and was also the new shaykh of his father and uncle.<sup>101</sup>

Although, he had done *bay'ah* with Khalīl Aḥmad; he was more inclined towards intellectual activities.<sup>102</sup> Recognizing this, his shaykh used a special method of *sulūk* with him called “*iktitāb*,” i.e., *sulūk* through writing.<sup>103</sup> Khalīl Aḥmad was the head teacher at Mazāhir al-‘Ulūm and Muḥammad Zakariyyā joined this *madrasah* in 1916. Khalīl Aḥmad had him work with him on a number of projects most notably, the twenty volume commentary on *Sunan Abū Dāwūd, Badhl al-majhūd fi ḥall Sunan Abī Dāwūd* [Exerting effort for the solution of *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*]. Work on this project began in 1916 and lasted almost until Khalīl Aḥmad's death in Madinah in 1927. Throughout most of this period, Muḥammad Zakariyyā remained with him in Saharanpur, as well as in Makkah and Madinah. He would spend long hours in the company of his shaykh working on this commentary, as well as doing other things for him. These included transcribing responses dictated by Khalīl Aḥmad to letters written to him by his disciples, making copies of books that he wanted, dealing with printers and publishers for printing his shaykh's works, as well as doing research on various projects for him.

During this time, he was the recipient of his shaykh's undivided attention, so much so that once someone asked him whether Muḥammad Zakariyyā was his son. Khalīl Aḥmad responded, “He is more than a son [to me].”<sup>104</sup> Finally, in 1927, when

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<sup>101</sup> ‘Alī Nadvī, *Sawāniḥ Ḥazrat...*, 63-64.

<sup>102</sup> Taqī al-Dīn Nadvī, *Ṣuḥbate bā awliyā*, (Karachi: H. M. Sa‘īd & Company, 1982), 78. [Urd]

<sup>103</sup> Najm al-Ḥaqq, *Quṭb al-aqtāb Mawlānā Zakariyyā kā maqām, ṭarz-e-tarbiat aur ijāzat-o-khilāfat*, (Junagadh: Dār al-‘Ulūm Ḥusayniya, n.d.), 23. [Urd]

<sup>104</sup> ‘Alī Nadvī, *Sawāniḥ Ḥazrat...*, 71.

Muḥammad Zakariyyā was returning from Madinah after finishing the work on *Badhl al-majhūd*, Khalīl Aḥmad gave him permission to take disciples in the four *ṭarīqahs*, namely, Chishtī, Naqshbandī, Qādirī and Suhrawardī. The main *ṭarīqah*, however, was Chishtī Ṣābirī. The *shajarah* (literally, tree, refers to the list of shaykhs that connect one to the Prophet (pbuh)) that is generally given to disciples by the successors of Muḥammad Zakariyyā is the Chishtī Ṣābirī one.

### **Relationship with Other Deobandī Shaykhs**

As mentioned above, Muḥammad Zakariyyā grew up in the *khānqah* of Rashīd Aḥmad. His father was the latter’s personal attendant, his confidant and his trusted *muftī*. Thus, from the beginning Zakariyyā received the kind of attention from the spiritual elite of his time, which others can only wish for. All senior shaykhs loved him. They recognized his intellectual talent, as well as spiritual strength. That is why Nadvī has declared that his becoming a student of *ḥadīth* with Khalīl Aḥmad was more a case of his being “*maṭlūb*” (the one desired) and less of being “*ṭālib*” (the one desiring).<sup>105</sup> Since most Deobandī Sufī shaykhs have similar orientation; therefore, even though he had done *bay‘ah* with Khalīl Aḥmad he also maintained links with other Deobandī Sufī shaykhs. This was with the approval of his shaykh. These included all the main shaykhs of his time, namely, ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Rāipūrī (a prominent successor of Rashīd Aḥmad), ‘Abd al-Qādir Rāipūrī (‘Abd al-Raḥīm’s main successor), Muḥammad Ilyās Kāndhlavī (Zakariyyā’s uncle and successor of Khalīl Aḥmad, as well as the head of Tablīghī Jamā‘at), Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, and Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī (successor of Rashīd Aḥmad as well as Maḥmūd-ul-Ḥasan). The list goes on but these are the main figures.

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 63-64

Amongst all these, Zakariyyā was especially close to ‘Abd al-Qādir and Ḥusayn Aḥmad. Together, the three were called “Akābir Salāsa.”<sup>106</sup> After his shaykh’s death, he sought ‘Abd al-Qādir as a guide. The latter loved him a lot and even though was older than him still treated him with respect and always referred to him as “shaykh.” He immediately gave him *ijāzah* (permission to take disciples) in his *ṭarīqah*. The relationship between these three is extremely interesting. ‘Abd al-Qādir was based in his *khānqah* in Raipur, which was away from main population centers. At the same time, he was interested in politics and supported a number of Islamic organizations. Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī was the main *ḥadīth* teacher at Dār al-‘Ulūm, Deoband and was an active political figure. He was the head of the Jamī‘at-e-‘Ulamā-e-Hind [Association of the scholars of India]. Zakariyyā was the odd one who had no interest in politics and was totally dedicated to teaching and writing. Yet, the Sufi connection brought these all together. In this connection, the theme often invoked in his biographies is that of being “*bay hama* and *bā hama*” (بے ہمہ اور با ہمہ) meaning “being with no one while simultaneously being with everyone.” This is a classic Sufi theme which indicates how an ideal Sufi should behave. His heart should not be connected to anyone except Allah but he should show affection to all at the same time. Zakariyyā was able to bring together people of diverse backgrounds on a single platform because of this ability of his.<sup>107</sup>

He had good relations with a number of senior shaykhs and as each passed away their disciples turned to him seeking guidance. These included the disciples of ‘Abd al-Qādir Rāipūrī and Ḥusayn Aḥmad. Gradually, he became the focus of a large number of seekers of the Sufi way, both his own and those coming to him from other shaykhs. Coupled with this was his role as the main patron of Tablīghī Jamā‘at, a role

<sup>106</sup> This is the Urdu version of the Arabic term *al-akābir al-thalāthah*.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 198-199.

he assumed after Muḥammad Ilyās's death. Pretty soon he became the main elder of the Deobandī *jamā'at* as a whole.

### **Main Contributions**

As mentioned above, Zakariyyā was more inclined towards academic pursuits. His works are a testimony to his erudition and understanding of *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*. His masterpiece is the six volume commentary on Mālik's Muwaṭṭa, *Awjaz al-masālik* [The shortest of paths].<sup>108</sup> Moreover, he penned marginalia on Rashīd Aḥmad's *ḥadīth* lectures which had been recorded by his father; and had them published. These are *Lāmi' al-darārī* [The extremely shining pearls] for *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *al-Kawkab al-durrī* [The shining star] for *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*.

However, amongst the common Muslims, he is more famous for the short treatises that he wrote on the virtues of various things such as *ṣalāh*, Ramaḍān, Qur'an, *dhikr*, Hajj, salutations upon the Prophet, *ṣadaqah* (charity), etc. Some of these were later put together in one book titled *Fazā'il-e-a'māl* [Virtues of deeds]. Most of these were written at the behest of his uncle Muḥammad Ilyās so that he could use these as prescribed reading materials for the members of the Tablīghī Jamā'at. It is undoubtedly the Tablīghī Jamā'at which can be credited with making these treatises popular. The tens of millions associated with Tablīghī Jamā'at in any way read it religiously. Then there are the many hundreds of thousands of other Muslims not affiliated with Tablīghī Jamā'at who also read this book.

Most of his other works, both published and unpublished, are of an academic nature. However, some of his works were penned specifically on the theme of

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<sup>108</sup> It has recently been published in ten volumes with the *taḥqīq* (verification) of Taqī al-Dīn Nadwī. See Muḥammad Zakariyyā Kāndhlavī, *Awjaz al-masālik*, ed. Taqī al-Dīn al-Nadwī, (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 2003). [Arb]



*taṣawwuf*. One of these is *Sharīʿat-o-ṭarīqat kā talāzum* [The inseparability of *Sharīʿah* and *taṣawwuf*] in which he has stated the Deobandī case for the inseparability of *Sharīʿah* and *taṣawwuf*. He also wrote biographies of all the shaykhs of his Chishtī *ṭarīqah*. This was published as *Tārīkh mashāʾikh-e-Chisht* [A history of the spiritual masters of Chisht]. His correspondence with his disciples, as well as seniors has been published in numerous volumes by various individuals. He is lucky to have many successors and associates who are keen to publish his letters. Some of these volumes are still in the process of being published. But the most important of all his Sufī works is his autobiography *Āp bītī*. He did not write it himself but dictated it over a long period of time to his many disciples. That is why it is not properly organized even though the final size of the book is huge; two thick volumes each numbering around eight hundred pages. Initially, it did not even have any table of contents. These were added later on by a publisher. This book, in particular, brings out his attitudes towards religion, towards his elders and the whole Deobandī approach. The whole book is suffused with accounts and anecdotes about his elders; about how they were committed to upholding the *Sharīʿah* at all cost; how they were extremely opposed to *bidʿah*; and how their whole lives were dedicated to pleasing Allah through doing His work.

He himself says that he used to flee from Sufī practices because he was more inclined towards academic activities.<sup>109</sup> However, as fate was to have it he became the centre of attention of an increasingly large number of seekers of the Sufī way. In the beginning, his role was primarily that of a shaykh giving counsel to only those who came to him. This was a somewhat laid back approach. His academic pursuits did not allow him to dedicate himself fully to *taṣawwuf*. Perhaps, his own interest in

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<sup>109</sup> ‘Alī Nadvī, *Sawāniḥ Ḥazrat...*,78.

these was also a factor. Later, old age and the many diseases, which afflicted him caused him to stop all kinds of academic activities. It is at this time that we find him talking more and more about *taṣawwuf* and emphasizing *dhikr* a lot. He narrates that once in Madinah after he had permanently moved there, he saw the Prophet (pbuh) in a dream.<sup>110</sup> With him was Rashīd Aḥmad. Rashīd Aḥmad said to the Prophet (pbuh), “Zakariyyā wants to stay here but we want to take some work from him.” The Prophet (pbuh) said, “Yes, he wants to stay here but we want to take some work from him [too].”

Zakariyyā writes that he kept thinking what this dream could mean. What was there that he could do? After a while, it dawned on him that Rashīd Aḥmad’s *khānqah*’s main activity was *dhikr* and these days (1970s), *khānqahs* have been abandoned and *dhikr* has been suspended. All the problems and tribulation (*fitnāhs*) afflicting Muslims can be traced to this lack of *dhikr*. Thus, he thought that the task which was to be given to him was that of reviving *khānqahs* and re-establishing *dhikr*. From this time onwards, we find this theme appearing again and again in his letters and utterances. Most of the trips that he undertook towards the end of his life were for this purpose. This includes at least two trips to Britain and Seychelles apart from his many trips to India, Pakistan and South Africa.

## Legacy

Zakariyyā had a large number of successors. Many of these are still alive. Some are based in India and Pakistan; and many others are based in South Africa, Saudi Arabia, UK and North America. Wherever these people have gone, they have set up *madrasahs* and *khānqahs*. These include some of the top *madrasahs* in each

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<sup>110</sup> See Muḥammad Iqbāl, *Zikr-o-i‘tikāf kī ahmiyyat*, (Lahore: Idāra-e-Islāmiāt, 1982), 7. [Urd]

respective country such as Dār al-‘Ulūm Bury in Britain; Dār al-‘Ulūm Zakariyyā in South Africa and Dār al-‘Ulūm al-Madania in USA. In most of these *madrasahs*, students are required to engage in the *khānqah* routine along with their regular academic studies. In fact, the idea is to integrate the two together. However, the rate of success is varied. In many places, the administrators have yet to properly organize the *madrasah* curriculum and routine to accommodate academics and *khānqah* activities in the form of an integrated whole. Nevertheless, the effects are visible. Most of the *madrasahs* run by his successors tend to be known for their emphasis on *taṣawwuf*. Students who graduate from these *madrasahs* might not all be Sufis but are at least well-disposed to it.

### ***Controversy***

Zakariyyā’s legacy became controversial in Deobandī circles because of the activities of some of his successors. The most prominent amongst these was Sūfī Iqbāl.<sup>111</sup> After the death of Muḥammad Zakariyyā, Sūfī Iqbāl had done *bay‘ah* with Muḥammad ‘Alawī Makkī, a Shādhilī shaykh based in Makkah. ‘Alawī Makkī was a major Sufi figure of Saudi Arabia and tended to agree with the Barelvīs on a number of issues. Deobandī-Barelvī divide is an inherent feature of Muslim societies of South Asia since the colonial years. We have already discussed the role that Imdād Allāh tried to play in bridging this divide and how it backfired. Almost a hundred years later, Sūfī Iqbāl tried to play the same role of a bridge builder. His new shaykh, ‘Alawī Makkī had composed a work titled *Mafāhīm yajibu ‘an tusaḥḥaha* [Notions that need to be corrected]. In this, he tried to clarify the positions of traditional Sufis on various issues which had been opposed by the Salafis.

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<sup>111</sup> His actual name was Muḥammad Iqbāl but is known amongst Deobandī circles as Sūfī Iqbāl.

Sūfī Iqbāl had the work translated into Urdu by a son of another successor of Muḥammad Zakariyyā, Ḥāfīz Ṣaghīr of Lahore. This translation, as well as the Arabic original had *taqārīz* (introductory notes in praise of the book) from a number of Deobandī ‘*ulamā*’ and Sufis.<sup>112</sup> Some of these were from amongst the followers of Muḥammad Zakariyyā. It is not clear whether they had actually read the whole book or praised it merely on the recommendation of Sūfī Iqbāl. When the translation came out, it was vehemently opposed by many prominent Deobandī ‘*ulamā*’.<sup>113</sup> The controversy cooled down after a while but the schism has yet to be healed.

Sūfī Iqbāl also composed other works. Some of these deal with advancing what he considers to be his former shaykh’s agenda, namely, reviving Muslims’ connection with Allah and His Messenger. However, he took it a step further ignoring the hard stance of Deobandī ‘*ulamā*’ against *bid‘ah*. He argued the need for Muslims to revive some of the traditional practices that had been declared *bid‘ah* by Deobandīs but were now needed to achieve the agreed upon objectives, viz., gaining love of Allah and His Messenger (pbuh). These practices included gatherings for *dhikr* and sending blessings upon the Prophet (pbuh). Traditionally, Deobandī ‘*ulamā*’ and shaykhs had maintained that these should be done individually. Sūfī Iqbāl declared that the time had changed. A new approach was needed. To this end, he composed a work *Majālis-e-durūd sharīf* [Gatherings of noble salutations upon the Prophet (pbuh)] in which he sought to justify the need for sending blessings upon the Prophet (pbuh) in gatherings. Another was *Majālis-e-dhikr* [Gatherings of *dhikr*], which dealt

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<sup>112</sup> See Sayyid Muḥammad ibn ‘Alawī Makkī, *Iṣlāḥ-e-mafāhīm*, translated by Anīs Aḥmad from Arabic into Urdu, (Lahore: n.p., n.d.), 16-25.

<sup>113</sup> See Muḥammad ‘Alawī Makkī *kī kitāb Iṣlāḥ-e-Mafāhīm par teḥqīqī naẓar* [A thorough analysis of Muhammad ‘Alawī Makkī’s book *Iṣlāḥ-e-Mafāhīm*] cited above. This long book is dedicated to refuting Sūfī Iqbāl’s ideas and contains most of the important refutations coming from mainstream Deobandī ‘*ulamā*’. It was commissioned by another of Muḥammad Zakariyyā’s successors, Ismā‘īl Badāt.

with loud *dhikr* and *dhikr* in a gathering. Interestingly, he dealt with the issue of *‘urs* in another work titled *Suhāg rāt* [Night of marriage], which he had composed to teach new couples how to spend their first night. In it, he argued for the revival of some of the practices that had been initially opposed by Deobandīs.<sup>114</sup> Through his opinions on these issues he gradually moved away from mainstream Deobandī positions. In the process, Sūfī Iqbāl did gain significant support which included his numerous followers, as well as many other successors of Muḥammad Zakariyyā; however, it also alienated him from the wider Deobandī community.

## CONCLUSION

We have seen how Rashīd Aḥmad and his associates were connected to Sayyid Aḥmad through their teachers and shaykhs who were in turn important members of the Walī Allāhī *jamā‘at*. Thus, intellectually and spiritually, Deobandīs represent a continuation of Walī Allāh’s and Sayyid Aḥmad’s tradition. We have also looked at the three distinct phases of Deobandī *taṣawwuf* as represented by Rashīd Aḥmad, Ashraf ‘Alī and Muḥammad Ilyās, and Muḥammad Zakariyyā. During these three stages, Deobandī *taṣawwuf* has crystallized, expanded, contracted and expanded yet again. *Taṣawwuf* permeated the lives and work of most Deobandī elders from these periods. This is truer of the early period and less of the later period. What started out as a complete union of the outward and inward sciences, initially expanded to include the uneducated masses in its fold. However, after some time, this expansion led to a distancing from *taṣawwuf*. This required a reviver which appeared in the form of Muḥammad Zakariyyā.

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<sup>114</sup> Muḥammad Iqbāl, *Suhāg rāt*, (Madinah: n.p., 1991), 67-69.

Muḥammad Zakariyyā's revival efforts had one drawback. They remained limited to the Deobandīs. Although, he had significant success here but it was still not enough to change the direction of the entire Deobandī *jamā'at*. His efforts were blunted mostly by Tablīghī Jamā'at which because of its size represented a huge part of the Deobandī *jamā'at*. His efforts were further set back because of the differences that arose within Deobandī ranks over the activities of Sūfī Iqbāl and his associates. Today, most rank and file Deobandīs are in doubt as to the utility of *taṣawwuf* and at times also of its validity. The Sufi stream within Deobandīs does not hold the paramount position even though majority of senior '*ulamā*' have some Sufi background. Within the Sufi stream, it is Muḥammad Zakariyyā and Ashraf 'Alī's followers who form the largest group.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SUFI DOCTRINE

We have divided this chapter into two parts. In the first part, we will start by looking at the definitions of *taṣawwuf* as enunciated by the various classical masters of *taṣawwuf*. This will help us get a general idea about the classical understanding of *taṣawwuf*. Then, we will look at the definitions of *taṣawwuf* as put forward by various Deobandī masters. This will help us identify the goals of *taṣawwuf* as understood by Deobandīs and their stand vis-à-vis the means to achieve these goals. We will also be engaging in some comparison between their understanding and that of the classical masters.

The second part deals with the key aspects of Deobandī Sufi doctrine. The two main pillars are *tawḥīd* and following the *Sunnah*. The concept of *tawḥīd* incorporates within it the classical Sufi concepts of gnosis of the Divine, love for Allah and establishing a connection with Him. Other important dimensions of Deobandī *taṣawwuf* are *ikhhlāṣ*, *īmān*, *iḥsān*, *taqwā* and *tazkiyat al-nafs*. For the last mentioned, Deobandīs rely heavily upon the works of al-Ghazālī and use his description of human psychology, and of positive and negative traits. After looking at the various aspects of *taṣawwuf* regarded as important by Deobandīs, we will look at their views on the relationship between *Sharīʿah* and *taṣawwuf*.

## **PART I: TAŞAWWUF: WHAT AND WHY?**

Deobandīs do not regard themselves as innovators with respect to *taşawwuf*. Rather, they see themselves as following in the footsteps of their immediate and distant predecessors. We find them relying on the works of their intellectual forebears such as Shāh Walī Allāh and Sirhindī, as well as on the works of other prominent Sufis like al-Ghazālī, al-Suhrawardī, al-Qushayrī, al-Sha‘rānī, etc. We begin our analysis by looking at the various definitions of *taşawwuf* provided by classical masters as presented in early Sufi works.

### **DEFINITIONS OF TAŞAWWUF**

*Taşawwuf* is a complex reality and encompasses a wide range of ideas and practices. It cuts across various Islamic sects and according to some, across religions.<sup>1</sup> In this analysis, we will confine ourselves to Sunni *taşawwuf* but even here “its appearance is so protean that nobody can venture to describe it fully.”<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, the definitions of *taşawwuf* tend to vary. However, before we examine the definitions of *taşawwuf*, we should look at the origins of the word. For this, we rely upon the Sufis themselves.

#### **Earlier Works on *Taşawwuf***

Amongst the earlier works of *taşawwuf* that have survived to this day, mention should be made of the following:

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<sup>1</sup> Salīm Yūsuf Chishtī, *Tārīkh-e-taşawwuf*, (Lahore: Dār al-Kitāb, n.d.), 9-10. [Urd]

<sup>2</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical dimensions of Islam*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 3.



1. Abū Naṣr Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī (d. 988), *al-Luma' fi al-taṣawwuf* [Light on *taṣawwuf*].<sup>3</sup>
2. Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Kalābādhī (d. 990s), *al-Ta'arruf li madhhab ahl al-taṣawwuf* [Introduction to the school of the people of *taṣawwuf*].<sup>4</sup>
3. Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 1031), *al-Muqaddamah fi al-taṣawwuf wa ḥaqīqatihi* [Introduction to *taṣawwuf* and its reality].<sup>5</sup>
4. Abū al-Qāsim 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (d. 1072), *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah* [The Qushayrite epistle].<sup>6</sup>
5. 'Alī ibn 'Uthmān al-Hujwīrī (d. 1077), *Kashf al-maḥjūb* [Revelation of the hidden].<sup>7</sup> This is the earliest known work on *taṣawwuf* in Persian.

### Origin of the Word *Ṣūfī* / *Taṣawwuf*

All of the above-mentioned works deal with the question of the origin of the word Sufi. There are mainly four theories regarding this. The first is that “Sufis were only named such because of the purity (*ṣafā*) of their secrets/hearts and the cleanliness of their traces/acts (*āthār*).”<sup>8</sup> The second suggestion is that Sufis are named such because they are in the first row (*al-ṣaff al-awwal*) before Allah.<sup>9</sup> The third suggestion is that they are named after the people of *ṣuffah* (porch), a group of poor companions of the Prophet (pbuh) who lived a life of renunciation and extreme

<sup>3</sup> Abū Naṣr Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī, *al-Luma' fi al-taṣawwuf*, translated from Arabic into Urdu by Pīr Muḥammad Ḥasan, (Islamabad: Idāra Tehqīqāt-e-Islāmī, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Kalābādhī, *al-Ta'arruf li madhhab ahl al-taṣawwuf*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1993). [Arb]

<sup>5</sup> Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, *al-Muqaddamah fi al-taṣawwuf wa ḥaqīqatihi*, ed. Yūsuf Zidān, (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyāt al-Azhariyyah, n.d.). [Arb]

<sup>6</sup> Abū al-Qāsim 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1998). [Arb]

<sup>7</sup> 'Alī ibn 'Uthmān al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, translated from Persian into Arabic by Is'ād Qandīl, (Beirut: Dār al-Nahḍah al-'Arabiyyah, 1980).

<sup>8</sup> Al-Kalābādhī, 9.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 10.

poverty and had dedicated themselves to serving the *dīn*.<sup>10</sup> Lastly, some suggest they are named such because of their wearing of *ṣūf* (wool) which was a sign of renunciation.<sup>11</sup> This has been favoured by many.<sup>12</sup> However, al-Hujwīrī asserts that none of these satisfies the requirements of etymology.<sup>13</sup> Al-Kalābādhī thinks otherwise and suggests that etymologically, *ṣūf* could be a root for the word Sufi. At the same time, he and others admit that all of the meanings associated with these terms are true of the Sufis.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps, the best description of why Sufis came to be known as a distinct group is given by al-Qushayrī. He says:

Know, may Allah have mercy upon you, that Muslims after the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) did not name the best amongst them with any name except [that of] the company of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) because there was no virtue greater than that. Thus, they were called “companions.” When the people of the second generation met them, they named those who had had company of the companions as the “followers.” In this, they saw the greatest honour. Then, the ones who came after them were called “followers of the followers.” Then, people differed and ranks differentiated. The elect amongst the people who had maximum regard for the matter of *dīn*, were called *zuhhād* (ascetics) and *‘ubbād* (those who worship abundantly). Then, innovations appeared; and the sects began to call towards themselves. Thus, each group claimed that it had ascetics. Then, the elect amongst the people of *Sunnah* who were mindful of Allah in [all] their breaths, and who guarded their hearts against ways of heedlessness; they were named Sufis. This name for these people became famous before 200 AH.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Schimmel, 15.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Hujwīrī, 230.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Kalābādhī, 11; and al-Hujwīrī, 231-237. Also, see Mīr Valī al-Dīn, *The Qur’anic mysticism*, (Lahore: Shaykh Ashraf Publishers, 1991), 2.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Qushayrī, 21.

## Historic Definitions of *Taşawwuf*

Sufi masters during the ages have described *taşawwuf* in a variety of ways. Some of these were mentioned as part of our discussion regarding the origin of the word. In the earlier works cited above, we find multiple definitions of *taşawwuf*. Various earlier Sufi figures are quoted describing different aspects of *taşawwuf*. These revolve around the themes of *maʿrifah* (gnosis of Allah), *zuhd* (renunciation of the world), *ihsān* (God-consciousness), *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul), *fanāʾ* (annihilation) and *baqāʾ* (subsistence), etc. Later, with the rise of Sufi studies in the West, Orientalists put forward their own definitions of *taşawwuf* as well. Most of these tend to signify one aspect of *taşawwuf*. ‘Abd al-Ḥaq Anṣārī has summarized these all as falling into three main categories, namely, *ihsān/maʿrifah* (gnosis), *tazkiyat al-nafs*, and *fanāʾ* (annihilation) and *baqāʾ* (subsistence).<sup>16</sup> To this we can add, *ḥubb Allāh* (love for Allah).<sup>17</sup>

Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. 910) is the most prominent figure from the early formative period of *taşawwuf* and is described by many as the architect of the Baghdad or Iraqī school of *taşawwuf*.<sup>18</sup> Classical works of *taşawwuf* often quote him. Al-Qushayrī mentions that when al-Junayd was asked about *taşawwuf*, he variably replied: “It is that the Truth makes you dead from yourself and makes you live through Him,”<sup>19</sup> and “it is that you remain with Allah without any relationship [with other than Him].”<sup>20</sup> At other times, he described other characteristics of Sufis. The same trend can be seen with other early masters who are also extensively quoted in

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<sup>16</sup> Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥaq Anṣārī, *Sufism and Sharīʾah: A study of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi’s effort to reform Sufism*, (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1986), 31-33.

<sup>17</sup> Schimmel, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Al-Junayd was trained as a jurist and *muḥaddith* before he became a Sufi. He followed the *madhhab* of Abū Thawr. For details about his position in *taşawwuf* and his understanding of *taşawwuf*, see Chishtī, 205-252. Also, see Ahmet Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 15-18.

<sup>19</sup> Al-Qushayrī, 312.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.

these Sufi works.<sup>21</sup> These masters include amongst others, Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 897), Abū Sa‘īd al-Kharrāz (d. 899), Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Nūrī (d. 907), Ruwaym ibn Aḥmad (d. 915-16), and Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 946).<sup>22</sup>

Al-Kalābādhī quotes an unnamed Sufi as saying that a Sufi is “the one who neither possesses [anything] nor is he possessed [by greed for anything].”<sup>23</sup> We find this statement repeated in other Sufi works as well, such as in *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*,<sup>24</sup> and later in ibn ‘Ajībah’s *Īqādh al-himam fi sharḥ al-Ḥikam* [Waking of determinations in explaining *al-Ḥikam*], among others.<sup>25</sup> Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Nūrī defined *taṣawwuf* as “renunciation of all pleasures of the self.”<sup>26</sup> Al-Junayd is also reported to have defined *taṣawwuf* as follows:

[It is] purification of the heart from associating with people, abandoning natural attributes, suppression of human characteristics, avoiding base desires, taking up spiritual qualities, attachment to the true sciences, always using that which is more appropriate, sincerity for the whole nation, true loyalty to Allah, and following the Prophet (pbuh) according to the *Shari‘ah*.<sup>27</sup>

At another time, he described the Sufi as “the one who is like the earth. All ugly things are thrown on it, and only good things come out of it.”<sup>28</sup> Al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 922) described the Sufi as one “who is singular in being, no one accepts him and he accepts no one.”<sup>29</sup> Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī (d. 815) described *taṣawwuf* as “taking the realities and giving up hope in that which people possess.”<sup>30</sup> ‘Amr ibn ‘Uthmān al-Makkī (d. 903-4) said of *taṣawwuf* that “it entails that a person

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<sup>21</sup> See *Ibid.*, 312-315; and *al-Hujwiri*, 231-237.

<sup>22</sup> The dates are taken from Karamustafa, 20-21.

<sup>23</sup> *Al-Kalābādhī*, 12.

<sup>24</sup> *Al-Qushayri*, 313.

<sup>25</sup> See Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Ajībah, *Īqādh al-himam fi sharḥ al-Ḥikam*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1996), 24. [Arb]

<sup>26</sup> *Al-Kalābādhī*, 19.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

<sup>28</sup> *Al-Qushayri*, 313.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.

engages at all times with that which is best for that time.”<sup>31</sup> Abū al-Ḥasan al-Fārisī (d.

c. 1058) defined it as follows:

The elements of *taṣawwuf* are ten: isolation of oneness (*tajrīd al-tawḥīd*), understanding of audition, good fellowship, preference of preferring, giving up of personal choice, swiftness of ecstasy, unveiling of thoughts, abundance of journeys, giving up of earning, and prohibition of hoarding.<sup>32</sup>

Al-Hujwīrī has described three levels of those who are considered Sufis. The first is the “Sufī who is dead to self and living by the Truth; he has escaped from the grip of human natures and has reached to the Reality of realities (God).”<sup>33</sup> The second is the “*mutaṣawwif* (aspirer) who seeks this rank [of the Sufis] through exertion, and rectifies his self while seeking their conduct.”<sup>34</sup> The third is the “*mustaṣwif* (pretender) who [tries to] resemble them for the sake of gaining [wealth], status and [obtaining] share of the world.”<sup>35</sup>

He also quotes al-Junayd as saying that “*taṣawwuf* is an attribute in which the slave is kept.”<sup>36</sup> When asked whether it was an attribute of the slave or of the Truth, al-Junayd replied that “the attribute of the Truth is reality and slave’s attribute is a form (*rasm*).”<sup>37</sup> He goes on to explain that this means that *taṣawwuf* requires annihilation of man’s attributes through the subsistence of Allah’s attributes.

Abū Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī (d. 1520) described *taṣawwuf* as:

*Taṣawwuf* teaches one how to purify one’s self, improve one’s morals, and build up one’s inner and outer life in order to attain perpetual bliss. Its subject matter is the purification of the soul and its end or aim is the attainment of eternal felicity and blessedness.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 312.

<sup>32</sup> Al-Kalābādhi, 103.

<sup>33</sup> Al-Hujwīrī, 231.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Valī al-Dīn, 3.

Some Sufis have grounded the concept of *taṣawwuf* in the Qur’anic concept of *muḥsin* (possessor of *iḥsān* or the one who does good) and *muqarrab* (the one who has been brought closer to Allah). This is combined with the famous *ḥadīth* of Jibrīl. Thus, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī [d. 1234], the author of *‘Awārif al-ma‘ārif* [Deep cognitions] says that when he uses the term Sufi it only refers to a *muqarrab*.<sup>39</sup> Abū Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī says of the Sufis:

These are the ones who are called *muqarrabūn*, who possess *iḥsān*.... The one whose [moments of] heedlessness have lessened and who engages in voluntary prayers and acts much, and His remembrance and calling on Him dominates his heart; he is *muqarrab* and *muḥsin*. He is also called Sufi i.e., the one who has cleansed [himself] of blameworthy traits, and has acquired praiseworthy traits. [He did this] until Allah made him His beloved and protected him in all his movements and stations.<sup>40</sup>

### **Deobandī Definitions of *Taṣawwuf***

Like the classical works of *taṣawwuf*, definitions of *taṣawwuf* tend to vary in Deobandī literature as well. At times, a single figure will define *taṣawwuf* in a number of different ways highlighting its different aspects. Deobandī definitions also revolve around the concepts historically associated with *taṣawwuf* such as love for Allah, *iḥsān*, *ikhhlāṣ* (purity of intention), *tazkiyat al-nafs*, acquiring *ta‘alluq ma‘a Allāh* or *nisbah* (both mean connection or relationship with Allah), *‘abdiyyah* (slave hood) and *wuṣūl ilallāh* (reaching Allah).

Muḥammad Zakariyyā was once asked about *taṣawwuf*. He replied,

The reality of *taṣawwuf* is merely correction of intention. It begins with “actions are only according to intentions” and ends with “that you worship Him as if you see Him.” This is also called *yād dāsh* (remembrance),<sup>41</sup> *ḥuḍūrī* (presence) and *nisbah* (connection).<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>40</sup> Shāh Waṣī Allāh, *Taṣawwuf-o-nisbat-e-sūfiya*, (Bombay: Maktaba Ashrafia, n.d.) 18-19. [Urd]

<sup>41</sup> It is a Naqshbandī term, which means constant mindfulness of Allah.

Here, he is referring to two famous *ḥadīths*; the first one dealing with *ikhlās* (sincerity or purity of intention) and the second one dealing with *iḥsān*. The first one is reported by ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb who says that the Prophet (pbuh) said:

إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّاتِ، وَإِنَّمَا لِكُلِّ امْرِئٍ مَا نَوَى، فَمَنْ كَانَتْ هِجْرَتُهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ، فَهِيَ هِجْرَتُهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ، وَمَنْ كَانَتْ هِجْرَتُهُ لِدُنْيَا يُصِيبُهَا، أَوْ امْرَأَةٍ يَنْكِحُهَا، فَهِيَ هِجْرَتُهُ إِلَى مَا هَاجَرَ إِلَيْهِ. (متفق عليه)<sup>43</sup>

Actions are only according to intentions, and a person receives only what he has intended. Therefore, whoever’s emigration is for Allah and His Messenger, his emigration is [truly] for Allah and His Messenger. And whoever’s emigration is for any worldly gain or a woman he is to wed, then his emigration is for what he emigrated. (Agreed upon by al-Bukhārī and Muslim)

The other *ḥadīth* is a long *ḥadīth* commonly known as “*Ḥadīth* of Jibrīl.” It has also been reported by ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. The portion relevant to our discussion is as follows:

قَالَ [جِبْرِيلُ]: مَا الْإِحْسَانُ؟ قَالَ [النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ]: أَنْ تَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ كَأَنَّكَ تَرَاهُ، فَإِنْ لَمْ تَكُنْ تَرَاهُ فَإِنَّهُ يَرَاكَ. (متفق عليه)<sup>44</sup>

He [Jibrīl] said: What is *iḥsān*? He [the Prophet] said: It is that you worship Allah as if you see Him for if you do not see Him, He surely sees you. (Agreed upon by al-Bukhārī and Muslim)

In this quotation, Muḥammad Zakariyyā is indicating that the starting point for *taṣawwuf* is sincerity in one’s intention. A Sufī should start watching over himself to see what the intentions behind all of his actions are. Then, he must change his intentions so that they are all for Allah and not for his own self. When he practices this and perfects this, eventually he will develop constant mindfulness of Allah, which is *iḥsān* and the goal of *taṣawwuf*.

<sup>42</sup> Zakariyyā Kandhlavī, *Āp bītī*, 2:11-12. The same quote appears in Muḥammad Iqbāl, *Akābir kā sulūk aur iḥsān*, (Karachi: Maktabat al-Shaykh, n.d.), 28-29. [Urd]

<sup>43</sup> Abu ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, (Riyadh: Dār al-Salām li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī‘, 1997), 1. [Arb]

<sup>44</sup> Al-Bukhārī, 15.

Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadvī gives a slightly different description of *taṣawwuf*. He describes it as the science and art of *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul) and *tahdhīb al-akhlāq* (reformation of character) which deals with identifying the tricks of one’s *nafs* and Shaytan, treatment of *nafsānī* (originating in the *nafs*) and moral diseases, and organizing and explaining the means and methods of acquiring *ta‘alluq ma‘a Allah* (connection with Allah) and *nisbah*.<sup>45</sup>

Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī (henceforth Thānvī) before him had also mentioned in *al-Takashshuf* that the primary purpose of *taṣawwuf* is reformation of the actions of the heart (*iṣlāḥ-e-a‘māl-e-bā‘īnī*).<sup>46</sup>

As is obvious from these definitions, *taṣawwuf* is associated with the inner dimension of man. This is considered to be centered on the heart. Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī (henceforth Gangohī) has used the case of Abū Bakr and other companions compared to the rest of the *ummah* to prove that this dimension is superior to the other dimensions of *dīn*. He writes:

Some Sufis have said that actions of the heart are many times better than actions of the limbs. Thus, the Prophet (pbuh) said, “If the faith of Abū Bakr was weighed, it would outweigh the faith of all the people of the world.” Moreover, he (pbuh) said, “Abū Bakr has not advanced [in spiritual rank] through abundance of prayers and fasts. Rather, it is because of a thing which is in his heart.”<sup>47</sup>

Most Deobandī works emphasize this inner dimension as the focus of *taṣawwuf*. This is also true of other works of *taṣawwuf* penned by non-Deobandī Sufis, past and present. However, amongst the Deobandīs, we also find a description of *taṣawwuf*, which seeks to combine the inward and the outward. Gangohī’s biographer, ‘Ashiq Ilāhī Mīrathī quotes him as defining the science of the Sufis as

<sup>45</sup> Sayyid Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadvī, *Tazkiya-o-iḥsān yā taṣawwuf-o-sulūk*, (Lucknow: Majlis Tehqīqāt-o-Nashriāt-e-Islām, 1979), 29. [Urd]

<sup>46</sup> Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *al-Takashshuf ‘an muhimmāt al-taṣawwuf*, (Karachi: Kutub Khāna Mazharī, n.d.), 256. [Urd]

<sup>47</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-Sulūk*, 151.



“the science of religion, [both] outward and inward.”<sup>48</sup> In the same biography, Mīrathī also defines *taṣawwuf* as “building of the outward and the inward.” He goes on to elaborate that one’s heart and limbs should engage in obedience to Allah and His service following the way of the Prophet (pbuh). One should pursue this to such an extent that it becomes one’s nature to follow the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (pbuh) and one is able to do these without forcing oneself.<sup>49</sup> At times, Thānvī also describes *taṣawwuf* as the “building of the outward and the inward.”<sup>50</sup>

### **Definition Through Negation**

A typical Deobandī way of defining *taṣawwuf* is through negating that which *taṣawwuf* is not. In this context, Thānvī’s statement in *al-Takashshuf* is often cited by later Deobandī writers. While explaining the reality of *ṭarīqat* or *sulūk* (two other names for *taṣawwuf*), he identifies the things that are not necessary in *taṣawwuf*. Amongst these, he lists *kashf* (unveiling), *karāmah* (miracle), amulets for worldly gains, complete uprooting of all blameworthy traits, extraordinary spiritual states, seeing lights while doing *dhikr*, beautiful visions, correct inspirations (*ilhām*), and shaykh’s taking responsibility for someone’s acquittal on the day of judgement.<sup>51</sup> As can be seen from this, the main thrust of Deobandī definitions and descriptions is the essential goals of *taṣawwuf*. Other things that are generally associated with *taṣawwuf* but are not essential to *taṣawwuf* are negated so that the disciple can have sincere intentions focusing only on the essential goals of *taṣawwuf*.

<sup>48</sup> Mīrathī, *Tadhkirat al-Rashīd*, 2:11.

<sup>49</sup> Mīrathī, *Tadhkirat al-Rashīd*, 2:1.

<sup>50</sup> ‘Abd al-Ḥayy ‘Ārifī, *Baṣā’ir Ḥakīm-ul-ummat*, (Karachi: Idarat al-Ma‘ārif, 2001), 100. [Urd]

<sup>51</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *al-Takashshuf*..., 7.

## Towards a Comprehensive Understanding of *Taşawwuf*

It is obvious from the foregoing that *taşawwuf* is a complex phenomenon. However, if we were to attempt to boil it down to a single idea, we posit that *taşawwuf* as understood by Deobandīs and others, comes down to one thing: seeking the pleasure of Allah.<sup>52</sup> For this, one must have *ta'alluq ma'a Allāh*, which means that one must try to be constantly aware/mindful of Him which is *ihsān*. In order for one to achieve *ihsān*, one must clean oneself of evil traits and adorn oneself with good traits. This is *tazkiyat al-nafs*. Moreover, for one to maintain *ta'alluq ma'a Allāh* and be loved by Him one must refrain from all that displeases Him. This is adherence to rulings of *Sharī'ah* both outwardly and inwardly. This, in turn, requires that one must be constantly mindful of His commands and prohibitions. Thus, all of these definitions feed into one another and are inter-dependent. In short, *taşawwuf* permeates Islam and is the essence of Islam.

It is this idea that Gangohī puts forth in the beginning of his book *Imdād al-sulūk* [Help for the spiritual journey]. He says,

Traveling on the spiritual path means reformation of character, which is that one purifies oneself of miserliness, jealousy, ostentation, self-praise and other evil traits; and adorns oneself with generosity, humility and other good traits, so that one is capable of reaching Allah. In the terminology of the Sufis, *ṭarīqat* refers to traversing the stations on the way to Allah. Its first door is *Sharī'ah*. In short, following *Sharī'ah*, engaging in the worship of Allah, and resolutely seeking the pleasure of Allah is called *ṭarīqat*.<sup>53</sup>

Thānṡvī has summed up *taşawwuf* in a similar way. He says,

The purpose of *taşawwuf* is [to seek the] pleasure of Allah. There are two things after that; knowledge of the way and acting upon them. So, the way is only one, i.e., fulfilling the outward and inward rulings [of *Sharī'ah*]. There are two things, which help on the way; one is the amount of *dhikr*, which can be done regularly; second, keeping the company of the people of Allah as much as one can. If one does not

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. and Ashraf 'Alī Thānṡvī, *Tarbiyyat al-sālik*, (Karachi: Dār-ul-Ishā'at, n.d.), 1:7. [Urd]

<sup>53</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 50.

have the time for doing this abundantly, then studying the biographies and statements of the pious is a substitute for this. Two things are obstacles on the way or from the objective, sins and engaging in useless activities. There is one thing, which is a condition for all of these to be beneficial, scrupulousness in informing [the shaykh] of one's condition. Now, depending on the capability of the individual, he will reach the goal sooner or later. This is the summary of the "way."<sup>54</sup>

### **Goals of *Taşawwuf***

Based upon the foregoing discussion, we can say that Deobandīs consider the goals of *taşawwuf* to be two-fold. One is the lower level, which is obligatory upon all Muslims. This includes building of the outward and the inward. The outward includes all external actions required by *Shari'ah* and the inward includes all the internal actions required by *Shari'ah* such as acquiring sound *'aqidah* and *fadā'il* (praiseworthy traits), and removing *radhā'il* (blameworthy traits). The higher level is that of maintaining constant mindfulness of Allah (*ihsān*) and engaging in voluntary worships. This much is desirable and not obligatory. Generally, people understand *taşawwuf* to refer to this second level only. That is why most references to *taşawwuf* in academic and popular writing mention concepts associated with this. Deobandīs have extended *taşawwuf* to the outward domain as well, although they also many times use the term "*taşawwuf*" to refer to the second level only. Thānvī has clarified the relationship between the two. He says that the obligatory has precedence over the desirable. Thus, if there is any conflict between the two, then the desirable must be given up. In the course of discussing these two levels, he censures those who ignore their familial responsibilities, which fall in the lower level but are obligatory, for the sake of achieving *ihsān*, which falls in the higher level but is only desirable.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī, *Malḡūzāt kamālāt-e-Ashrafia*, (Karachi: Maktaba Thānvī, n.d.), 23. [Urd]

<sup>55</sup> 'Ārifī, *Başā'ir Ḥakīm-ul-ummat*, 100.

The underlying theme in both of these is seeking pleasure of Allah, which is the ultimate goal. In fact, the first level is also a means for achieving the second and many times the second becomes instrumental in achieving the first, and both are means to achieve the pleasure of Allah. Sufi works including Deobandī ones variably mention one of these three as the goal. The last mentioned is at times also described as *qurb-e-ilāhī* (closeness to Allah) and at times as *wuṣūl ilallāh* (reaching Allah) because both are essential results of achieving pleasure of Allah.

### **The Means**

The means are also two-fold. One is *mujāhadah*, which can be summary or detailed. It is used to weaken blameworthy traits through weakening their impulses and to adorn oneself with praiseworthy traits. The other means is engaging in particular spiritual exercises such as *dhikr*, *murāqabah* (meditation) or whatever else one's shaykh has commanded one to undertake. Amongst the latter, Thānvī has differentiated between those in which there is little or no attendant risk and those in which there is significant risk. The former includes *dhikr*, *shughl* (imagining *dhikr*), and *murāqabah*. The latter includes *taṣawwur-e-shaykh* (imagining the shaykh), *ishq-e-majāzī* (temporal love) and *samā'* (audition, with or without music).<sup>56</sup>

### **WHY TAṢAWWUF?**

The name *taṣawwuf* and the ideas associated with it have caused many Muslims to deny its legitimacy. Starting in the early centuries of Islam, tensions developed between Sufis who focused on the inner dimension of Islam and externalist scholars. This was further aggravated by the rise of the Bāṭiniyyah who relied upon esoteric

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<sup>56</sup> Muḥammad Dīn, *Sharī'at-o-tarīqat*, (Lahore: Idāra-e-Islāmiāt, 1981), 284-297. [Urd]

interpretations of the Qur'an to justify their views and practices.<sup>57</sup> In this environment, Sufis felt the need to justify their way or school by writing books on it. A good example from the early period is al-Kalābādhī's *al-Ta'arruf* and Abū Naṣr Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī's *al-Luma' fī al-taṣawwuf*.

The period in which Deobandīs operated was characterized by a similar distrust of the Sufis. Ahl-e-Ḥadīs were in the forefront of denying the legitimacy of *taṣawwuf*. They claimed un-Islamic origins for *taṣawwuf* and felt that it undermined the Propheptic mission. At the same time, they claimed to be the followers of Shāh Walī Allāh and his grandson Shāh Ismā'īl. Both of these had been Naqshbandī. Deobandīs regard themselves to be the real inheritors of Walī Allāh's thought. We find them often quoting Walī Allāh on *taṣawwuf*. This serves to rebut the charges leveled by Ahl-e-Ḥadīs, as well as assuage the skeptics among Deobandīs. The main arguments put forward by them are similar to the arguments presented by mainstream Sufi scholars throughout the ages. The starting point for this is stating the broad scope and comprehensive nature of *Sharī'ah*.

### **Comprehensiveness of *Sharī'ah***

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Thānvī attempted to present a comprehensive view of Islam through his writings and lectures. He did not treat *taṣawwuf* in isolation, especially when talking to the masses. In many of his works on *taṣawwuf* written for the common person, he begins by identifying the main elements of *Sharī'ah*.<sup>58</sup> According to him, these are five, viz., 'aqā'id, 'ibādāt, mu'āmalāt, mu'āsharat and *taṣawwuf*. 'Aqā'id is the plural of 'aqīdah, which means creed or an

<sup>57</sup> Bāṭiniyyah was a name given to the Ismā'īlī Shī'īs who sought to interpret religious texts on the basis of their hidden (*bāṭin*) meanings at the expense of their literal (*ẓāhir*) meanings.

<sup>58</sup> See Thānvī's introduction to *Ta'līm al-dīn* [Education of religion] in Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī, "Ta'līm al-dīn" in Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī, *Iṣlāhī Niṣāb*, (Multan: Kutub Khāna Majīdia, n.d.), 462-465. [Urd]

article of faith. It refers to the set of beliefs that a Muslim is supposed to believe in. The books of *'aqīdah* deal with it. *'Ibādāt* is the plural of *'ibādah*, which means worship. It covers the entire range of worships ordained in Islam such as *ṣalāh*, *zakāh*, fasting, Hajj, etc. *Mu'āmalāt* is the plural of *mu'āmalah*, which means dealing or transaction and it includes the rulings of marriage and divorce, and those of business dealings covering all aspects of economic activity. In this, it only provides general principles. *Mu'āsharat* means social interaction and this area of *Sharī'ah* provides guidelines for social dealings and the proper *adab* (etiquette) for all social categories of people and occasions. The fifth part is *taṣawwuf*, which is also called *islāh al-nafs* (reformation of the soul) or *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul). Thānvī and other Deobandī writers are at pains to explain that each of these five parts of *Sharī'ah* must be adhered to. Ignoring any one of these amounts to ignoring a part of the *Sharī'ah*.

Thānvī writes,

Just as the verse وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ (establish *ṣalāh* and give *zakāh*) exists in the Qur'an; similarly, يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اصْبِرُوا (O you who believe! Be patient) and وَاشْكُرُوا (be thankful) also exist. If in one place you will find كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ (fasting has been made compulsory upon you) and لِلَّهِ عَلَى النَّاسِ حِجُّ الْبَيْتِ (it is obligatory upon people from Allah that they perform pilgrimage of the House), then in another place you will find وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَشَدُّ حُبًّا لِلَّهِ (Allah loves them and they love Him) and وَإِذَا قَامُوا إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ قَامُوا كُسَالَى (when they get up for *ṣalāh*, they get up lazily); you will also find يُرَاءُونَ النَّاسَ (they show off to others). If the one who abandons *ṣalāh* or *zakāh* is condemned in one place; then pride and arrogance are also condemned in another place. Similarly, look at the *ḥadīth*[s]. Just as you will find chapters on *ṣalāh*, fasting, buying and selling, marriage and divorce; similarly, you will find chapters on showing off and arrogance.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Dīn, 37-38.

We find a similar theme in Walī Allāh's thought. Thānvī's successor, Shāh Waṣī Allāh, has quoted him extensively in his book *Taṣawwuf-o-nisbat-e-sūfia* [*Taṣawwuf* and the *nisbah* of the Sufis]. He quotes Walī Allāh as saying:

The main part of that whose establishment the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) called for, comprises three things. 1) Rectification of beliefs regarding the origin, the end, the recompense, etc. The people of foundations [of religion] (*uṣūl al-dīn*) from amongst the scholars of the *ummah* took responsibility for this. May Allah reward their efforts. 2) Rectification of actions such as worships which bring one closer [to Allah] and necessary, useful things in accordance with the *Sunnah*. The jurists of the *ummah* took responsibility for this. Through them Allah guided many and straightened the crooked sects....3) Rectification of *ikhhlāṣ* and *iḥsān* which are the two foundations of this straight *dīn*, which Allah has chosen for His slaves....This third one is the most subtle of the purposes of *Sharī'ah* in terms of its source, and challengingly deep. With respect to all the laws, it is like the spirit is to the body, and like the meaning is to the word. The Sufis, may Allah have mercy upon them, took responsibility for this. They were guided and guided others; they were satiated and satiated others. They succeeded with maximum felicity; and gathered the greatest portion.<sup>60</sup>

With Gangohī, we find it stated even more succinctly. Writing to one of his disciples, he says:

In reality, *Sharī'ah* is obligatory and the real goal. *Ṭarīqah* is also an internal *Sharī'ah*. *Ḥaqīqah* and *ma'rifah* complete the *Sharī'ah*. One cannot act perfectly upon the *Sharī'ah* without *ma'rifah*.<sup>61</sup>

### **Development of *Taṣawwuf***

It should be noted here that the argument for the validity of *taṣawwuf* is closely tied to the Sufis' account of its development and crystallization. Their opponents dispute this description. Nevertheless, many Sufi scholars through the centuries have maintained that *taṣawwuf* is not an innovation. The name is new but the concept has existed since the time of the Prophet (pbuh). Many verses and *ḥadīths*, some of which have been cited above, are presented by these scholars to prove their point. These scholars

<sup>60</sup> Waṣī Allāh, *Taṣawwuf-o-nisbat-e-sūfia*, 27-28.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 32. Sūfī Iqbāl has also referred to this. See Iqbāl, *Akābir kā...*, 24.

include all the classical proponents of *taṣawwuf* including al-Kalābādhī, al-Qushayrī, al-Hujwīrī, ibn ‘Ajībah, Zarrūq, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha‘rānī, and others.

Deobandīs echo the same ideas and sentiments. Muḥammad Zakariyyā has charted the development of *taṣawwuf* in his *Sharī‘at-o-ṭarīqat kā talāzum* [The inseparability of *Sharī‘ah* and *taṣawwuf*].<sup>62</sup> For this, he quotes Gangohī. Gangohī’s original statements are part of the *Ḥekāyāt-e-awliyā* [Stories of saints]. In it, he is reported to have said:

The spiritual power of the Prophet (pbuh) was such that the strongest of disbelievers would acquire this level of *iḥsān* as soon as he said the *shahādah*. After him, because of his blessing, the companions had this power but it was less. The followers also had it but it was less than that of the companions. Amongst the followers of the followers, this power was reduced significantly. In order to compensate for this loss of power, the elders [of the time] devised spiritual exertions. For a long time, these remained as means and were not goals in themselves. However, as the time-distance from the best of generations increased, more and more of these became goals. The result was that a number of intellectual and practical innovations entered the *dīn*. The *muḥaqqiq* (rigorously exacting) Sufis [tried] to reform these but they could only lessen them and could not eliminate them altogether.<sup>63</sup>

Gangohī mentions Shaykhs ‘Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī, Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī, Aḥmad Sirhindī, and Sayyid Aḥmad Barelvī among the reformers.

Thānvī has also described the development of the science of *taṣawwuf*. He writes,

During the time of the Prophet (pbuh), the sciences of *ḥadīth*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, etc. were not separate. Rather, many sciences were [later] derived from the Qur’an and *ḥadīth* and each was given a separate name....Just as other derived sciences received a particular name such as *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*; similarly, the name of the “way” derived by shaykhs came to be called *taṣawwuf*. If someone studies *Sharḥ al-Wiqāyah* or *al-Hidāyah* (two main works of Ḥanafī *fiqh* used as textbooks in *madrasahs*), he is said to be studying *fiqh*. If he studies *ḥadīth* or *tafsīr*, it is not said that he is studying *fiqh*. This, in spite of the fact that *fiqh* contains in it many sciences such as *ḥadīth*, *tafsīr*, *kalām*, etc. Similarly, when someone

<sup>62</sup> Muḥammad Zakariyyā Kāndhlavī, *Sharī‘at-o-ṭarīqat kā talāzum*, (Karachi: Maktabat al-Shaykh, 1993), 89-90. [Urd]

<sup>63</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *Ḥekāyāt-e-awliyā*, 256.



follows the way of the shaykhs, it is said that he is learning *taṣawwuf* or that he is a Sufi. The one who [merely] prays or fasts is not called a Sufi even though *taṣawwuf/tazkiyat al-bāṭin* in its broader sense includes all of this. Therefore, just as *Kanz [al-daqa'iq]* and *al-Hidāyah* (Ḥanafī texts) are necessary; similarly, it is necessary to study Abū Ṭālib Makkī's *Qūt al-qulūb*, Imam Ghazālī's *al-Arba'ūn* and Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī's *Awārif [al-ma'ārif]*.<sup>64</sup>

Thānvī also makes the case for the necessity of following the shaykhs of old in our understanding of *taṣawwuf*.

The founders of these [traditional Islamic] sciences were acknowledged as Imams by everyone. So much so that upon seeing Imam Abū Ḥanīfah's understanding of *fiqh*, Imam al-Shāfi'ī was forced to say that people are in need of Abū Ḥanīfah in *fiqh*. Imam al-Bukhārī was acknowledged as an Imam; and to this day his erudition in *ḥadīth* is well-known. Similarly, there have been such saints whom everyone has acknowledged as a leader. For example, the shaykh of shaykhs Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir Jīlanī, Khawājah Bahā' al-Dīn Naqshband, Khawājah Mu'īn al-Dīn Chishtī, Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī and before them Junayd Baghdādī and others....

Just as the later generations cannot do [in matters of *Sharī'ah*] without following the previous ones; similarly, in *taṣawwuf*, there is no way besides following the shaykhs of the "way," although, the lowest level of *tazkiyat al-nafs* which leads to salvation can be had without following the shaykhs of the "way." However, that which is desired and is the perfection of this cannot be achieved without the company of the perfect.<sup>65</sup>

### ***Shifts in Taṣawwuf***

With regards to the shifts in Sufis' doctrine and practice, we find a useful description in Walī Allāh's *Ham'āt* [Floods]. He describes four stages.<sup>66</sup> The first stage comprises the time of the Prophet (pbuh) and the early generations. This period is characterized by complete unity of the inward and the outward aspects of *Sharī'ah*. The companions and the followers followed the commands of the *Sharī'ah* while maintaining consciousness of Allah. There were various levels in society in terms of

<sup>64</sup> Dīn, 41-42.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Walī Allāh, *Ham'āt*, 48-53.

their *ikhlās* and *ihsān* but the outward was the same. During this period, we do not find people spending long hours in *murāqabah* (meditation). Special *dhikrs*, *wajd* (ecstasy), *samāʿ* (audition) and *shatḥiyyāt* (ecstatic sayings) are conspicuous by their absence. Supernatural events did take place but were far less than what we witness in the later periods.

The second period begins around al-Junayd's (d. 910) time. This period witnessed a marked differentiation in society. The generality of Muslims continued to practice Islam the same way as those before them with unity between the outward and the inward. However, the elect began to engage in *mujāhadahs*, cut themselves off from the world, and dedicated their time to *dhikr* and meditation. This resulted in the development of a certain psychological state in them. Now, people began working for this state. They would spend years trying to acquire this state, which was also called *nisbah*. During this period, we find people engaging in meditation, audition, ecstasy, etc. *Kashf* and supernatural things became more common. These people described the spiritual states that they achieved in signs and allusions.

The third period begins around the time of Abū al-Ḥusayn ibn Abū al-Khayr al-Nūrī and Abū al-Ḥasan al-Kharaqānī (d. 1034). Now, the generality of the Muslims and the elite remained focused on their particular way while the select of the elite crossed over into the domain of absorption (*jadhb*). They sought to annihilate the consciousness of their own existence before that of the Divine Essence. They did not engage in *awrād* (litanies) and *ashghāl* (plural of *shughl*, which means imagining a *dhikr*), or *tazkiyat al-nafs*; rather, they focused on the Divine Essence. All of their energies were spent in acquiring this state and maintaining it. Through this they sought to unite with the Divine Essence. At this time, they did not distinguish between *tawḥīd wujūdī* (unity of being) and *tawḥīd shuhūdī* (unity of witnessing).

The fourth period is that of Muḥy al-Dīn ibn ‘Arabī (d. 1240) and those just prior to him. This is the time when philosophy found its way into *taṣawwuf*. Now, Sufis began searching for the realities of things as they actually are (*ḥaqā’iq al-ashyā’ ‘alā mā hiya ‘alayhi*). They began to talk about the Necessary Being, *tanazzulāt* (descents) and other theological issues. This led to the development of “speculative *taṣawwuf*” or “theosophical *taṣawwuf*.”

The description given by Walī Allāh is useful. It allows us to better approach each Sufi keeping in mind the time period he belonged to and that which was prevalent in his time. According to Walī Allāh, all of the approaches mentioned above are valid and accepted by Allah. He warns against judging the Sufis of one time according to the dominant tastes of another time.<sup>67</sup> As will become apparent in the following, the Deobandīs are primarily concerned with approaching *taṣawwuf* in the same way that it was approached and practiced in the first era. They are also willing to use the techniques devised in the second era. As for the third and fourth eras, Deobandis have tried to dissociate themselves from it. Hence, the major gap that exists between Deobandīs and other Sufis who still engage in the kinds of activities that Sufis from the these two eras engaged in.

### **Growth and Regeneration of Sufi Orders (*Ṭarīqahs* or *Silsilahs*)<sup>68</sup>**

It is not our objective here to provide a detailed outline of the historical development of Sufi orders.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, we must look at the general themes inherent in the sprouting of the many orders that have existed and continue to exist today. To begin

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>68</sup> In Urdu, the word *silsilah* is often used with the same meaning as *ṭarīqah* in Arabic.

<sup>69</sup> Trimmingham has dealt with the organizational aspect of the formation and development of Sufi orders in his masterpiece *The Sufi orders in Islam*. The strengths and weaknesses of his analysis have been discussed by John Voll. See John Voll’s foreword in J. Spencer Trimmingham, *The Sufi orders in Islam*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), vii-xv.

with, it must be noted that many Sufi commentators agree that whatever differences exist between the various *ṭarīqahs*, these are due to the different natural inclinations of their founders or because of the particular conditions of the people amongst which this *ṭarīqah* flourished.<sup>70</sup>

Walī Allāh has ventured to describe why Sufi orders emerge at particular times and how sub-orders are created.<sup>71</sup> He says that at various times and in various places, different *awliyā'* of Allah are charged with preserving and renewing the internal dimension of *Shari'ah*. When a certain *walī* is chosen for this role, his high spiritual status becomes apparent to people and their hearts are attracted to him. He is inspired with those spiritual exercises that are more beneficial for the people of his times. Concurrently, a certain effect is given to this chosen *walī's* speech and his company. A new order is thus born which comprises his particular approach to *taṣawwuf*. People follow this order's methodology and succeed quickly. Whoever is supportive of this *ṭarīqah* is victorious and whoever opposes it loses.

After some time, when divine grace shifts to another person and another *ṭarīqah* is born, this *ṭarīqah* loses its luster and becomes like a body without spirit. This, according to him, explains why different Sufis have claimed at different times that their *ṭarīqah* was the shortest way to the goal. This is true for them only as long as divine grace favours them. When it shifts to another order, this claim is no longer true. Thus, this quality is not special to any particular order. Rather, it is divine grace, which is the key to this.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, sometimes a person appears who does not start any new *ṭarīqah*. Rather he only revives an old *ṭarīqah*, which had become less known due to its old age and its lack of prominent practitioners. Sometimes, a person

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<sup>70</sup> See, for example, Sayyid Manāẓir Aḥsan Gilānī, *Maqālāt-e-Iḥsānī*, (Karachi: Maktaba As'adia, 2005), 36. [Urd]

<sup>71</sup> Walī Allāh, *Ham'āt*, 43-46.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

appears who combines different *ṭarīqahs* in him. Even though he is known to be from a certain *ṭarīqah*, in fact, his *ṭarīqah* is a combination of different *ṭarīqahs*. Amongst these Wali Allāh has mentioned Quddūsiyyah, which is named after the Chishtī Ṣābirī shaykh ‘Abd al-Quddūs Gangohī.

This description of the process of renewal of *ṭarīqahs* and their mixing also applies to the Deobandīs. Their main *ṭarīqah* was Chishtī Ṣābirī but they combined in them all the main *ṭarīqahs* of the Indo-Pak subcontinent and they also added a distinctive touch to it. Deobandīs depart from conventional Sufi orders in an important way. Historical Sufi orders were characterized by a focus on their particular *ṭarīqah*. Along with the individual shaykh, the *ṭarīqah* was also important. With Deobandīs, there was a shift to a particular shaykh at the expense of the *ṭarīqah*. Thus, identification with Thānvī or Muḥammad Zakariyyā assumed more importance than a particular *ṭarīqah*. However, this reduced emphasis upon *ṭarīqah* was mitigated by their identification with the Deobandī *jamā‘at*, which took the place of *ṭarīqah*.

## PART II: DEOBANDĪ SUFI DOCTRINE

Delineating Deobandī Sufi doctrine requires that we look at the overall Deobandī doctrine or orientation in matters of *dīn*. We have already looked at some prominent aspects of Deobandī outlook in the introductory chapter. Probably, the best work, which brings together Deobandī attitude to different aspects of *dīn* is Qāri Muḥammad Ṭayyib's '*Ulamā'-e-Deoband kā dīnī rukh aur maslakī mizāj* [The religious outlook of the scholars of Deoband and their particular orientation]. Ṭayyib served as the *muhtamim* (rector) of Dar al-'Ulūm Deoband from 1929 until his death in 1983. His statements are the closest thing we have to official Deobandī doctrine. He has identified Deobandī orientation as nothing else but that of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah.<sup>73</sup> Elaborating on this, he stresses the great importance that Deobandīs give to striking a balance between the various aspects of *dīn*. The Book (Qur'an) and the Teacher (the Prophet) are both emphasized. Mere scholarship devoid of personal attachment to scholars and saints or excessive submission to saintly personalities without scholarly knowledge, are both considered extreme.<sup>74</sup> The same attitude extends to the various branches of Islamic sciences. All the various personalities of Islam are given due respect and the *dīn* is understood in the light of the teachings of the elders of the *ummah* who form an unbroken chain from the Prophet (pbuh) down to the scholars of Deoband. Thus, *taṣawwuf* is not allowed to become independent of Qur'an, *ḥadīth* and *fiqh*. It remains subservient to the outward *Sharī'ah*. The overarching goal is to strike a balance between the various branches of *dīn*.

After a lengthy analysis of the various aspects of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah's approach towards matters of *dīn*, Ṭayyib summarized it by saying,

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<sup>73</sup> Ṭayyib, 7-8.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 102.

The summary of the orientation of the scholars of Deoband is, following the *Sunnah* through the mediation of those who turn repentantly [to Allah], or following the *dīn* through the training of people of certainty, or following the *dīn* and religiosity through the training of people of *Sunnah*, or dying hearts in the colour of the Knower of the Unseen, or following the commands of Allah through the company of His friends.<sup>75</sup>

With respect to *taṣawwuf*, Deobandīs fall in the broader camp of sober Sufis (*ahl al-ṣahw*) as opposed to those who are intoxicated (*ahl al-sukr*). They do respect all the other Sufis making excuses for them whenever they can but they follow only the sober ones. The main classical personality amongst these is al-Junayd, who is called Sayyid al-Ṭāi'fah (leader of the group). After him, it is the founders of the four main *ṭarīqahs* that Deobandīs belonged to viz, 'Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī, Mu'īn al-Dīn Chishtī, Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī and Bahā' al-Dīn Naqshband. However, more than these, Deobandīs identify themselves with the school of thought enunciated by Sirhindī which is a particular orientation within the sober Sufis. This orientation was upheld by Shāh Walī Allāh, and later, somewhat modified by Sayyid Aḥmad Barelvī.

Deobandīs do not have a taste for philosophical speculation.<sup>76</sup> We do not find much discussion regarding the philosophical dimensions of *taṣawwuf*. Thānvī has categorically stated that he never intellectually took interest in *'ulūm al-mukāshafah* (sciences of unveilings); rather he was inclined to *'ulūm al-mu'āmalah* (sciences of actions). The reason is that the former have no role to play in achieving closeness to Allah, while the latter are related to commands and prohibitions and they have a direct role in helping one gain closeness to Allah.<sup>77</sup> The logical result of this attitude is that

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<sup>75</sup> Ṭayyib, 107.

<sup>76</sup> This is not to say that Deobandīs were not well versed in philosophy. Most of the elders of Deoband had in-depth training in traditional Islamic philosophy. However, they felt that most philosophical discussions were merely theoretical in nature with little or no benefit for one's practical life. Thus, they consciously lowered the priority of engaging in philosophical discussions.

<sup>77</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *al-Tanbīh al-ṭarabī...*, 1.

the proportion of Deobandī works on philosophical issues is far less compared to their overall intellectual output in other branches of Islamic learning.<sup>78</sup>

Sirhindī has described three stages of his mystical experience in metaphysical terms. These are: *tawhīd wujūdī* (oneness of being), *zilliyah* (shadowness) and *‘abdiyyah* (slavehood).<sup>79</sup> Amongst these, Deobandīs aim for the third level of *‘abdiyyah*, which they consider to be the purpose of *Shari‘ah*. Like Sirhindī before them, they do not regard *wajd* (ecstasy), *mukāshafah* (unveiling), and other such mystical experiences as the goals (*maqṣūd*) of the path; rather, they are merely praiseworthy (*maḥmūd*) in themselves and blameworthy (*madhmūm*) when raised to the level of goals. They hold the same view of *taṣawwuf* as Sirhindī, viz., “the goal of *taṣawwuf* is neither union with God, nor participation in His attributes, but simply to obey the *Shari‘ah* and to be a faithful servant of God.”<sup>80</sup>

Salīm Yūsuf Chishtī has identified three things as the main goals of *taṣawwuf*.<sup>81</sup> These are: perfect *tawhīd* (oneness of Allah), perfect *taqwā* (piety), and perfect *maḥabbah* (love for the Allah). Deobandīs would agree with that. There are enough statements to the same effect in Deobandī literature.<sup>82</sup> However, the emphasis on the external aspect of *Shari‘ah* tends to drown out the dimension of love for Allah. It is only when one engages with Deobandī masters personally that this goal comes out in sharp focus. Most of the time, we find three things identified by Deobandīs as the bedrock of *taṣawwuf*. These are: sound *‘aqīdah* (which includes the

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<sup>78</sup> It should be noted that the founder of Dar al-‘Ulūm Deoband, Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautvī was a major philosopher and theologian. His books are a testimony to that. Later, Thānvī and other Deobandi scholars continued to pen a number of treatises on philosophical issues but their proportion to their overall intellectual output was always considerably less.

<sup>79</sup> Anṣārī, 15-16.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>81</sup> Chishtī, 104-107.

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, Waṣī Allāh, 38-41.



comprehensive concept of *tawhīd*, which in turn includes the concept of love for Allah), following the *Sunnah* and *taqwā*.

Deobandīs regard *taṣawwuf* as having a sound basis in Qur'an and *ḥadīth*. In his Urdu commentary on the Qur'an *Bayān al-Qur'ān* [Exposition of the Qur'an], Thānvī also describes the Sufi concepts associated with different verses. All such verses with their Sufi meanings were later compiled together and published as *Masā'il al-sulūk min kalām Malik al-Mulūk* [Sufi issues in the speech of the King of kings].<sup>83</sup> He compiled another work titled *al-Tasharruf bi ma'rifat aḥādith al-taṣawwuf* [Honour through knowing the *ḥādiths* of *taṣawwuf*]. We have discussed it in the previous chapter. We will now look at some of the major themes of *taṣawwuf* as per Deobandīs, and also see their Qur'anic and *ḥadīth* basis as provided by them.

### **Knowledge: The Foundation**

When a person makes sincere repentance and resolves to never disobey Allah and His Messenger (pbuh), it requires that he should be fully aware of the commands of Allah directed towards him. For this, a person must seek religious knowledge. This could either be through formal or informal studies or merely through constantly remaining in touch with scholars. Gangohī has defined the position of knowledge with respect to the spiritual path. He says,

One should not hope to achieve closeness and reaching Allah without proper knowledge and good actions... Actions cannot be rectified without proper knowledge. Since, states are the fruits of actions; therefore, states are hard to achieve without rectification of actions. Allah accepts sound and pure actions. That action is sound, which is in accordance with the *Sharī'ah*; and that action is pure, which is only for Allah. Moreover, an action is never accepted without *taqwā*.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī, *Masā'il al-sulūk min kalām Malik al-mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad Iqbāl Qurayshī, (Lahore: Idāra-e-Islāmiāt, 1990). [Urd]

<sup>84</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 176-177.

The same idea is expressed by al-Junayd who is reported to have said that “whoever follows someone who has not listened to *ḥadīth*, and has not sat with the jurists, and has not learned etiquette from the one who teaches it; such a person ruins himself.”<sup>85</sup>

Thānvī produced a number of works specifically to fulfill the public need for Islamic knowledge. *Behishtī zewar* [Heavenly ornaments] is the most famous one, which was initially written as a basic essentials book for Muslim women. It proved so successful and so many portions of it were relevant to Muslim men as well that Thānvī decided to make it comprehensive for everyone. He wrote a supplement *Behishtī gohar* [Heavenly pearl], which included issues particular to men, as well as scholarly references to many *fiqh* issues. These two are generally published together now as a single volume. *Behishtī gohar* is also published separately and is taught in some boys’ *madrasahs* as a basic text of *fiqh*. Other works by Thānvī include *Ta’līm al-dīn* [Education of religion], *Ḥayāt al-Muslimīn* [Life of Muslims], etc. Nowadays, ten such works are published together as part of a single volume called *Iṣlāḥī niṣāb* [Syllabus for rectification].<sup>86</sup>

The idea behind these books was to create semi self-help guides for Muslims that dealt with Islamic faith and practice. These books were not meant to replace ‘*ulamā*’ but Thānvī and his associates recognized the changing moods of people and

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<sup>85</sup> ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Dehlavī, *Maraj al-baḥrayn*, translated from Persian into Urdu by Sanā-ul-Ḥaqq Ṣiddīqī, (Multan: Ṭayyib Academy, 2001), 50.

<sup>86</sup> This collection has been created by publishers. It brings together different books of Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī. The following books are part of this collection: *Ḥayāt al-Muslimīn* [Life of the Muslims], *Jazā’ al-a’māl* [Reward of actions], *Ta’līm al-dīn* [Education of religion], *Furū’ al-īman* [Branches of faith], *Ḥuqūq al-Islām* [Rights of Islam], *Ḥuqūq al-wālidayn* [Rights of parents], *Ādāb al-mu’āsharat* [Etiquettes of social dealings], *Aghlāt al-‘awām* [Mistakes of the common people], and *Qaṣd al-sabīl* [The optimal path]. Some publishers use the simplified version of the last mentioned book. The collection that we have used had the simplified version by Shāh Luṭf-e-Rasūl. Other publishers use Muḥammad Shafī’s simplification. Some publishers also include *Zād al-sa’id* [Provision for the fortunate] by Thānvī in this collection. The same name is used for the overall collection in spite of the variations.

sought to provide them with the guidance they needed in the manner that they wanted. However, they did point out that books could take one only up to a point. Beyond that, one had to refer to learned ‘*ulamā*’.

Many Sufi works mention that knowledge is the greatest barrier (*al-ḥijāb al-akbar*). The apparent meaning of this statement indicates that there is a conflict between knowledge and gnosis. However, Thānvī had a different take on it. He denounced the “pseudo-Sufis” who use this statement to free themselves of the need to learn the *Sharī‘ah* and of acting upon it. In reality, according to him, this statement means the opposite of what they have understood. Its meaning is quite subtle and hard for common people to understand. Therefore, he does not share it with us but gives a simplified explanation. According to him, there are a great many barriers between man and God and all those barriers are removed with knowledge except for the last one, which is closest to God. When this barrier is removed, one achieves *wuṣūl* (reaching Allah). This last barrier is called *al-ḥijāb al-akbar*. Thus, knowledge gets one closer to God until one reaches the last barrier and is not a barrier in itself as these people understood.<sup>87</sup> Gangohī had a somewhat different take on it. Responding to a question regarding *al-ḥijāb al-akbar*, he defined ‘ilm as *khudī* (self). In other words, it is the knowledge of one’s self, which is the greatest barrier. Once, a person loses sight of himself and considers him to be nothing (*lā shay’*), then he can achieve *wiṣāl*.<sup>88</sup>

These differing interpretations provided by Thānvī and Gangohī bring out an important dimension of Deobandi attitude towards their Islamic intellectual heritage. They were keen to appropriate this heritage in a way, which rendered it harmonious to

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<sup>87</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *Ta‘līm al-dīn*, 552-553.

<sup>88</sup> Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, “Fatāwā Rashīdia,” in Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, *Tālīfāt-e-Rashīdia*, (Lahore: Idāra-e-Islāmiāt, 1992), 197. [Urd]

their understanding of *Sharī‘ah*. Even if it required them to go out of their way to re-interpret these texts and statements, they were willing to go for it. This attitude is also illustrated by Khalīl Aḥmad Sahāranpūrī’s statement, which he made to Gangohī. According to Deobandī tradition, there was once a debate taking place between Deobandīs and Barelvīs. Before leaving for the debate, Khalīl Aḥmad approached Gangohī and said: “Please, tell us how much room there is for compromise [with the Barelvīs]. As for the proofs, we will take care of them.”<sup>89</sup>

By this statement, Khalīl Aḥmad was highlighting the fact that *Sharī‘ah* is elastic, which allows for multiple interpretations with regards to differed upon issues. There are generally proofs for many sides, and if there do not appear to be any, existing texts could be re-interpreted. It is the job of the *mujaddid* to decide, which one of these interpretations should be adhered to.

### **Sound ‘*Aqīdah* (Creed)**

Amongst the various aspects of *dīn*, sound ‘*aqīdah* is of fundamental importance. The main criterion for salvation in the hereafter is one’s ‘*aqīdah*. Deobandīs place strong emphasis on ‘*aqīdah*. This becomes especially important because of the milieu in which Deobandīs operated. Muslims were a minority living amongst a sea of non-Muslims. Most of these were Hindus who adhered to polytheistic ideas. Even though, at its core, Hinduism is monotheistic, yet the vast majority of the Hindu commonality believes in thousands of deities. Prolonged co-existence with the Hindus had made Muslim masses susceptible to their influences. Moreover, *wujūdī* Sufis (those who subscribe to *waḥdat al-wujūd*) had created confusion about the

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<sup>89</sup> Dr. Ismā‘īl Memon, Interview by Author, Buffalo, NY, April 2009.

fundamental Islamic *‘aqīdah* of *tawḥīd*. Their statements were cited by careless Sufis to stress the ultimate unity of all religions at the expense of Muḥammadan *Shari‘ah*.

Deobandīs sought to dispel these notions. They laid strong emphasis upon *tawḥīd*. Anything which may have been permissible in itself but was seen to have the potential of compromising *tawḥīd* was censured. For them, this also included the theological debates of the theologians. As we have stated before, the Deobandīs studied Māturīdī *‘aqīdah*. Yet for the common person, they insisted on holding on to the plain and simple *‘aqīdah* of the early generations of Islam. We have already mentioned before that while commissioning the Urdu translation of al-Ghazālī’s *al-Arab‘ūn*, Thānvī did not have the section on Ash‘arī *‘aqīdah* translated. The reason, apparently, was to avoid theological controversies.

This Deobandī emphasis on *tawḥīd* and maintaining the simplicity of *‘aqīdah* extended to certain popular Sufi practices as well. Thus, *tawassul* (seeking intercessors in prayer) which Deobandīs consider to be permissible was discouraged. Another important case was the position of the Prophet (pbuh). Deobandīs felt that over-zealous Sufis had tried to equate the Prophet (pbuh) with Allah. They sought to emphasize the human nature of the Prophet (pbuh) with the intention of clearly demarcating the boundary between the human and the divine. This placed them on a collision course with those Sufis who considered the Prophet (pbuh) to be *ḥāzīr* (present), *nāzīr* (seeing), and *‘ālim al-ghayb* (knower of the unseen).<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> This issue is one of the most divisive between the Deobandīs and the Barelvīs. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to arbitrate between the two. Suffice it to say that both sides do not consider the Prophet (pbuh) to be God or God-like. The main dispute is regarding the use of terms, which are considered problematic by Deobandīs and have the potential of making uneducated Muslims think that the Prophet (pbuh) is omnipresent and omniscient like Allah. For a relatively balanced discussion of the subject, see ‘Atā Allāh, 63-95.

## Sincerity or Purity of Intention (*Ikhhlās*) and God-consciousness (*Ihsān*)

We have discussed *ikhhlās* in some detail above in the context of Deobandī definitions of *taṣawwuf*. The main basis for this is the famous *ḥadīth* quoted there. The same idea is found in the following Qur’anic verse:

قُلْ إِنَّ صَلَاتِي وَنُسُكِي وَمَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ (الأنعام: 162)

Say, my prayer, my offering, my life and my death are all for Allah, the Lord of all the worlds. (al-An‘ām: 162)

Purification of intention is the starting point for any Sufi. Constant observation of one’s intention gradually leads to all one’s actions being for Allah’s sake alone. When this becomes a permanent condition, it is called *ikhhlās*. *Iḥtisāb*, which means doing something with the expectation of reward from Allah is an integral part of this. It also helps to create God-consciousness, which is *ihsān*. Things that would otherwise be considered temporal or worldly become religious and worthy of reward when one alters one’s intentions before doing them. The underlying basis of all of these is knowledge of the various virtues of different acts and of the *dīn* as a whole. Thus, knowledge, *iḥtisāb*, *ikhhlās*, and *ihsān* all work in tandem.

*Ihsān* means awareness of Allah as if one sees Him. The proof for *ihsān* is the famous *ḥadīth* of Jibrīl. It is a rigorously authenticated *ḥadīth*, which occurs with various chains of transmission in different books of *ḥadīth*, among them *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. The portion relevant to our discussion has been stated above. In this *ḥadīth*, *ihsān* is mentioned after *īmān* and Islam. The latter two refer to basic articles of faith and outward actions, respectively. *Ihsān* is mentioned separately which indicates that it is separate from what is generally understood from *īmān* and Islam.

We have already seen the relationship between *ikhhlās* and *ihsān*. Moving on to *īmān* (faith), we should note that *ihsān* is, in fact, a higher level of *īmān*. Gangohī

uses the following Qur'anic verse to bring out the relationship between *īmān*, *ihsān*, and *taqwā*:

لَيْسَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ جُنَاحٌ فِيمَا طَعِمُوا إِذَا مَا اتَّقَوْا وَآمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ ثُمَّ اتَّقَوْا وَآمَنُوا ثُمَّ اتَّقَوْا وَأَحْسَنُوا وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ (المائدة: 93)

There is no sin for those who believe and do good deeds in what they might have partaken earlier, if they fear Allah and believe and do good deeds, and again fear Allah and believe, and still again fear Allah and do good deeds. And Allah loves those who do good. (al-Mā'idah: 93)

He points out that this verse indicates that there are three levels of *īmān* followed by *ihsān*, which is the fourth level.<sup>91</sup> These are:

1. Having faith and accepting all legal rulings without proper piety and while committing sins.
2. Having faith and accepting legal rulings with abstention from all sins while using dispensations as and when needed. Thus, one avoids those things that are expressly forbidden and does not avoid things in which there is doubt.
3. Having faith and righteousness in such a way that one avoids forbidden things, as well as dispensations and some permissible things out of fear of committing something forbidden.
4. The fourth level is that of faith and *taqwā* accompanied by *ihsān*. It is this last level that the Sufi aims for. This level is above that of faith in the unseen; rather, this person has faith through direct observation. The *taqwā* for this level requires that one leaves all that which is besides Allah.

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<sup>91</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 177-178.

### ***Connection with Allah (Ta‘alluq ma‘a Allāh/Nisbah)***

Another concept associated with *ihsān* is that of acquiring *ta‘alluq ma‘a Allah* or *nisbah*. Both of these mean “connection with Allah.” This connection has multiple levels. The minimum is possessed by every Muslim. However, in Sufi circles these words are used to mean the higher level, which is also considered to be equivalent to *ihsān*.

Thānvī has defined *nisbah* as,

Man’s special relationship with Allah [which is characterized by] permanent obedience, dominant remembrance, and Allah’s special relationship with man [which is characterized by] acceptance and pleasure. [This relationship is] similar to the one between an obedient lover and a graceful beloved.<sup>92</sup>

*Ihsān* actually means constant mindfulness. Thus, it is synonymous with *yād dāsh*t or *hudūrī*, which have the same meaning. This is not exactly the same as true *nisbah* even though the latter is used interchangeably with these terms. The reality of *nisbah* is constant acceptance by Allah, which is solely from His grace. It just so happens that normally He grants this when a person does righteous deeds and avoids disobeying Him. Constant mindfulness is only helpful in achieving this state of complete obedience. It is theoretically possible that someone be aware of Him all the time and yet disobey Him. However, normally a person with such mindfulness of Allah does not disobey Him. Furthermore, *nisbah* with Allah is dependent on perfect acceptance by Him and it is a permanent state, which is normally not lost after being acquired.<sup>93</sup> True *nisbah*, thus, is the ultimate goal of *taṣawwuf*.

Looked at from the perspective of *ihsān* (in the meaning of true *nisbah*), *taṣawwuf* is partially obligatory, and partially commendable. This much is stated by Gangohī. Writing to Thānvī as part of the famous correspondence that took place

<sup>92</sup> Iqbāl, *Akābir kā...*, 50.

<sup>93</sup> Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Anfās-e-‘Īsā*, (Karachi: H. M. Sa‘īd & Company, 1989), 1:16-17. [Urd]



between them regarding *bid'ah* (innovation) in religion, he says in his usual succinct style,

Acquiring *nisbah* (connection with Allah) and being focused on Allah is required by Allah. It is a *kullī mushakkak*<sup>94</sup> (doubtful universal) whose lowest level is *farḍ* (obligatory) and whose highest level is *mandūb* (commendable).<sup>95</sup>

### **Closeness (*Qurb*)**

The idea of closeness (*qurb*) to Allah is intrinsic to *taṣawwuf*. The word *qurb* can have multiple meanings. One is the literal meaning, which means being physically close to someone or knowing his essence. Both of these cannot be achieved with respect to Allah since He is not bound by physical space and His essence cannot be known by humans.<sup>96</sup> The other meanings are metaphorical. Amongst these *qurb al-raḍā* (closeness due to Divine pleasure) is the goal of *taṣawwuf*. Its basis is the following Qur'anic verse:

وَمَا أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُكُمْ بِالَّذِي تُقَرَّبُونَ عِنْدَنَا زُلْفَىٰ إِلَّا مَنْ آمَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا (سبأ: 37)

Your riches or your children are not the things that bring you near to Us closely. However, the one who believes and acts righteously (is close to Us). (Saba': 37)

The same meaning is intended in the Qur'anic term *muqarrab*, which appears in a number of Qur'anic verses. In the beginning of Surat al-Wāqī'ah, three groups of people are identified, viz., people of the Right who are granted entry into Paradise, people of the Left who are sent to Hell, and the foremost ones who are granted higher status in Paradise. The last mentioned is the most superior group. They are also

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<sup>94</sup> It is a term used in logic which denotes "a word with a concept which is found in varying degrees in different individual situations." For example, the word "black" denotes a concept, which is more applicable to some things than others. Some things are blacker than others leading to a number of grades of blackness.

<sup>95</sup> Mīrathī, *Makātīb-e-Rashīdia*, 158.

<sup>96</sup> This is the standard Sunni position on the subject.

called *muqarrabūn* (those who have been brought closer to Allah). These verses are as follows:

فَأَصْحَابُ الْمَيْمَنَةِ مَا أَصْحَابُ الْمَيْمَنَةِ. وَأَصْحَابُ الْمَشْأَمَةِ مَا أَصْحَابُ الْمَشْأَمَةِ. وَالسَّابِقُونَ السَّابِقُونَ. أُولَئِكَ الْمُقَرَّبُونَ. (الواقعة: 8-11)

As for the people of the Right, how [lucky] are the people of the Right! And the people of the Left? How [wretched] are the people of the Left! And the foremost are the foremost. Those are the ones who have been brought close [to Allah]. (Al-Wāqī‘ah: 10-11)

Moreover, in verse 45 of Surat Āl ‘Imrān, Allah praises Jesus (pbuh) by giving him the title *muqarrab*. Sufis draw upon these verses and also upon the *ḥadīths* that deal with the subject. Amongst these, we find a *ḥadīth* which indicates two types of *qurb*, viz., *qurb al-farā‘id* (gaining closeness to Allah through obligatory acts) and *qurb al-nawāfil* (gaining closeness to Allah through voluntary acts). The *ḥadīth* appears in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and is as follows:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: "إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَالَ مَنْ عَادَى لِي وَلِيًّا فَقَدْ آذَنْتُهُ بِالْحَرْبِ وَمَا تَقَرَّبَ إِلَيَّ عَبْدِي بِشَيْءٍ أَحَبَّ إِلَيَّ مِمَّا افْتَرَضْتُ عَلَيْهِ وَمَا يَزَالُ عَبْدِي يَتَقَرَّبُ إِلَيَّ بِالنَّوَافِلِ حَتَّى أُحِبَّهُ فَإِذَا أَحْبَبْتُهُ كُنْتُ سَمْعَهُ الَّذِي يَسْمَعُ بِهِ وَبَصَرَهُ الَّذِي يَبْصُرُ بِهِ وَيَدَهُ الَّتِي يَبْطِشُ بِهَا وَرِجْلَهُ الَّتِي يَمْشِي بِهَا وَإِنْ سَأَلَنِي لِأَعْطَيْتَهُ وَلَئِنْ اسْتَعَاذَنِي لِأُعِيدَنَّهُ وَمَا تَرَدَّدْتُ عَنْ شَيْءٍ أَنَا فَاعِلُهُ تَرَدُّدِي عَنْ نَفْسِ الْمُؤْمِنِ يَكْرَهُ الْمَوْتَ وَأَنَا أَكْرَهُ مَسَاءَتَهُ." رواه البخاري.<sup>97</sup>

Abu Hurayrah reports that the Prophet, Allah bless him and give him peace, said: "Allah said that whoever opposes a friend of mine, I call him to war. There is nothing more beloved to me through which a slave of mine gains closeness to Me other than that which I have made obligatory upon him. My slave constantly draws nearer to Me through voluntary acts until I make him My beloved. Then, when I make him My beloved, I become his hearing with which he hears, and his sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he grasps, and his foot with which he walks. If he asks Me anything, I will surely give to him. If he were to seek My refuge, I will grant it to him. I am not hesitant from anything that I do than the hesitation that I have about [taking] the soul of a believer who dislikes death while I dislike hurting him. Reported by al-Bukhārī.

<sup>97</sup> Al-Bukhārī, 1372.

This *ḥadīth* has been cited by al-Qushayrī as well as Thānvī and others.<sup>98</sup> When a person engages in *tazkiyat al-naḥs*, his blameworthy traits are removed and natural faculties of greed and anger are weakened. His soul develops the *malakah*<sup>99</sup> (habitus) of loving those things, which Allah likes and hating those things, which Allah dislikes. This helps him to engage in good and avoid bad without much effort. This condition of his has been described as his hands becoming the hands of God and his feet becoming the feet of God. This condition is called *qurb al-nawāfil*. This does not imply physical union of man and God. Rather, in this state, man is the doer and Allah is the means through which he does things. It entails annihilation of one's blameworthy traits; therefore, it is also called *fanā' al-ṣiffāt*.<sup>100</sup>

The level of *qurb al-farā'id* is even higher. Here, man's existence is extremely weakened. He finds his own volition and power as non-existent. He becomes the tool and Allah becomes the doer. This is superior to the previous level of *qurb al-nawāfil* because the former entailed only the annihilation of blameworthy traits while the latter entails the annihilation of human volition. The first part of the *ḥadīth* confirms this superiority of *qurb al-farā'id*. It is also called *fanā' al-dhāt*.<sup>101</sup>

It should be mentioned here that only those things which are within one's power (*al-umūr al-ikhtiyāriyyah*) have a role to play in bringing one closer to Allah. Similarly, those things that are not in one's power (*al-umūr ḡhayr al-ikhtiyāriyyah*) do not play any role in bringing anyone closer to Allah.

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<sup>98</sup> Al-Qushayrī, 116; and Thānvī, *al-Takashshuf...*, 370-371.

<sup>99</sup> It could also be defined as a firmly established psychological state (كَيْفِيَّةٌ رَاسِخَةٌ فِي النَّفْسِ).

<sup>100</sup> 'Ārifī, *Baṣā'ir Ḥakīm-ul-ummat*, 199.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

### **Reaching Allah (*Wuṣūl ilallāh*)**

As we have discussed before, *qurb* and *wuṣūl* are integrally linked to achieving the pleasure of Allah. As for the particular meaning of *qurb*, we just dealt with it. Literally, *wuṣūl* means reaching. However, it does not refer to a physical meeting of man and God. While discussing *taṣawwuf*, Thānvī wrote about *wuṣūl* as follows: “the goal [of *taṣawwuf*] is *wuṣūl ilallāh* (reaching Allah) which means weakening of one’s relationship with the creation and strengthening of one’s relationship with the Creator.”<sup>102</sup> Gangohī explained it further:

It means that one is totally disconnected from anything other than Allah. The lowest level of this is that the veil is lifted from one’s heart and he begins to witness the beauty of the true Beloved.... Thus, *wiṣāl* means that one is disconnected from everything other than Allah and is totally focused on Allah. This is not what some heretics have understood who take it to mean that man achieves physical union with Allah. Such thinking is disbelief.<sup>103</sup>

### **Love for Allah (*Ḥubb Allāh*)**

Love for Allah is the cornerstone of *taṣawwuf*. It has many levels. The least of these is called *maylān* (inclination) and the highest is called *‘ishq* (passionate love).<sup>104</sup> These different levels can also be grouped under two over-arching categories, obligatory and voluntary.<sup>105</sup> The obligatory love of Allah is that which urges one to obey His commands and prevents him from engaging in things prohibited by Him. The reason why this love is obligatory is that following the *Sharī‘ah* is obligatory and this minimum degree of love is needed for one to combat one’s lower desires.

The basis for this understanding of divine love is the following Qur’anic verses:

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<sup>102</sup> Thānvī, *al-Takashshuf...*, 25.

<sup>103</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 56-57.

<sup>104</sup> Muḥammad Iqbāl, *Maḥabbat*, (Karachi: Maktabat al-Shaykh, n.d.), 12. [Urd]

<sup>105</sup> Waṣī Allāh, 53-54.

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَتَّخِذُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَنْدَادًا يُحِبُّونَهُمْ كَحُبِّ اللَّهِ ۗ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَشَدُّ حُبًّا لِلَّهِ (البقرة: 165)

Among the people, there are those who set up co-gods beside Allah whom they love as the love due to Allah. But those who believe are most firm in their love for Allah. (Al-Baqarah: 165)

And

قُلْ إِنْ كَانَ آبَاؤُكُمْ وَأَبْنَاؤُكُمْ وَإِخْوَانُكُمْ وَأَزْوَاجُكُمْ وَعَشِيرَتُكُمْ وَأَمْوَالٌ اقْتَرَفْتُمُوهَا وَتِجَارَةٌ تَخْشَوْنَ كَسَادَهَا وَمَسَاكِينُ تَرْضَوْنَهَا أَحَبَّ إِلَيْكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَجِهَادٍ فِي سَبِيلِهِ فَتَرَبَّصُوا حَتَّى يَأْتِيَ اللَّهُ بِأَمْرِهِ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْفَاسِقِينَ (التوبة: 24)

Say: If it be that your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your mates, or your kindred, the wealth that you have earned, the commerce in which you fear a decline, or the homes you like, are dearer to you than Allah, or His Messenger, and jihad in His cause then wait until Allah brings about His decision and Allah does not guide the sinning people. (Al-Tawbah: 24)

It naturally follows from this that the stronger love one has for Allah, and by extension, for His messenger (pbuh), the greater will be one's observance of His *Shari'ah*. It is this greater level of love for Allah and His messenger that the Sufis aim for. This passionate love or *'ishq* causes one to desire to meet one's Lord, which is also expressed in the following Qur'anic verse:

فَمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُو لِقَاءَ رَبِّهِ فَلْيَعْمَلْ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا وَلَا يُشْرِكْ بِعِبَادَةِ رَبِّهِ أَحَدًا (الكهف: 110)

So whoever hopes to meet his Lord, must do righteous deeds and must not associate anyone in the worship of Allah. (Al-Kahf: 110)

Deobandīs differentiate between *ḥubb-e-'aqlī* (rational love) and *ḥubb-e-'ishqī* (passionate love). The former is considered obligatory while the latter is merely praiseworthy even though they aim for it themselves. It is obvious that Deobandīs are balancing their dual roles of *muftīs* and shaykhs. They are at the crossroads of *taṣawwuf* and theology; and everything needs to be placed at its proper position.

## Oneness of Allah (*Tawhīd*)

The fundamental creed of Islam is *tawhīd*. *Taṣawwuf* has as its focus the one and only god Allah. Negating all others besides Allah is critical to it. This is tied in with the above-mentioned ideas of love for Allah, *qurb*, and *ihsān*. Gangohī says in *Imdād al-sulūk*:

True *tawhīd* (oneness) is that one should not remember anyone except Allah and should not know anyone or anything except Allah. He should not love anyone except Him. His love for Him should only be for His sake. It should not be out of greed for paradise or out of fear of hell. Rather, His own Essence is worthy of being loved.<sup>106</sup>

*Tawhīd* requires that one realize that Allah is the beginning and the end. He is the outward and the inward. All that exists is due to Him. It is because of this emphasis on *tawhīd* that the elect are described in the Qur'an as those who convey the messages to the people and fear Allah and do not fear anyone except Him (al-Aḥzāb: 39). He is not in need of anyone. At the same time, it must be remembered that His essence cannot be known. He is known through His attributes. It is said in the Qur'an:

وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِهِ عِلْمًا (طه: 110)

They do not encompass Him in their knowledge. (Ṭāhā: 110)

And

لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ (الشورى: 11)

Nothing is like Him. (Al-Shūrā: 11)

Nevertheless, Sufis aim to cultivate love for His essence without imagining any physical form.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 65.

<sup>107</sup> See Gangohī's letter to one of his main successors Şiddīq Aḥmad in *Mīrathī, Makātīb-e-Rashīdia*, 43-45.

### *Existence (Wujūd)*

The concept of *tawhīd* raises another important issue, that of *wujūd* (existence). The questions raised about it are: Is our existence real or illusory? Does anything really exist besides God? Is *wujūd* not an attribute of God? Would assigning existence to anything besides Allah not amount to polytheism? These questions have been hotly debated throughout human history and Sufis are no exception. Amongst the various theories that developed in response to these questions, ibn ‘Arabī presented the idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (existential monism or unity of being). Gradually, this spread throughout the Sufi community and almost every Sufi ended up subscribing to it. Later, it was challenged by Sirhindī who put forth his own theory of *waḥdat al-shuhūd* (experiential unity or unity of witnessing). However, he did not reject *waḥdat al-wujūd* altogether. Rather, he contended that this was a lower level of mystical experience. At the higher level, the mystic experiences *waḥdat al-shuhūd* which is in line with outward *Shari‘ah*.<sup>108</sup>

Deobandīs pride themselves on the fact that they give equal respect to apparent opposites such as ibn ‘Arabī and ibn Taymiyya/Sirhindī.<sup>109</sup> This presents obvious logical problems that are fraught with contradictions. We have stated before that even though Deobandīs generally study and teach Māturīdī texts, yet their *‘aqīdah* is not necessarily Māturīdī.<sup>110</sup> They follow Walī Allāh’s approach, which was to return to the plain and simple *‘aqīdah* of the early generations.<sup>111</sup> Thus, Deobandīs solve the problem of accommodating apparently opposite personalities by generally, not

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<sup>108</sup> Anṣārī, 14.

<sup>109</sup> Ṭayyib, 135.

<sup>110</sup> Ṭayyib, the former rector of Dar al-‘Ulūm Deoband has stated that Deobandīs are Ash‘arī-inclined Māturīdīs. He cites this as an example of their moderate approach to all branches of Islamic learning. See *Ibid.*, 156-157. While this is true of some *‘ulamā’* who dabble in dogmatic theology, most Deobandīs, scholars and laymen alike, avoid indulging in such debates. In fact, textbooks on logic and philosophy, which are needed for higher-level studies of dogmatic theology, are gradually being phased out of Deobandī *madrasahs* in Pakistan.

<sup>111</sup> Walī Allāh, *Ham‘āt*, 55-56.

engaging in any philosophical speculation or arbitration between them. They do not even try to harmonize between their contradictory theories as Walī Allāh had tried to do. Rather, they profess their respect for ibn ‘Arabī on the basis of their elders’ respect for them.<sup>112</sup>

Nevertheless, Thānvī dealt with the issues surrounding existence (*wujūd*) to clarify the stance of various Muslim groups. According to him, there are four main schools:<sup>113</sup>

1. Non-existent things are given their originated (*ḥādīth*, something with an origin) existence by Allah. Their existence is real and is completely separate from Allah but is dependent upon Him. This is the view of externalist scholars.
2. Non-existent things are given their originated existence by Allah in a way, which is beyond human comprehension. Thus, created things’ existence is an accident (*bi al-‘arḍ*) while Allah’s existence is intrinsic (*bi al-dhāt*). Some Muslim philosophers hold this view.
3. People of *kashf* (unveiling), i.e. Sufis reject existence of possible things altogether. Existence is an attribute of Allah; therefore, considering possible things to be existent amounts to associating partners with Allah. Their opinion is based upon their *kashf* and *dhawq* (taste). There are two schools of thought within them. One is that of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Its proponents say that only Allah’s is the real existence. Possible things’ existence is *wahmī* (illusory). The other school of thought is that of *waḥdat al-shuhūd*. Its proponents also say that only Allah’s is the real

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<sup>112</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *al-Tanbīh al-ṭarabī...*, 2.

<sup>113</sup> See Thānvī’s detailed discussion of the various schools of thought regarding *wujūd* in Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, “*Zuhūr al-‘adam bi nūr al-qidam*” in Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Bawādir al-nawādir*, (Lahore: Idāra-e-Islāmiāt, 1985), 640-665. [Urd]



existence. However, they consider possible things' existence to be *zillī* (a shadow).

After discussing these various schools of thought, Thānvī reminds his readers that it is dangerous to engage in philosophical discussions, which involve the Divine Essence. The safe approach is that of the pious predecessors who did not indulge in this. At the same time, he urges them to treat all the friends of Allah with respect and not to say anything bad about them even if they have engaged in such discussions.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, he declares that “*waḥdat al-wujūd* is not an issue of *taṣawwuf* at all; rather, it belongs to dogmatic theology. Because of their taste, Sufis have preferred it [over other opinions] and have used it.”<sup>115</sup>

### **Purification of the Soul (*Tazkiyat al-Nafs /Tahdhīb al-Nafs*)**

*Tazkiyat al-nafs* refers to reformation or purification of the soul. The main evidences for this are the Qur’anic verses, which explicitly mention the purification of the soul as required and praiseworthy.<sup>116</sup> Some of these are:

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا (الشمس : 9,10)

Truly he succeeds that purifies it (the soul), and he fails that corrupts it (the soul)! (Al-Shams: 9, 10)

And

هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ (الجمعة: 2)

It is He who has raised up from among the unlettered people a Messenger from among them, to recite His signs to them and to purify them, and to teach them the Book and the Wisdom, though before that they were in manifest error. (Al-Jumu‘ah: 2)

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 655.

<sup>115</sup> Muḥammad Shafī‘, *Majalis-e-Ḥakīm-ul-ummat*, (Karachi: Dār-ul-Ishā‘at, 1976), 232. [Urd]

<sup>116</sup> Dīn, 38.

In the second verse, purification (of the soul) is defined as one of the four main tasks of the Prophet (pbuh). The others are reciting the Qur'an to the people, teaching them the Book (Qur'an), and teaching wisdom (the *Sunnah*).

There are also numerous *ḥadīths*, which underscore the importance of purifying one's soul. We present a few. In one *ḥadīth*, the Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said:

أَلَا وَإِنَّ فِي الْجَسَدِ مُضْعَةً إِذَا صَلَحَتْ صَلَحَ الْجَسَدُ كُلُّهُ ، وَإِذَا فَسَدَتْ فَسَدَ الْجَسَدُ كُلُّهُ ، أَلَا وَهِيَ  
الْقَلْبُ. متفقٌ عَلَيْهِ<sup>117</sup>

Beware! There is a piece of flesh in the [human] body. When it is corrected, the whole body is corrected; and when it is corrupted, the whole body is corrupted. Beware, it is the heart. (Agreed upon)

The Prophet (pbuh) also said: “The heaviest thing which shall be weighed in the scale is good character.”<sup>118</sup> At another time, he said: “I was sent to perfect good character/morals.”<sup>119</sup> He also said: “Verily, a believer achieves the rank of the one who [voluntarily] fasts and prays through his good character.”<sup>120</sup>

When we talk of purification of soul, the obvious question is: purification from what? In order for us to answer that, we must look at the Islamic understanding of human psychology.

### ***Human Psychology***

Al-Ghazālī has devoted significant portions of his *Iḥyā' al-'ulūm al-dīn* [Revival of religious sciences] and *Kimiā-ye-Sa'ādat* [The alchemy of happiness] to discussing the psychological make-up of man. Deobandīs have made abundant use of this but have also added their own insights. Before we proceed further, it will be useful to

<sup>117</sup> Al-Bukhārī, 15.

<sup>118</sup> Abū Dāwūd, 4:253.

<sup>119</sup> Mālik ibn Anas, *Muwatta' al-Imām Mālik*, (Karachi: Qadīmī Kutub Khāna, n.d.), 705. [Arb]

<sup>120</sup> Abū Dāwūd, 4:252.

take an over-view of al-Ghazālī's description of the human soul and the interplay of psychological forces.

The human being has a physical aspect, as well as a spiritual one. Al-Ghazālī says that the spiritual is variously termed as *al-nafs* (soul), *al-'aql* (intellect/reason), *al-qalb* (heart), and *al-rūḥ* (spirit).<sup>121</sup> Each of these four has a particular meaning but there is also a fifth meaning which is common to all four. The meanings specific to each four are as follows:

1. The *qalb* refers to the cone shaped organ of flesh located at the left side of the chest. It is a flesh of a certain sort in which there is a cavity, and in this cavity, there is black blood which is the source (*manba'*) and the seat (*ma'dan*) of the spirit. Animals and even dead humans have this heart of flesh.<sup>122</sup>
2. The *rūḥ* is a subtle body whose source is the cavity of the physical heart, and which spreads by means of the pulsative arteries to all the other parts of the body. Its circulation in the body is what gives life to the human being.<sup>123</sup>
3. The *nafs* refers to the faculty of anger (*ghaḍab*) and appetite or craving (*shahwah*). The Sufis generally use *nafs* to denote all that is blameworthy in man; and so they say, "The *nafs* must be striven against and broken."<sup>124</sup>
4. The *'aql* refers to the faculty of knowledge of the real nature of things, and is thus an expression for the quality of knowledge, whose seat is the heart.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1982), 3:3-4. [Arb]

<sup>122</sup> Walter James Skellie, *The religious psychology of Al-Ghazzali: A translation of his book of the Iḥyā' on the explanation of the wonders of the heart with introduction and notes*, (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1938), 5.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

The fifth concept, which is the second meaning of each of these four is the essence of man. It is defined as follows:

هُوَ لَطِيفَةٌ رَبَّانِيَّةٌ رُوحَانِيَّةٌ ... وَ تِلْكَ اللَّطِيفَةُ هِيَ حَقِيقَةُ الْإِنْسَانِ وَ هُوَ الْمُدْرِكُ الْعَالِمُ الْعَارِفُ مِنَ الْإِنْسَانِ وَ هُوَ الْمُخَاطَبُ وَ الْمُعَاقَبُ وَ الْمُعَاتَبُ وَ الْمُطَالَبُ.<sup>126</sup>

It is a subtle, tenuous substance of an ethereal spiritual sort. .... This is the real essence of man. This is the one, which perceives and knows and experiences; it is addressed and held responsible and rebuked.<sup>127</sup>

It is in this meaning that the *rūḥ* has been mentioned in the Qur'an.

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الرُّوحِ قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا (الإسراء: 85)

And they ask you about the *rūḥ*. Say: The *rūḥ* is one of the commands of my Lord, and you are not given aught of knowledge but a little. (Al-Isrā': 85)

### The Seven Stages/Levels

Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī's description of the human being is somewhat different. He defines seven levels basing this division upon the Qur'anic verse:

وَقَدْ خَلَقَكُمْ أَطْوَارًا (نوح: 14)

He created you in diverse stages. (Nūḥ: 14)

These levels are as follows:<sup>128</sup>

1. Body. This is derived from the Qur'anic verse:

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ سُلَالَةٍ مِنْ طِينٍ (المؤمن: 12)

We have created man from an extract of clay. (Al-Mu'minūn: 12)

2. *Nafs*. This is a subtle body, which extends throughout the physical body.

The following Qur'anic verse refers to it.

يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ (الفجر: 27)

O content soul! (Al-Fajr: 27)

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>126</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm...*, 3.

<sup>127</sup> Skellie, 6.

<sup>128</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 117-120.

3. *Qalb*. This is the inside of the *nafs* and is more subtle than the *nafs*. The following Qur’anic verse refers to it:

كَتَبَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ الْإِيمَانَ (المجادلة: 22)

Allah has inscribed faith in their hearts. (Al-Mujādalah: 22)

4. *Sirr*. This is defined as a spiritual light and the tool of the *nafs*. It is also called the will and volition of the *nafs*. *Nafs* cannot do anything without it.
5. *Rūh*. This is also a spiritual light and the tool of the *nafs*. *Nafs* is living because of the presence of this *rūh*.
6. *Rūh-e-Khafī*. Many times it is referred to as merely *khafī*. Gangohī says that the proper name for this should be *akhfā*. It has been called *akhfā* in the Qur’an as well. Thus, it is said:

يَعْلَمُ السِّرَّ وَأَخْفَى (طه: 7)

He certainly knows the secret and what is even more hidden. (Ṭāhā: 7)

In another place, it is said:

قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي (الإسراء: 85)

Say, the spirit is something from the command of my Lord. (Al-Isrā’: 85)

This *akhfā* is a light, which is the subtlest and is closest to the world of realities.

7. ‘*Aql* (intellect): This is also a spiritual light and its location is to the left of the *qalb*.

### The Interplay of Psychological forces

Man is characterized by a number of powers and forces, which give him his particularly complex psychological composition. The various internal forces as well

as external limbs are described as the armies of the heart by al-Ghazālī.<sup>129</sup> He acknowledges that none can know the reality and the true number of these armies except Allah basing it upon a Qur’anic verse (al-Muddaththir: 31). Yet, he ventures to give a description of some of these. The scope of our discussion is the internal forces only. Al-Ghazālī has described these in a number of different ways. Each one of these helps to bring out different dimensions of man. In one such description, he uses the similitude of a kingdom. He says,

The body may be figured as the kingdom, the soul [the essence of man] as its king, and the different senses and faculties as constituting an army. Reason may be called the vizier, or prime minister, passion the revenue collector, and anger the police officer. Under the guise of collecting revenue, passion is continually prone to plunder on its own account, while resentment is always inclined to harshness and extreme severity. Both of these, the revenue collector and the police officer have to be kept in due subordination to the king, but not killed or excelled, as they have their own proper functions to fulfill. But if passion and resentment master reason, the ruin of the soul [the essence of man] infallibly ensues. A soul, which allows its lower faculties to dominate the higher, is as one who should hand over an angel to the power of a dog or a Muslim to the tyranny of an unbeliever.<sup>130</sup>

In another place, he goes in depth and says,

It should be understood that there are four mingled factors, which dwell together in man’s nature and make-up, and therefore four kinds of qualities are united against him. These are the qualities of the beasts of prey (*sabu’iyyah*), brutish qualities (*bahīmiyyah*), demonic qualities (*shaitāniyyah*) and lordly qualities (*rabbāniyyah*).

In so far as anger (*ghadab*) rules over him he is addicted to the deeds of a beast of prey, such as enmity, detestation, and attacking people by beating and cursing them. In so far as appetite (*shahwah*) rules him he is addicted to brutish acts of gluttony, greed, carnal desires, and so on. In so far as there is within his soul something lordly, as Allah has said, “The spirit is from the decree of my Lord” (Qur’an, *al-Isrā’*: 87), he claims lordship for himself and loves majesty, superiority, exclusiveness, and despotism in all things; and to be the sole ruler, and to slip away from the noose of servitude and humility. He longs to study all the sciences, nay rather he claims for himself science and knowledge and the real nature of things. He rejoices when knowledge is

<sup>129</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm...*, 5.

<sup>130</sup> Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, *Kimiā-ye-sa’ādat*, translated from Hindustani by Claud Field as *The alchemy of happiness*, (New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 1997), 22-23.

attributed to him, and is grieved when accused of ignorance. The comprehension of all realities, and seeking to rule by force over all creatures are among the lordly qualities, and man is greedy for them.

In so far as he differs from the brutes in having the faculty of discernment, although sharing with them in anger (*ghaḍab*) and appetite (*shahwah*), he attains to demonic qualities. Thus, he becomes wicked and uses his discernment in the discovery of ways of evil. He seeks to attain his ends by guile, deceit, and cunning and sets forth evil as though it were good. These are the characteristics of demons (*shayāṭīn*).

Thus, every man has within him a mixture of these four qualities, i.e., lordly, demonic, beastly, and brutish; and all of these are gathered together in the *qalb*.<sup>131</sup> So there are gathered inside of a man's skin, as it were, a pig, a dog, a demon, and a sage. The pig is appetite, for the pig is blameworthy for his covetousness, his voracity and his greed. The dog is anger, because dog has the bestial quality of savageness and enmity and slaughter. Thus, the pig through gluttony invites man to excess and abominations, and the wild beast by means of anger calls him to oppression and harmful acts.

The demon continues to stir up the appetite of the pig and the wrath of the wild beast, and to incite the one by means of the other; and he makes their inborn dispositions to appear good to them.

The sage who represents the intellect, is duty bound to ward off the plotting and guile of the demon by revealing his dissembling by means of his [i.e. the sage's] penetrating insight and clear illumination; and to destroy the gluttony of this pig by setting the dog over him, for by means of anger he breaks down the assault of appetite. He wards off the savageness of the dog by setting the pig over him and bringing the dog in subjection under his rule. If he does this successfully, his affairs are set right, equity is manifest in the kingdom of the body, and all goes in the straight path."<sup>132</sup>

Al-Ghazālī has not clarified as to whether these forces originate in the *nafs* or the *rūḥ*. While acknowledging al-Ghazālī, Gangohī quotes some unnamed Sufi shaykhs as saying that

*Nafs* is a subtle substance inside the physical body, which is the repository of all blameworthy traits. *Rūḥ* is also a spiritual substance inside the physical body but it is the repository of all praiseworthy traits. *Nafs* is the mine of evil. *ʿAql* is the army of the *rūḥ*. God's grace is the

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<sup>131</sup> Referring to the essence of man defined above.

<sup>132</sup> Skellie, 36-38.

helper of the *rūh* while absence of this divine grace is help for the *nafs*. *Qalb* is subordinate to the dominant side. And Allah knows best.<sup>133</sup>

As seen above, al-Ghazālī has used his description of the four main faculties to derive blameworthy and praiseworthy human traits. Thānvī does the same.<sup>134</sup> He begins by defining *khalq* and *khulq*. The former means outward appearance and the latter, which is the singular for *akhlāq*, means inward condition. It can also be translated as character or moral. Just as the outward appearance has aspects such as the eye, the nose, the mouth and the cheek; and the outward appearance will not be considered beautiful unless all of these are beautiful. Similarly, the internal aspect or the spiritual domain has certain aspects, which need to be made beautiful.

Basing his discussion on al-Ghazālī's description, Thānvī identifies four fundamental internal faculties of man: the faculty of *ilm* (knowledge), the faculty of *ghaḍab* (anger), the faculty of *shahwah* (appetite), and the faculty of *adl* (justice or maintaining proper balance) between the other faculties.<sup>135</sup> When these four are maintained in their proper places, good character is achieved.

The beauty of the faculty of knowledge is its ability to differentiate between truth and falsehood in creed as well as speech, and between good and bad actions. When this faculty develops this power, it achieves the fruit of *ḥikmah* (wisdom). Allah, the Exalted says in the Qur'an,

يُؤْتِي الْحِكْمَةَ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَنْ يُؤْتَ الْحِكْمَةَ فَقَدْ أُوتِيَ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّا أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ (البقرة: 269)

He grants wisdom to whom He wills and whoever is granted wisdom, he is indeed given a great good and none remember but men of understanding. (Al-Baqarah: 269)

<sup>133</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 153.

<sup>134</sup> The discussion that follows is from Dīn, 86-89. Thānvī has relied upon al-Ghazālī's *al-Arba'ūn* for this.

<sup>135</sup> Shiblī has objected to al-Ghazālī's inclusion of *adl* among fundamental internal faculties. See Shiblī Nu'mānī, *al-Ghazālī*, (Lahore: Islāmī Academy, n.d.), 80. [Urd]



The beauty of the faculties of *ghaḍab* and of *shahwah* is that they should remain restrained within the bounds of the *Sharī‘ah*. The beauty of the faculty of ‘*adl* lies in restraining the faculties of *ghaḍab* and *shahwah* under the instructions of *dīn* and reason. Thus, intellect has the job of an advisor and the faculty of ‘*adl* is the executor of the commands of the intellect.

When the faculty of *ghaḍab* is in excess, it leads to recklessness, arrogance, self-adulation and aggression. On the other hand, its scarcity leads to cowardice, meanness and disgracefulness. When in its moderate state, it is called *shajā‘ah* (bravery). Then, it entails the traits of graciousness, nobility, forbearance, steadfastness and gracefulness.

When the faculty of *shahwah* is in excess, it leads to gluttony, greed, ostentation, sycophancy, jealousy and madness. When it is scarce, it leads to sloth, weakness and laziness. When this *shahwah* is moderate, it is referred to as ‘*iffah* (temperance/chastity). Then it leads to modesty, generosity, patience, forgiveness, contentment, piety and helpfulness.

When intellect is in excess, it leads to cunningness and fraud. When it is scarce, it leads to stupidity and foolishness. When it is in moderation, it leads to sharpness of mind, and brilliance and smartness.

Thus, the essence of it all is moderation for indeed the best of matters are the moderate ones. Gangohī’s biographer Mīrathī defined this state of moderation as *nisbah*.<sup>136</sup>

Gangohī has also explained the internal forces within man in terms of Greek medicine’s view of the human being as comprising of four elements, viz., clay, water, fire and air. He says,

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<sup>136</sup> Mīrathī, *Tadhkirat al-Rashīd*, 2:2.

Opaqueness and cloudiness, darkness and ignorance, weariness and hard heartedness are the attributes of clay. When a person engages in *mujāhadah* in isolation, this opaqueness and weariness changes into lightness and clarity. When the *sālik*<sup>137</sup> passes over [his] earthen attribute, he sees deserts, forests, and desolated places in the world of practicality (*wāq'iah*). The attributes of water are: desire to interact with people, unbalanced temperament, being influenced easily, and tendency to sleep much. When the *sālik* passes over it, he sees rivers, seas, and greenery. The attributes of air are inclination toward carnal desires, excessive sorrow, and quick change of condition. While crossing over it, one feels as if he is going upwards and is flying in the air. The necessary attributes of fire are anger, arrogance, desire for greatness, seeking rank and status and exaltation. When one passes over it, he sees lamp, torch, lightning and other such things which burn. This component is after all the other components. This is the meaning of the Prophet's (pbuh) saying that the last thing to leave the hearts of *siddīqīn* (the truthful ones) is love for rank and status. It means that they [finally] get rid of the fire component, which is dominant upon most people.<sup>138</sup>

### ***Virtues (Faḍā'il) and Vices (Radhā'il)***

Thānvī and Gangohī have used al-Ghazālī's list of blameworthy and praiseworthy traits and have added others to it. Thānvī has also provided proofs for them, as well as the method of removing the former and acquiring the latter. Apart from al-Ghazālī's works, he has also at times referred to al-Qushayrī's *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*.

The praiseworthy traits as listed by Thānvī and Gangohī are: *niyyah wa irādah* (volition and intention), *ikhhlās* (sincerity), *tablīgh* (preaching), *tafakkur* (deliberation), *tafwīd* (entrusting one's affairs to Allah), *taqwā* (God fearingness), *tawādu'* (humility), *tawbah* (repentance), *tawḥīd* (oneness of the doer), *tawakkul* (trust), *khushū'* (submissiveness), *khawf* (fear), *du'ā* (prayer), *rajā* (hope), *raḍā* (contentment), *zuhd* (abstinence), *shukr* (gratitude), *ṣabr* (patience), *ṣidq* (truthfulness), *maḥabbah* (love), gentleness towards people, patiently enduring their

<sup>137</sup> Traveler on the spiritual path.

<sup>138</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 186.

harshness, generosity, and forgiveness.<sup>139</sup> Mīrathī asserts that the root of all *faḍā'il* is *ṣidq* and *ikhlās*.<sup>140</sup>

The blameworthy traits are as follows:<sup>141</sup> *shahwah* (desire), *āfāt al-lisān* (diseases of the tongue including back-biting, lying, etc.), *isrāf* (wastefulness), *ghaḍab* (anger), *ḥiqd* (rancour), *ḥasad* (jealousy), *ḥubb al-dunyā* (love of the world), *bukhl* (miserliness), *ḥirṣ* (greed), *ḥubb al-jāh* (love of status), *riyā* (showing off), *kibr* (arrogance), *ʿujb* (self-conceit), *ghurūr* (delusion), *takalluf* (affecting). Mīrathī states that the root of all *radhā'il* is *kibr*.<sup>142</sup>

The blameworthy traits must be removed and the praiseworthy traits must be acquired. Together, these two processes are termed as *tazkiyat al-nafs*. Looking at *taṣawwuf* from the perspective of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, it becomes personally obligatory as indicated by al-Ghazālī, a major figure of the classical Shafī'ī school, as well as ibn ʿĀbidīn, a major reference in the later Ḥanafī school.<sup>143</sup>

### **Fearing God (*Taqwā*)**

*Taqwā* is a verbal noun from the root letters w-q-y. It has two meanings. One is to fear someone and the other is to safeguard oneself. As a technical term, it is generally associated with the idea of fearing Allah and saving oneself from sins and His punishment. As for fearing Allah, Sufis generally invoke the idea of Allah as the Beloved and so translate *taqwā* as “fearing Allah’s displeasure.” Explaining the final goal of *taṣawwuf*, which is reaching Allah spiritually, Gangohī writes,

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<sup>139</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *Taʿlīm al-dīn*, 526 and Mīrathī, *Tadhkirat al-Rashīd*, 2:11-12.

<sup>140</sup> Mīrathī, *Tadhkirat al-Rashīd*, 2:6.

<sup>141</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *Taʿlīm al-dīn*, 534 and Mīrathī, *Tadhkirat al-Rashīd*, 2:11-12.

<sup>142</sup> Mīrathī, *Tadhkirat al-Rashīd*, 2:6.

<sup>143</sup> For al-Ghazālī’s opinion, see Keller, *Reliance of the traveller*, 12. Ibn ʿĀbidīn has the same opinion and he cites al-Ghazālī’s *Iḥyāʾ al-ʿulūm al-dīn* as a source for learning about the diseases of the heart and their treatments. See Muḥammad Amīn ibn ʿĀbidīn, *Radd al-muḥtar ʿalā al-Durr al-Mukhtār*, (Damascus: Dār al-Thaqāfah wa al-Turāth, 2000), 1:141. [Arb]

In short, proper faith and *taqwā* are the integrals of reaching [Allah, which is the goal of *taṣawwuf*]. It is not proper to leave any of these in any condition. After learning the fundamentals of *dīn*, it is obligatory to maintain faith and *taqwā* in all stations [of the spiritual path].<sup>144</sup>

The command to observe *taqwā* is contained in numerous verses of the Qur'an.

Some of these are listed below. Many of these are also quoted by Gangohī in his *Imdād al-sulūk*.<sup>145</sup>

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

O you who believe, fear Allah as He should be feared, and die not except as those who have surrendered (unto Him) (Āl 'Imrān: 102)

لَنْ يَنَالَ اللَّهَ لُحُومُهَا وَلَا دِمَاؤُهَا وَلَكِنْ يَنَالُهُ التَّقْوَىٰ مِنْكُمْ (الحج: 37)

Their flesh and their blood do not reach Allah but *taqwā* on your part reaches Him. (Al-Hajj: 37)

إِنَّمَا يَتَقَبَّلُ اللَّهُ مِنَ الْمُتَّقِينَ (المائدة: 27)

Allah accepts only from the God-fearing. (Al-Mā'idah: 27)

After listing all the verses, Gangohī infers that these verses have a common theme which is that Allah does not befriend anyone except the one who is pious.<sup>146</sup>

For this, he quotes the following verse:<sup>147</sup>

إِنَّ أَوْلِيَاءَهُ إِلَّا الْمُتَّقُونَ (الأنفال: 34)

His friends are none except the God-fearing. (Al-Anfāl: 34)

*Taqwā* has various levels. We mentioned some of these in our discussion on *īmān* and *ihsān*. It should also be noted that all body parts have their own form of *taqwā*. Thus, the *taqwā* of the eye is that one should not look at forbidden things. The *taqwā* of the tongue is that one should not engage in back-biting, ridicule, slander and other sins of the tongue. The *taqwā* of the ear is that one does not listen to

<sup>144</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 179.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 179-181.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid. Gangohī has translated this verse independent of the context of its revelation. The commonly understood meaning of the verse is that “the rightful guardians of the Noble Sanctuary in Makkah are Muslims.” See Muḥammad Shafī', *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, translated from Urdu into English by Muḥammad Taqī 'Usmānī, (Karachi: Maktabat Dār al-'Ulūm, 1995), 8:212.

anything impermissible. The *taqwā* of the hands and the feet is that one does not do anything forbidden with them and does not walk to anything forbidden. In short, *taqwā* requires one to stay away from all sins. At the higher level, it also requires one to avoid things that are doubtful

The benefit of *taqwā* is the company of Allah himself. He says in the Qur'an,

إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ مُحْسِنُونَ (النحل: 128)

Surely, Allah is with those who fear Him and who are good in their deeds. (Al-Nahl: 128)

Thānvī has also pointed out that requirements of *taqwā* vary from person to person. He quotes the verse,

فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ وَأَسْمِعُوا وَأَطِيعُوا (التغابن: 16)

So observe *taqwā* (total obedience to Allah in awe of Him) as much as you can, and listen and obey. (Al-Taghābun: 16)

He uses this verse to convince his listeners (this was part of a speech that he gave), as well as readers (it was later transcribed) that since *taqwā* is an integral part of *taṣawwuf*, and *taqwā* has been made dependent upon one's ability; therefore, *taṣawwuf* is possible for everyone.<sup>148</sup> Everyone has his own set of circumstances that he has to deal with. Some people are able to undertake more *mujāhadah* while others can only do little. The expert shaykh judges a disciple's situation and advises him accordingly.

### **‘Abdiyyah (Slavehood): Giving Up Objections to Allah**

‘Abdiyyah (slavehood) refers to the perfection of faith and actions. The purpose of man's existence is to achieve this state. This is relevant to a *sālik* in all conditions and especially so when he starts his *khalwah*. Gangohī says that “the disciple must stay

<sup>148</sup> Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Khuṭbāt Ḥakīm-ul-ummat*, (Multan: Idāra Tālīfāt-e-Ashrafia, n.d.), 11:35-37. [Urd]

before Allah like a dead person remains in the hands of the washer.”<sup>149</sup> It requires that one submits to Allah’s will in all respects. Thus, whether one has wealth or not, whether one receives a spiritual opening or contraction, he must always remain content with whatever Allah sends his way. He must believe that whatever Allah does to him is in accordance with the divine plan, and that Allah does not oppress anyone. Thus, there might be something that he does not like but Allah has put some good in it. In the Qur’an, He says:

وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَّكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ (البقرة: 216)

It may happen that you hate a thing, which is good for you, and it may happen that you love a thing which is bad for you. Allah knows while you know not. (Al-Baqarah: 216)

### **Annihilation (*Fanā’*) and Subsistence (*Baqā’*)**<sup>150</sup>

Annihilation and subsistence are closely connected concepts. Both have two levels. At the first level, one’s blameworthy traits are annihilated through *izālah* (complete removal) or *imālah* (redirection) such that only praiseworthy traits remain. This annihilation is called *fanā’ hissī* (sensorial annihilation) and the subsistence is called *baqā’*. We have referred to this in our discussion of closeness to Allah. The other level or type of annihilation refers to the annihilation of knowledge of creation because of the *sālik*’s immersion in *tawhīd*. This *fanā’* is the highest level of love. Relationships with everyone and everything besides Allah are eliminated to such an extent that no one remains His partner in worship. This is the gist of لا إله إلا الله. Similarly, no one remains His partner in being the goal. This is the gist of the following Qur’anic verse:

<sup>149</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 138.

<sup>150</sup> The discussion in this section is based on ‘Ārifī, *Baṣā’ir Ḥakīm-ul-ummat*, 204-205.

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ أَنَّمَا إِلَهُكُمُ اللَّهُ وَاحِدٌ ۗ فَمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُوا لِقَاءَ رَبِّهِ فَلْيَعْمَلْ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا وَلَا يُشْرِكْ بِعِبَادَةِ رَبِّهِ أَحَدًا (الكهف: 110)

Surely, I am but a man like yourselves. It is revealed to me that your God is the one God. So the one who hopes to meet his Lord should do righteous deeds and should not associate anyone in the worship of his Lord. (Al-Kahf: 110)

Moreover, no one appears existent in the eyes of the seeker. This is the gist of the Qur'anic verse:<sup>151</sup>

كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ (القصص: 88)

Everything will perish except His face. (Al-Qaṣaṣ: 88)

This type of *fanā'* is also called *fanā'-e-'ilmī* (intellectual annihilation). When a person achieves this state he may be subjected to one of many *aḥwāl* (states). Thus, some are overwhelmed by intoxication and remain in this state. Others are dominated by *jadhb*. Still others are dominated by *istighrāq*. Some recover their knowledge of things. Their state is called *baqā'* (subsistence) which occurs after having achieved annihilation. If this person annihilates his knowledge of annihilation, it is called *fanā' al-fanā'* (annihilation of annihilation). This leads to perfect subsistence. This is also the end-point of *sayr ilallāh*. From here onwards, *sayr fillāh* (journey in Allah) begins.<sup>152</sup>

### **Position of the Prophet (pbuh) and His *Sunnah***

Deobandīs claim for themselves the position of moderation with respect to the Prophet (pbuh). They regard him as the noblest of men, the leader of all prophets, and second only to Allah. He is regarded as the perfect man who embodied the perfections of all prophets and who is the source of the *wilāyah* of all *awliyā'* to come. All the different

<sup>151</sup> Thānvi, *Malḥūzāt kamālāt-e-Ashrafīa*, 36.

<sup>152</sup> *Sayr fillāh* is an experiential matter. Deobandīs do not normally talk about experiential matters. We were unable to find anyone willing to discuss this with us.

aspects of *dīn* whether they deal with creed, or practices, or *taṣawwuf*; they are all regarded as originating with him. He is regarded as the *murabbī* (trainer) of the whole *ummah* who trained his companions directly, using the Qur'an as the manual, and through them the rest of the *ummah*.<sup>153</sup> His *Sunnah*, thus, serves as a detailed implementation plan for people to rely on. He serves as the focus of Islamic faith and practice. Nevertheless, Deobandīs are keen to draw a line between him and Allah, so that the boundaries between the Creator and the creation are maintained. They are careful to reject even the slightest hint of any claim of divinity about him.

An analysis of Deobandī literature suggests that more than the person of the Prophet (pbuh), it is his *Sunnah* that is the focus of Deobandīs. To be sure, sending blessings upon the Prophet (pbuh) is the starting point for any Deobandī disciple;<sup>154</sup> and remembering him through mentioning his noble character and his life is considered virtuous.<sup>155</sup> However, it is *ḥubb-e-‘aqlī* (rational love) that is considered necessary and not *ḥubb-e-‘ishqī* (natural love). Deobandīs are careful not to deny the validity of the latter but the emphasis is more on the former.

The *Sunnah* is considered as providing comprehensive guidance for all Muslims of all times. It encompasses beliefs, external traits and manners. It covers every aspect of human existence including relations between man and man, man and God, man and society, as well as man and the natural world. The main evidence for this is the following Qur'anic verse:

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُو اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا  
(الأحزاب: 21)

<sup>153</sup> Ṭayyib, 116.

<sup>154</sup> ‘Ārifī, *Baṣā’ir Ḥakīm-ul-ummat*, 142.

<sup>155</sup> See, for example, Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Nashr al-ṭib fi dhikr al-Nabiyy al-Ḥabīb*, (Karachi: Tāj Company Limited, n.d.). [Urd]



Certainly you have in the Messenger of Allah an excellent exemplar for him who hopes in Allah and the Last day and remembers Allah much. (Al-Aḥzāb: 21)

Deobandīs' emphasis upon *ḥadīth* studies had as its main goal that the Prophet's life should come into sharp focus for Muslims so that they can connect to him directly and actually attempt to experience him through his words and actions. In fact, following the *Sunnah* is one of the main themes of Deobandī *taṣawwuf*. This is used to stake their claim to be true Ahl al-Sunnah wal Jamā'ah. The obvious reference is to their opponents, Barelvīs and Ahl-e-Ḥadīs who are considered to have either a shallow or an incorrect understanding of *Sunnah*.

Thānvī has mentioned that the disciple starts benefiting immediately in Imdād Allāh's *ṭarīqah*.<sup>156</sup> The disciple benefits through *jadhb* (Allah pulling man to Himself) and not through *sulūk* (Sufi's effort to travel on the path to Allah). The reason for this *jadhb* is following the *Sunnah*. He cites the following verse as evidence:

قُلْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي يُحْبِبْكُمُ اللَّهُ (آل عمران: 31)

Say (to the believers, O Prophet), if you love Allah, then follow me, Allah will love you. (Āl 'Imrān: 31)

This verse provides the main basis for the Deobandī viewpoint. The opinion of Gangohī regarding the way of the *Sunnah* has also been cited above. Deobandīs present following the *Sunnah* as a short-cut way to establishing *ta'alluq ma'a Allāh*.<sup>157</sup> *Ad'iyah ma'thūrah* (prayers established through *ḥadīth*) cover a broad range of occasions. They encompass one's whole day. Making a habit of saying these with presence of mind allows one to remember Allah throughout the day. This helps one

<sup>156</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *Anfās-e-Īsā*, 1:18.

<sup>157</sup> See Muḥammad Taqī 'Usmānī, *Islāhī khuṭbāt*, (Karachi: Memon Publications, 1994), 4:134-135. [Urd]. Taqī 'Usmānī is one of the foremost contemporary Ḥanafī scholars. He is also a successor of Dr. 'Abd al-Ḥayy 'Arifī who was a successor of Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī.

gradually develop a connection with Allah which in turn gives one gnosis of Him and helps one stay away from sin.

Shāh Waṣī Allāh, a successor of Thānvī, composed a treatise dealing with the issue of love for Allah titled *Maḥabbat-e-Ilāhī aur nafs* [Love of the Divine vs. the self]. In it, he quotes al-Junayd as saying that all the paths are closed to people except for those who follow the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (pbuh). He claims a direct link between denying one's lower desires and following the *Sunnah*.<sup>158</sup> The main impediment to following *Sunnah* is one's lower desires; and Allah's love is dependent on following the *Sunnah* as established through (Qur'an, *Āl 'Imrān*: 31).

### ***Innovations and Customs***

The necessary result of this emphasis on *Sunnah* is rejection of *bid'ah* (innovation). In this context, there are two levels which Deobandīs point out. One is the level of actual innovation; the other is that of *khilāf al-Sunnah* (against the *Sunnah*). By the first one, they mean anything which people do, considering it to be a part of religion but was not practiced by the early generations. In the Indian milieu of nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this meant death rituals which had become common in India such as *chehlam* (commemoration of death, forty days after it), *tīja* (commemoration of death, three days after it), offerings at graves, etc., as well as common Sufi practices such as *mawlid*, *urs*, etc. Any such practice has no place in Deobandī *taṣawwuf*. Rather, it is perceived as a travesty of true *taṣawwuf* and is considered detrimental to spiritual progress. We will discuss these practices in more detail in the next chapter.

The second level is that of social customs which are not established from the *Sunnah*. These are not branded as innovations. Rather, they are termed as being

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<sup>158</sup> Shāh Waṣī Allāh, *Maḥabbat-e-Ilāhī aur nafs*, (Allahabad: Dāi'rat al-Ishā'ah, n.d.), 8. [Urd]

against the *Sunnah* and thus, worthy of giving up. These things are not considered to be as bad as the previous category but should be shunned, nevertheless. Ṭayyib has given a simple formula for identifying *bid'ah* and *khilāf al-Sunnah* things.<sup>159</sup> The customs associated with occasions of sorrow are generally done with the intention of divine reward. These are innovations and should be stopped forcefully. The customs associated with joyous celebrations and marriages are not done with the intention of divine reward. Rather, these are just social customs or expressions of one's emotions. These are merely against the *Sunnah* way of doing such things, and should be stopped gently.

### ***Wilāyah* and the Friends of Allah (*Awliyā*)**

*Wilāyah* is a comprehensive Arabic term which can have a number of different meanings. In Sufi context, it refers to the high spiritual rank of a Muslim. *Awliyā* (plural of *walī*, someone who is a saint or friend of Allah) have always been revered by Sufis, as well as the general body of Muslims. Deobandīs are no exception. They believe in the continuation of *wilāyah* and are particular about giving due respect and reverence to those who are considered *awliyā*. The basis of *wilāyah* is the Qur'anic verses which refer to it or to *awliyā*. One such verse is the following one:

أَلَا إِنَّ أَوْلِيَاءَ اللَّهِ لَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ. الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَكَانُوا يَتَّقُونَ. لَهُمُ الْبُشْرَىٰ فِي الْحَيَاةِ  
الدُّنْيَا وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ ۗ لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِكَلِمَاتِ اللَّهِ ۗ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ (يونس: 62-64)

Listen! The friends of Allah shall have no fear nor shall they grieve; those who have believed and have been fearful of Allah. For them there is the good news in the worldly life and in the hereafter. There is no change in the words of Allah. That is the great achievement. (Yūnus: 62-64)

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<sup>159</sup> Ṭayyib, 137.

This verse points out that *wilāyah* is dependent on faith and *taqwā*. The higher the level of faith and *taqwā* the higher the *wilāyah*, and the lower these two are the lower the *wilāyah*. The lowest level of *wilāyah* is possessed by all Muslims and is called *al-wilāyah al-‘āmmah* (general friendship). The higher rank of *wilāyah* is possessed by the spiritual elite and is called *al-wilāyah al-khāṣṣah* (special friendship). These latter ones are generally the only ones called *awliyā* and are characterized by greater closeness to Allah. A true *walī* is the one whose heart compels him to engage in obedience to Allah. The goal of *taṣawwuf* is to achieve this level.

Deobandī approach towards the *awliyā* is characterized by caution and moderation. They consider them to be the soul of the *ummah*.<sup>160</sup> They maintain respect for all known *awliyā* but are careful to follow only those whom they regard as *muḥaqqiq* (rigorously exactingly).<sup>161</sup> In cases of conflict, Deobandīs favour *Sunnah* over the actions or ideas of any shaykh. Even though some amongst Deobandīs seek and acquire permissions for reciting *Dalā’il al-khayrāt* [Guides to good deeds], *Ḥizb al-baḥr* [Litany of the sea] and other such compilations; they generally emphasize sending blessings upon the Prophet (pbuh) using those formulas that are reported in *ḥadīths*.<sup>162</sup>

The same attempt to balance respect towards *awliyā* and maintaining legal limits is seen with respect to their attitude towards the *shathīyyāt* (ecstatic utterances) of some Sufis such as al-Ḥallāj.<sup>163</sup> In the same vein, Thānvī composed a work titled

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<sup>160</sup> Ṭayyib, 129.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>162</sup> See the edition of *Ḥizb al-baḥr* published by Kutub Khāna Maḥzarī, a publishing house based in Karachi and run by the son of Ḥakīm Akhtar, a contemporary Deobandī shaykh. The beginning of the book carries a reminder to “all Muslims that even though this prayer is blessed yet the prayers based on Qur’an and *Sunnah* have a higher rank.” See Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, *Ḥizb al-baḥr*, (Karachi: Kutub Khāna Maḥzarī, n.d.), 3. [Arb]

<sup>163</sup> Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Bawādir al-nawādir*, (Lahore: Idāra-e-Islāmiāt, 1985), 397-398. [Urd]

*al-Tanbīh al-ṭarabī fī tanzīh ibn al-‘Arabī* (Delightful notification for the exoneration of ibn ‘Arabī) seeking to explain his apparently unorthodox statements.

### ***Sharī‘ah and Taṣawwuf***

The relationship between *Sharī‘ah* and *taṣawwuf* is closely linked to the debate surrounding its origin. For those who regard it as a foreign un-Islamic concept, there can be no concordance between the two. We have already discussed in our analysis of their definitions of *taṣawwuf*, and of their doctrine, that the Deobandīs believe *taṣawwuf* to be firmly rooted in Qur’an and *Sunnah*. At the same time, they acknowledge that innovations have crept in to *taṣawwuf* to the extent that some have tried to make *taṣawwuf* independent of *Sharī‘ah*. Deobandīs seek to rehabilitate *taṣawwuf* in a way which also rehabilitates *Sharī‘ah* with respect to *taṣawwuf*. Their efforts in this regard are squarely in the line of Sirhindī and Walī Allāh. Muḥammad Zakariyyā has extensively quoted Sirhindī in the chapter on *ṭarīqat* in his book *Sharī‘at-o-ṭarīqat kā talāzum* [The inseparability of *Sharī‘ah* and *taṣawwuf*]. This effort extends to reshaping the image of those Sufis who are regarded by some as being on the boundaries of disbelief. Thānvī writes in *Ta‘līm al-dīn*:

The correction of this mistake that there is no following of *Sharī‘ah* in *faqīrī* (*taṣawwuf*), is in *Futūhāt* [*al-Makkiyyah*, viz.]: “That *ḥaqīqah*, which is against *Sharī‘ah* is rejected.” Also, [it is said] in it [that]: “the one who says that there is another way to Allah besides the one that *Sharī‘ah* ordained, his statement is false.”<sup>164</sup>

There is strong basis for Deobandīs’ insistence upon *Sharī‘ah* as the basis for *taṣawwuf*. It is to be found in the statements attributed to classical masters. Al-Junayd is regarded as the Sayyid al-Ṭā’ifāh (leader of the group) by most Sufis. Like Waṣī Allāh mentioned above, Muḥammad Zakariyyā quotes al-Junayd saying that “all

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<sup>164</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *Ta‘līm al-dīn*, 551.

ways [to Allah] are closed to people except for the one who follows the Prophet (pbuh).”<sup>165</sup>

Moreover, amongst the early writers on *taṣawwuf*, al-Kalābādhī has declared that “there is consensus amongst the Sufis that no matter what spiritual level a person may attain, he must still fulfill his religious obligations that every legally responsible person is supposed to fulfill.”<sup>166</sup> He quotes a famous Sufi Yaḥyā ibn Mu‘ādh al-Rāzī (d. 872) saying that “the essence of gnosis will not reach your heart as long as you owe Him a right that you have not fulfilled.”<sup>167</sup>

In *Imdād al-sulūk*, Gangohī quotes al-Junayd as saying that the *nihāyah* (end) of *taṣawwuf* is to return to the *bidāyah* (beginning).<sup>168</sup> This is taken to mean that a Sufi who has passed through the various stages of mystical experience returns to the same outward appearance as that of common Muslims except that he has a higher level of certitude. The implication is that commands of the *Sharī‘ah* must still be upheld.

All Deobandī writers emphasize that the *Sharī‘ah* is always applicable to a Sufi unless he loses his senses in which case he is no longer legally responsible. This theme is to be found in almost all Deobandī works on *taṣawwuf*. To give a sampling, we will quote Gangohī, Thānvī, and Muḥammad Zakariyyā. Gangohī says:

The *ummah* (community) is agreed that whatever Allah has obligated on His servants, and whatever has been proven from the *ḥadīth*, it is obligatory upon people. No *walī* or *ṣiddīq* (a highly ranked *walī*), no matter what rank he attains, as long as he retains his senses, neither can he step back from [the Qur’an and *Sunnah*] nor can he decrease or increase [anything] in the *Sharī‘ah*. No matter what station a person reaches, he must respect the *Sharī‘ah*.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Kāndhlavī, *Sharī‘at-o-ṭarīqat kā talāzum*, 101.

<sup>166</sup> Al-Kalābādhī, 65.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>168</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 50.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 54-55.

Thānvī says the same.

Now, that the meaning of *nisbah* is understood, it will be obvious that a transgressor or unbeliever cannot have *nisbah*. Some people mistakenly regard certain states [which are the result of spiritual exercises and exertion] as the sign of *nisbah*. This state can exist in anyone who engages in spiritual exercises but this is ignorants' understanding of it.<sup>170</sup>

Muḥammad Zakariyyā echoes the same while talking about his elders. He says,

My elders isolated the traditions and innovations that had developed in *taṣawwuf* due to the increase in time-distance [from the time of the Prophet (pbuh)]. Some ignorant people had declared *taṣawwuf* to be separate if not against apparent *Sharī'ah*. This is either extremism or ignorance.<sup>171</sup>

### ***Sharī'ah, Ṭarīqah, Ḥaqīqah (Reality) and Ma'rifah (Gnosis)***

Other terms used in the context of *taṣawwuf* are *ṭarīqah*, *ḥaqīqah* and *ma'rifah*. We now look at the relationship between *Sharī'ah* and these terms. To begin with, *Sharī'ah* is the name given to the collective of all legal rulings imposed upon man by Allah. This includes the external actions as well as the internal ones. *Fiqh* refers to man's knowledge of these rulings. Thus, the divine law is *Sharī'ah* and *fiqh* is human knowledge of that law. According to the usage of the early scholars (*mutaqaddimūn*), *fiqh* was considered to deal with the whole of *Sharī'ah*. It is narrated from Abū Hanīfah that he defined *fiqh* as “مَعْرِفَةُ النَّفْسِ مَا لَهَا وَ مَا عَلَيْهَا” (knowledge of the *nafs* of that which is beneficial and harmful for it). Later, in the usage of the later scholars (*muta'akhkhirūn*), that part of *Sharī'ah* which deals with external actions came to be called *fiqh*; and that part which deals with internal actions came to be called *taṣawwuf* or *ṭarīqah* (*ṭarīqat* in Urdu). Simultaneously, the word “*Sharī'ah*” also began to be

<sup>170</sup> See Ashraf Thānvī, *Anfās-e-Īsā*, 1:18-19 and Iqbāl, *Akābir kā...*, 50.

<sup>171</sup> Iqbāl, *Akābir kā...*, 17.

used to mean only the external dimension of Islam. Deobandīs tried to set the record straight by emphasizing the original meaning of the word “*Sharī‘ah*.”

When a person practices upon *Sharī‘ah* (both external and internal actions), his heart is purified. At this stage, certain realities concerning the physical world and the divine attributes are unveiled to man. The unveiled is called *ḥaqīqah* (*ḥaqīqat* in Urdu); the unveiling is called *ma‘rifah* (*ma‘rifat* in Urdu); and the one to whom these are unveiled is called a *muḥaqqiq* or an *‘ārif*.<sup>172</sup> Thānvī mentions all of this and then sums it up saying:

All of these matters are related to *Sharī‘ah*. As for the notion, which has become widespread among common people that *Sharī‘ah* only refers to the external rulings, this is not reported from any person of knowledge....And Allah knows best.<sup>173</sup>

Gangohī has explained the relationship between the various components of *Sharī‘ah* thus: “*Tawḥīd*, gnosis and faith are the roots of the knowledge of *Sharī‘ah*. All the worships and actions are its branches, and states and stations are the fruits of these.”<sup>174</sup>

Another way of looking at it is as follows. Man is composed of three entities, *nafs* (soul), *qalb* (heart) and *rūḥ* (spirit). Outward *Sharī‘ah* deals with *nafs*, *ṭarīqah* deals with the *qalb* and *ḥaqīqah* deals with the *rūḥ*. In other words, outward *Sharī‘ah* is words, *ṭarīqah* is actions and *ḥaqīqah* is states.

### **States and Stations (*Aḥwāl* and *Maqāmāt*)**

*Aḥwāl* is the plural of *ḥāl* which means “state” or “condition.” *Maqāmāt* is the plural of *maqām* which means “station.” In Sufi terminology, *ḥāl* refers to a condition which one cannot acquire on his own. Rather, it is from Allah and is generally transitory.

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<sup>172</sup> This is based upon the discussion in *Dīn*, 34-35.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>174</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 55.



*Maqām* on the other hand is a condition, which can be acquired by man himself and is permanent. The Sufis say, “الْمَقَامَاتُ مَكَايِبُ وَ الْأَحْوَالُ مَوَاهِبُ” (the stations are acquired and the states are gifts).<sup>175</sup> The states include *dhawq* (taste), *shawq* (longing), *qabḍ* (contraction), *baṣṭ* (expansion), *ṣaḥw* (sobriety), *sukr* (intoxication), *ghaybah* (absence), *wajd* (ecstasy), *istighrāq* (absorption), *uns* (affinity), *haybah* (awe), etc. These are all praiseworthy but they are of two types. One type comprises those without risk of harm and the second comprises those which carry the risk of harm. In the first category, Thānvī has placed the following: acceptance of prayers, *ilhām* (inspiration), good dreams, true insight, *fanā'* (annihilation), *baqā'* (subsistence), *wajd* (ecstasy), and *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being).<sup>176</sup> Amongst the latter category, he has counted *istighrāq* (absorption), *tawajjuh* (focused spiritual attention), *sukr* (intoxication), *qabḍ* (contraction), *baṣṭ* (expansion), *mushāhadah* (observation), *karāmah* (miracle), and *kashf* (unveiling).<sup>177</sup>

Deobandī masters keep reminding their disciples and readers that one should not seek these states. Rather, one should be grateful when one receives any. The general principle is that volitional matters (*al-umūr al-ikhtiyāriyyah*) have a role to play in bringing one closer to Allah or taking him away from Allah. Similarly, non-volitional matters (*al-umūr ghayr al-ikhtiyāriyyah*) do not play any role in bringing one closer to or away from Allah. One's focus should be the former and not the latter.

The states are generally sought by pseudo-Sufis because *nafs* has a hidden agenda in these. *Nafs* desires pleasure, ease and fame. States generally fulfill these goals. Moreover, the one who seeks them suffers from two problems. Either he will achieve these or not. If he does achieve them, he will consider himself to have

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<sup>175</sup> Al-Qushayrī, 92.

<sup>176</sup> Dīn, 301-313.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 313-331.

achieved the goal and perfection. This is delusion. It will lead to laxity in observance of *Sharī'ah* rulings. On the other hand, if he does not achieve these states, he will always remain depressed.<sup>178</sup>

The stations include all the praiseworthy traits which we have listed in the section on *tazkiyat al-nafs*. These are within one's power to achieve. When one acquires these traits but they are not permanent, these are also referred to as states.<sup>179</sup> When they become permanent, they are called stations.

### **Veils (*Hijābāt*)**

*Hijābāt* is the plural of *hijāb* which means a veil or a screen. The veils for the *sālik* are of two types: *rūḥānī* (positive or spiritual) and *ẓulmānī* (negative or dark). The *rūḥānī* are the lights that are shown to some *sāliks* after they have achieved a certain degree of spiritual purification. They are not the goal and can easily distract the *sālik*. Therefore, they are described as veils. Gangohī has stated their number to be 70,000.<sup>180</sup> The *ẓulmānī* veils are due to one's physical body, the five senses, the *nafs* and Shayṭān.<sup>181</sup> Gangohī has described the veils of each of the various segments of human beings. He says,

In the case of the *nafs*, these veils are due to one's blameworthy traits. The veil for the *qalb* is its giving attention to anything other than Allah. The veil for *'aql* is its thinking about rational things. The veil for *sirr* is its looking at secrets. The veils of *rūḥ* are the unveilings. The veil for *khafī* is grandeur and exaltedness. The perfect person is the one who does not pay attention to anything besides Allah.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> 'Ārifī, *Baṣā'ir Ḥakīm-ul-ummat*, 103-104.

<sup>179</sup> This is another meaning of the word *ḥāl*. It is not the same as the primary meaning of state, which is an involuntary spiritual condition.

<sup>180</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 72.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 154.

The *sālik* who has achieved a certain level of purification feels affinity towards the *rūḥānī* veils and is repelled by the *ẓulmānī* veils.<sup>183</sup> Thus, it is easy for him to remove the *ẓulmānī* veils but harder to remove the *rūḥānī* veils. The *ẓulmānī* veils are removed through following the *Sharīʿah*.<sup>184</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In the foregoing, we have seen that *taṣawwuf* refers to the internal dimension of *Sharīʿah*. It deals with concepts like gnosis, God-consciousness, love of Allah, annihilation and subsistence, as well as purification of the soul and asceticism. These concepts are to be found in the works and utterances of classical masters like al-Junayd, al-Qushayrī, al-Ghazālī, etc., as well as in the works of the various Deobandī scholars. This represents a continuation of classical Sufi doctrine with the Deobandīs.

Philosophical *taṣawwuf* is a later development. Deobandīs do not engage in philosophical discussions regarding matters of *taṣawwuf*. Thus, they represent *taṣawwuf*'s non-philosophical stream. Their doctrine is simple and gives great importance to the goals. In general terms, the goal is to seek the pleasure of Allah through acting upon the *Sharīʿah*. In specific terms and in line with traditional understanding of *taṣawwuf*, this entails reforming one's self (*tazkiyat al-naḥs*) and seeking to achieve *iḥsān* or *ta'alluq ma'a Allah*. The former is obligatory while the latter's lower level is obligatory and higher level is commendable. Deobandīs sought to revive this simple understanding of *taṣawwuf* as it had been practiced at the time of the Prophet (pbuh) and his companions. Thus, the main focus of Deobandī *taṣawwuf* is developing strong personal connection with Allah. This is achieved through scrupulous following of the Prophet's (pbuh) *Sunnah* in all one's affairs. The

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 154.

traditional Sufi means for achieving *iḥsān* like special *adhkār*, *ashghāl* and *murāqabat* are acknowledged and utilized. However, their status is clearly identified as non-*Sunnah* based and as merely a means. These means are not allowed to turn into goals.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DEOBANDĪ SUFI METHODOLOGY

Deobandī Sufi doctrine serves as the overall framework within which Deobandī Sufis operate. Most of the general public, many Sufis, as well as some scholars associate the Sufi path with spiritual states such as intoxication, ecstasy, rapture, etc. Deobandīs do not deny these but point out that the main goal of *taṣawwuf* is none of these. Rather it is something very basic and accessible to all Muslims, namely, submission to Allah inwardly and outwardly, and to seek His pleasure.

Deobandī masters are conscious of the path that *taṣawwuf* has taken over the centuries. They point out that over the years different Sufi paths developed to seek the goal(s) outlined in the previous chapter. Each shaykh had a different temperament and it reflected on his method of teaching his disciples. Some shaykhs pursued detailed *sulūk* (spiritual journey) while others had brief *sulūk*. Similarly, some took their disciples through *laṭā'if*<sup>1</sup> while others did not. Gradually various accretions crept in and the goals became hidden behind the thick veil of means.

Deobandīs claim for themselves a short-cut path to the goal.<sup>2</sup> We cannot conclusively confirm or deny this. Many aspects of *taṣawwuf* are experiential and would require us to pursue that path ourselves which is beyond the scope of this research. Nevertheless, from the literature that is available to us and from the

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<sup>1</sup> *Laṭā'if* is the plural of *laṭīfah*. This is the name given by Sufis to various parts of the *rūḥ*. Amongst the Naqshbandīs, seven *laṭā'if* are defined. Deobandīs (Chishtī Ṣābirī) generally focus only on the *laṭīfah* of the *qalb* (heart) which is located slightly below the left breast.

<sup>2</sup> Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī's biographer and translator, 'Āshiq Ilāhī Mīrathī claims that amongst all the various methodologies, Shaykh 'Abd al-Quddūs Gangohī's method was the fastest and easiest to travel. Then, within those who associate themselves with him, Rashīd Aḥmad's method has a certain distinction. He does not explain this claim and leaves it to the reader to verify this claim on his own. See the footnote by the translator in Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 73.

discussions that we have had with Deobandī Sufi masters and disciples, we can safely say that Deobandīs have a trimmed down version of *taṣawwuf* in which a number of traditional Sufi practices have been done away with. This is in line with the trend started by Sayyid Aḥmad and passed on to the Deobandīs through Imdād Allāh. Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī described Imdād Allāh’s methodology by saying that “the essence of Ḥājī Ṣāhib’s (Imdād Allāh) path is that internally one should have extreme love and emotional agitation, and externally, submission [to the *Sharī‘ah*].”<sup>3</sup>

The same idea was expressed by Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī, one of the later Deobandī masters, who described Deobandī methodology as a combination of Naqshbandī and Chishtī *ṭarīqahs* such that its exterior was Naqshbandī and interior was Chishtī.<sup>4</sup> Being Naqshbandī here means complete compliance with the *Sharī‘ah* outwardly, and being Chishtī means extreme love and emotional agitation on the inside.

We quoted Gangohī earlier who had mentioned certain reformers of *taṣawwuf* such as ‘Abd al-Qādir Jilānī, Sirhindī, etc. In the same place, he continues that their methodology was grounded in *Sunnah*, and that his (Gangohī’s) way is also based upon *Sunnah*. He says,

Allah had unveiled the “way of *Sunnah*” to these people. Thanks be to Him, He has also unveiled the same way to me. The blessing of the way of *Sunnah* is that Shayṭān has very little chance of causing anyone to go astray in this way. It is obvious that if a person rigorously follows the things that the Prophet (pbuh) adhered to rigorously such as praying in congregation, obligatory acts, necessary acts, and recommended *Sunnahs*; neither will he think that he has become a *walī* nor will others regard him as a *walī*. Whereas, the one who takes special care of those things which the Prophet did not adhere to rigorously such as the prayers of *chāshṭ*, *ishrāq*, *awwābīn*; he will think that he has become a *walī* and others will also think that he has become a *walī*.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *Malḡūzāt kamālāt-e-Ashrafia*, 127

<sup>4</sup> Muḥammad Iqbāl, *Shajarah Naqshbandia Imdādia Khalīlia*, (Karachi: Ḥājī ‘Ārifīn, 1978), 13. [Urd]

<sup>5</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *Ḥekāyāt-e-awliyā*, 257.

In this quotation, Gangohī has hinted at an important distinction between two main methodologies of *taṣawwuf*. It is to these that we now turn.

## DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO TAṢAWWUF

### *Jadhb* and *Sulūk*

There are two main paths to attaining *nisbah* (connection) with Allah or developing *ta'alluq ma'a Allāh* (connection with Allah). One is called *jadhb* (Allah's pulling someone to Himself) and the other is *sulūk* (a disciple's journey to Him). In the former, one receives divine grace and achieves *nisbah* or attains to Allah (*wuṣūl ilallāh*) first, and then develops the desire to engage in voluntary worships and *mujāhadahs*. In the latter, one develops the desire to engage in voluntary worships and *mujāhadahs* first, and then by divine grace achieves *nisbah*. In fact, whatever a *sālik* gains, it is by the grace of Allah, so everything should fall under *jadhb*. However, some receive this grace of Allah from the beginning while others receive it after having struggled in His way; hence the distinction. *Jadhb* is also called *ijtibā*, and *sulūk* is also called *hidāyah*. These alternate names are based upon the following Qur'anic verse:

اللَّهُ يَجْتَبِي إِلَيْهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي إِلَيْهِ مَنْ يُنِيبُ (الشورى: 13)

Allah chooses whomever He pleases for Himself and guides towards Himself those who turn to Him. (Al-Shūrā: 13)

The one who follows the path of *sulūk* is called *sālik majdhūb* and *murīd*; and the one who follows the path of *jadhb* is called *majdhūb sālik* and *murād*. In general usage, the former is just called *sālik* and the latter, *majdhūb*. As we have stated before, the main focus of *taṣawwuf* is those things which are within one's power. Thus, Deobandī masters do not deal with *jadhb*, which is entirely dependent on Allah; rather, they focus on *sulūk*.

### **Sequence in *Sulūk***

As to the proper course of action in *sulūk*, Thānvī outlines the following sequence.<sup>6</sup> First, one develops desire to reach Allah in one's heart. At that time, he should entrust himself to a qualified shaykh. This is generally called *bay'ah*. This shaykh may make him undergo summary or detailed *mujāhadah* (spiritual exertion), which will produce some degree of *nisbah* in him. An alternative is that the shaykh uses his spiritual powers to give the *sālik* some degree of *nisbah*, and then makes him undergo *mujāhadahs*. Either way, once such a person's heart is emptied of everything besides Allah, the shaykh may give him *khilāfah* or may choose to wait for some states and *'awārif* (gnosis) to be revealed to the disciple. If fate has it, such states and *'awārif* will be unveiled to him. When these dominate him, it is called *'urūj* (ascension) and its peak is called *tajallī bi lā kayf* (manifestation of God without any physical description). Once, that is achieved some end up remaining absorbed in this; others recover. This recovery is called *nuzūl* (descent). Proper *khilāfah* is granted upon this descent.

### **Traveling to Allah (*Sayr ilallāh*) and Traveling in Allah (*Sayr fillāh*)**

The full term for *sulūk* is *sulūk ilallāh* (journey to Allah). It is also called *sayr ilallāh*, which also means journey to Allah. It refers to a *sālik's* traveling on the path, engaging in voluntary worships and seeking closeness to Allah. This stage is also called *jazbah khafī* (subtle pulling) and is the beginning of *sulūk*. This is the meaning of *يُحِبُّونَهُ* (they love Allah).<sup>7</sup> It entails purification of the soul or rectification of morals. Its result is *nisbah*. At this stage, Allah makes Him His beloved and pulls him to

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<sup>6</sup> 'Ārifī, *Baṣā'ir Ḥakīm-ul-ummat*, 123-124.

<sup>7</sup> Qur'an, *al-Mā'idah*: 54



Himself. This is *jazbah jalī* (manifest pulling). This is the meaning of *يُحِبُّهُمْ* (He loves them).<sup>8</sup> This is also called *sayr fillāh* (journey in Allah). Obviously, it does not mean that one has acquired some sort of physical union with Allah. Rather, the idea is that in this phase, one acquires gnosis of the Divine Essence and Attributes and increases in his connection with Allah. He receives secrets (*asrār*) and states (*aḥwāl*). This is an experiential stage.

**Types of *Sulūk*: *Sulūk al-Nubuwwah* (Path of Prophet hood) and *Sulūk al-Wilāyah* (Path of Friendship)**

Within *sulūk*, there are two main approaches. One is called *sulūk al-nubuwwah* or *ṭarīq al-nubuwwah* (path of prophet hood); the other is *sulūk al-wilāyah* or *ṭarīq al-wilāyah* (path of friendship). Sayyid Aḥmad has discussed the two in detail in his book *Ṣirāṭ-e-Mustaqīm*.<sup>9</sup> Thānvī has also dealt with these and in one of his books he has given a very useful comparison chart between the effects of each approach. He says that a *walī* is sometimes affected by *fayḍān al-nubuwwah* (divine effulgence based on the path of prophet hood) and sometimes by *fayḍān al-wilāyah* (divine effulgence based on the path of friendship). Each of these has its own characteristics. We quote the chart in its entirety.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> The whole book revolves around a discussion of these two different paths.

<sup>10</sup> Dīn, 45-47.

Table 5.1  
Comparison of the Paths of Prophet hood and Friendship

	Effects of <i>Sulūk al-Wilāyah</i>	Effects of <i>Sulūk al-Nubuwwah</i>
1.	Followers of this way excessively cut down on eating and drinking.	Followers of this way do not consciously cut down on eating and drinking. Whatever they get, they are content with it.
2.	They hate [to be with] people.	They incline towards people with the intention of giving them benefit but their hearts are not involved with them.
3.	They do not enjoin right and forbid evil unless it is obligatory.	They enjoin right and forbid evil.
4.	They have faith in their <i>mukāshafāt</i> (spiritual unveilings) and <i>tahqīqat</i> (researches); and act upon them if they do not violate the <i>Sharī‘ah</i> .	Comportment dominates them. They do not add to that which is narrated from the Prophet (pbuh) through <i>kashf</i> and other such things even if that addition is not in violation of <i>Sharī‘ah</i> .
5.	<i>Dhawq</i> (taste) and <i>shawq</i> (zeal) dominate them. They enjoy worship.	<i>Dhawq</i> and <i>shawq</i> do not dominate them. They don’t even enjoy worship, i.e., if they don’t enjoy it they are not worried about it. They worship merely because of the divine command to do so.
6.	They do not engage in supplication out of concern [for the divine command].	They consider it their obligation to supplicate because of [the divine command] اُدْعُونِي اَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ (Call on Me; I will answer you).
7.	They abandon apparent causes ( <i>al-asbāb al-zāhiriyyah</i> ).	They rely upon causes more than others but without engrossing themselves in them. The Prophet (pbuh) wore two armour coats in battle because of need.
8.	They have more natural affinity with ‘Alī (Allah be pleased with him) but they regard the other three caliphs as superior to him [in accordance with Sunni orthodoxy].	They have more love for Abu Bakr and ‘Umar (Allah be pleased with them).
9.	They consider [their] shaykh to be superior to everyone and are deeply in love with him.	They do not believe in [his] superiority. They [merely] love him.
10.	Sometimes, they are lax in observance of religious rulings. In this, they are excused.	They are steadfast in following the <i>Sharī‘ah</i> .

Table 5.1- Continued

	Effects of <i>Sulūk al-Wilāyah</i>	Effects of <i>Sulūk al-Nubuwwah</i>
11.	<i>Sukr</i> (intoxication) dominates them.	<i>Ṣaḥw</i> (sobriety) dominates them.
12.	Sometimes, some of those who are dominated by a certain state run away from congregational prayers because they want to hide [their deeds]. However, this indicates that they are still aware of other [than Allah].	They adhere to congregational prayers. They have completely denied other [than Allah].
13.	If the shaykh orders something, which is against outward <i>Shari‘ah</i> , they do not consider it to be against the <i>Shari‘ah</i> . They follow it through some interpretation [to justify his command]. However, this is only with respect to things that are not definitive ( <i>qaṭ‘ī</i> ).	If the shaykh orders something in violation of outward <i>Shari‘ah</i> , they oppose it but with proper etiquette.
14.	<i>Ḥubb-e-‘ishqī</i> dominates them.	<i>Ḥubb-e-īmānī</i> [also called <i>ḥubb-e-‘aqlī</i> ] dominates them.
15.	Sometimes, <i>tashbīh</i> (immanence) dominates them.	<i>Tanzīh</i> (transcendence) always dominates them.
16.	The end of this path is the station of <i>raḍā</i> (contentment with Allah) or <i>fanā’ al-fanā’</i> (annihilation of annihilation).	The end of this path is the station of <i>‘ubūdiyyah</i> (worshipfulness).

There are a number of new terms in this comparison, which we will have occasion to discuss later on. As will become clear later, based on this comparison, the Deobandī Sufis have elements of both paths but the path of prophet hood dominates them. This is because of their strong emphasis upon following the *Sunnah*.

### Levels of Travelers on the Path

As for the various stages through which a *sālik* passes, Gangohī has identified three broad categories. These are as follows:<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 157.

1. *Murīd ṭālib* (seeker disciple): This is the beginner level seeker. His task is to engage in *mujāhadah* and deny the pleasures of his *nafs*.
2. *Mutawassit sā'ir* (Intermediate traveler): This is the intermediate traveler. He must undertake tough spiritual tasks and must maintain the etiquette of each station.
3. *Muntahī wāṣil* (advanced Sufī who has reached): This is the advanced person who has reached the goal. He must maintain his senses and engage in the divinely given task. Difficulty, hardship and ease should all be the same for him. All of the pleasures of his *nafs* should be eliminated and only the rights of his Lord must remain. Such a person is among the people outwardly but inwardly he is with his Lord.

### **DIVERSITY OF DEOBANDĪ METHODOLOGIES**

Deobandīs generally do not discriminate between the works of their various masters. Imdād Allāh was the grand shaykh of most Deobandīs. Second only to him was Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī who can also be called the grand shaykh of most *Deobandīs* (with emphasis on Deobandī). Sub-orders emerged after him taking an important personality as their focal point. The prominent ones were those centered around Khalīl Aḥmad Sahāranpūrī, Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, Muḥammad Zakariyyā Kāndhlavī, ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Rāipūrī and ‘Abd al-Qādir Rāipūrī, and Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madnī, etc. The methodologies expressed by different shaykhs are then fused by those who come after them. For example, successors of Muḥammad Zakariyyā rely upon his works, as well as those of other masters, prior to him and after him. This openness to other sub-orders varies from shaykh to shaykh. In all cases, the books of one’s own shaykh or grand shaykh get more attention than those of other sub-orders’ shaykhs.

Deobandī Sufi methodology has undergone some changes over the years. Gangohī followed al-Junayd’s approach. Thānvī refined it and explained it; while Muḥammad Zakariyyā’s successor Sūfī Iqbāl’s books (many of which were written at the behest of Muḥammad Zakariyyā) presented an even more trimmed down version of *taṣawwuf*.

### **Gangohī’s Approach**

Gangohī’s approach is primarily contained in his book *Imdād al-sulūk* and in a diffused way in the published collection of his letters *Makātīb-e-Rashīdia*. The material contained in these is not enough to comprehensively document his particular approach but they are a good starting point for looking at Deobandī methodology in general. In *Imdād al-sulūk*, he bases his approach on al-Junayd’s methodology which he considers to be the best and the shortest. He says the following eight things are needed as part of al-Junayd’s method of rectifying the *bidāyah* (beginning). In Persianized Urdu, these are as follows:

1. *Dawām-e-ṭahārat* (constant purity)
2. *Dawām-e-ṣawm* (constant fasting)
3. *Dawām-e-sukūt* (constant quietness)
4. *Dawām-e-khalwat* (constant isolation)
5. *Dawām-e-zikr* (constant *dhikr*)
6. *Dawām-e-nafy-e-khawāṭir* (negating extra thoughts)
7. *Dawām-e-rabṭ-e-qalb bishshaykh* (constant connection with the Shaykh in one’s heart)
8. *Dawām-e-tark-e-i’tirāz bar Allāh* (never objecting to Allah)

The emphasis is upon making sure that the *sālik* spends his entire day in the remembrance of Allah. Thus, Gangohī instructs the *sālik* to fill those times whose virtues have been established through the Qur'an and *Sunnah* with *dhikr* and prayers.<sup>12</sup> In these, the obligatory prayers and the voluntary prayers serve as poles around which the other spiritual exercises are spread out. The voluntary prayers are: *ishrāq* (after sunrise), *chāshṭ* (before noon), *fai' al-zawāl* (after the beginning of the time of *zuhr*), *awwābīn* (voluntary prayers after *maghrib* and before *ishā*), and *tahajjud* along with *witr* (night prayer). During the times before and after these prayers, the *sālik* should keep himself engaged in *dhikr*.

### **Thānvī's Methodology**

The many works of Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī, as well as his utterances and lectures recorded by others, contain ample material for a researcher to document his understanding of the *ṭarīq* (Sufi way). We have quoted some of these before. To re-iterate, Thānvī says that the ultimate goal is seeking the pleasure of Allah. The path to achieving that is to act upon all the rulings of *Sharī'ah*, both outward and inward ones. There are two things that help on the way: doing *dhikr* as much as one can and company of the people of Allah.<sup>13</sup>

Thānvī had *Imdād al-sulūk* as part of curriculum for his disciples. This suggests that he approved of its contents. Nevertheless, he also composed primers in which he outlined what he considered to be the correct procedure for embarking on the spiritual path. In one such primer *Qaṣḍ al-sabīl* [The optimal way], he begins by defining two levels of *faqīrī* (another name for *taṣawwuf*). These are firstly building of the inward and the outward by acting upon all the commands of *Sharī'ah* (this

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>13</sup> 'Ārifī, *Baṣā'ir Ḥakīm-ul-ummat*, 98.

includes *tazkiyat al-nafs*), and secondly achieving *ihsān*.<sup>14</sup> These have been discussed in detail in the previous chapter.

Then he lays out the proper sequence for achieving each of these levels.<sup>15</sup> The first level needs two things. The first is acquiring knowledge of *dīn* as much as is necessary through any means at one's disposal. The second is acting upon this knowledge with determination.

As for achieving the second level of *taṣawwuf*, the first step is sincere repentance from all sins, major and minor. Repentance entails that one makes an effort to make up for all unfulfilled obligations; whether these are owed to Allah or to the people. Thus, whatever *ṣalāhs* one has missed or *zakāh* one has not paid, or fasts that one has missed; one must make up for them. Similarly, the rights of people that one has not fulfilled should be fulfilled or one should ask those to whom they are owed that they be forgiven. This is a necessary first step. Without this, all exertions will not be of any benefit. Thānvī declares that “the one who does not have the determination and the commitment to follow *Sharī‘ah* is not a true seeker.”<sup>16</sup> A true seeker has to submit to the *Sharī‘ah*. In other words, the first level has to be achieved for one to move on to the next level.

The second step is that he must seek knowledge as has been described above with respect to the first level. Once this is achieved, he must look for a qualified shaykh who can guide him on the path. He can then choose to do *bay‘ah* with him or maintain a disciple-master relationship without it. Generally, *bay‘ah* is the main sign of acceptance as a disciple. The disciple must follow all the commands of his shaykh. After the *bay‘ah*, he should stay with the shaykh for some time, if possible. If not,

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<sup>14</sup> Shāh Luṭf-e-Rasūl, *Tashīl Qaṣd al-Sabīl* in Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Iṣlāhī niṣāb*, (Multan: Kutub Khāna Majīdia, n.d.), 580-581. [Urd]

<sup>15</sup> ‘Ārifī, *Baṣā‘ir Ḥakīm-ul-ummat*, 100-101.

<sup>16</sup> Dīn, 56.

then he must follow his commands wherever he is while corresponding with him regularly. We will examine the role of the shaykh and the relationship of the disciple with him later.

Thānvī has analyzed the possible scenarios of an aspiring *sālik*.<sup>17</sup> According to him, an aspiring *sālik* can fall into one of the following categories. Either he will be a scholar or not; and in each case he will either have to work to fulfill his familial obligations or not. Thus, there are a total of four categories. For each one of these there is a different course to follow.

Thānvī designed these different courses or routes for all those traveling on the spiritual path as long as they do not find a qualified shaykh, as well as for those who were his (Thānvī's) disciples. The initial preparatory steps are the same for everyone as outlined above irrespective of the category in which they fall. These are as follows:

1. Sincere repentance from all sins.
2. Gaining as much knowledge of *dīn* as is needed to practice upon the *dīn*.
3. Seeking a shaykh qualified to be one's guide on the way.
4. Pledging allegiance to a qualified shaykh and submitting to him completely.

Beyond these, Thānvī distinguishes between the scholar and the non-scholar. For each the path will be different. There are issues in *taṣawwuf* that arise because of the Sufi *adhkār*, *ashghāl* (spiritual exercises) and *murāqabat* (meditations) that can only be handled by a scholar or someone who has become similar to a scholar because of his being in the company of scholars.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Luṭf-e-Rasūl, 589.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 591-592.



### **Busy Non-scholar**

The busy non-scholar must fulfill all of his Islamic obligations. In addition, if he can, he should pray *tahajjud* at night. If he cannot manage to get up in the later portion of the night, he should pray a few *rak'ahs* (prayer units) after *'isha* and before *witr* with the intention of *tahajjud*. After each of the five *ṣalāhs*, or after whichever *ṣalāh* he has time, he should repeat, *subḥānillāh, lā ilāha illallāh, and Allāh Akbar* 100 times each. Before sleeping, he should do *istighfār*<sup>19</sup> 100 times. He should send blessings upon the Prophet (pbuh) as much as he can and whenever he can. He does not need to maintain a count for this. If he knows how to read the Qur'an, he should read a portion of it every day. He should also spend some time in the company of his shaykh, if he has any, or some other pious elder.

Apart from these, he should focus on earning an honest living, and refrain from all sins, and do as many good deeds and *adhkār* proven from the *Sunnah* as he can. The same course of action is suggested for the woman who instead of earning a living should spend the rest of her time in housework and serving her husband.

### **Non-busy Non-scholar**

The basic routine is the same for this category as for the previous one. In addition, he should free himself from all engagements for a few days and spend that time with his shaykh. Moreover, he should stay away from people and minimize talking. He should pray *ṣalāh* in congregation, and should also read one section (*manzil*) out of the seven sections of *Munājāt-e-maqbūl* [The accepted whispers] each day.<sup>20</sup> He

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<sup>19</sup> Seeking forgiveness from Allah. The typical formula is *astaghfirullāh Rabbī min kulli dhanb wa atūbu ilayhi* (I seek forgiveness from Allah, my Lord for all sins and I repent to Him).

<sup>20</sup> *Munājāt-e-maqbūl* is a collection of supplications (including blessings upon the Prophet (pbuh)) that Thānvī composed. He divided it into seven *manzils* (sections), each *manzil* to be recited on a day of the week, thus finishing the book in one week.

should add voluntary worships to his routine as much as he can handle including *ṣalāhs*, fasts, *istighfār*, sending blessings upon the Prophet (pbuh), etc. He should read religious books or have them read to him (if he cannot read himself). If there is some *dhākir* (someone who engages in *dhikr*) in his vicinity, he should spend some time serving him. If his shaykh or some *dhākir* sees keenness in him, he should teach him to do 3,000 or 6,000 repetitions of the divine name “Allah.” The count should not go beyond this.

### **Busy Scholar**

The basic routine is the same for this category as for the busy non-scholar. In addition, he should do 12,000 to 24,000 repetitions of the divine name “Allah,” to be done in isolation and on a light stomach. Beyond that, he should try to do as many *Sunnah adhkār* as he can along with reading a *manzil* of *Munājāt-e-maqbūl* daily. He should also be punctual about *tahajjud*. This scholar should engage in some teaching, if not already doing that; and should give occasional religious talks.

### **Non-busy Scholar**

In addition to the routine outlined above for the busy scholar, he should spend a few days in the company of his shaykh and engage in *dhikr*. Amongst the *adhkār*, he should do the standard Chishtī *dhikr*, “*bāra tasbīḥ*” or “*dawāzdah tasbīḥ*.” This should be done after *tahajjud*. After *fajr*, he should read the Qur’an and a *manzil* of *Munājāt-e-maqbūl*. After that, he should do 12,000 to 24,000 repetitions of the divine name “Allah.” This should be done in isolation, in a low voice, and with slight hitting of the heart. After *zuhr*, he should again do 12,000 to 24,000 repetitions of the divine name “Allah.” This should be done until ‘*asr*. If his shaykh is available after ‘*asr* and

he desires so, he should stay with him. Otherwise, he should go for a walk. If the shaykh is present, he should leave with his permission. Moreover, after *maghrib*, he should meditate on death, after death and the final reckoning. This should be done for about half an hour or more.

The *dhikr* is meant to produce love of Allah and this *murāqabah* (meditation) regarding death and afterlife is meant to produce hatred of *dunyā*. According to Thānvī, “this love and hatred, Allah willing, will be enough to help him achieve the goal.”<sup>21</sup> Whatever time is left should be used to do *dhikr* of any kind including sending blessings upon the Prophet (pbuh). If the *dhikr* leads to more concentration, and stray thoughts are reduced, then this person does not need to do anything beyond that. No *shughl* is required. All that he needs to do is keep his mind focused on Allah, and observe piety. This will ensure for him a reward in the hereafter, and if Allah wills, this person will gain benefits in this world as well. Amongst these benefits, Thānvī lists various forms of gnosis and experiencing different states such as *maḥabbah* (love), *uns* (affinity), *haybah* (awe), etc. He may also experience divine inspiration, which will guide him and warn him if he makes mistakes. When a person achieves this stage, then he must go to his shaykh so that the latter can interpret these states for him.

Furthermore, Thānvī emphasizes that certain sins are more dangerous for the disciple than others.<sup>22</sup> These must be especially avoided. These include showing off (*riyā*), arrogance, unnecessary and/or forbidden speech, looking at non-*maḥram* women (unrelated women that one can marry) or boys with lust, and excessive anger or bad manners. Moreover, he must minimize his relationship with the world. Until

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<sup>21</sup> Luṭf-e-Rasūl, 595. Later, we will have occasion to discuss *bāra tasbīḥ dhikr* and this *murāqabah* in detail.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 598.

this person achieves *nisbah*, he must be careful about this. He should not even teach as long as he can do without it.

It should be noted here that Thānvi does not define the goals of *taṣawwuf* in terms of *aḥwāl* (states) or higher forms of gnosis. Rather, he declares that a person may or may not be bestowed with these. The main thing is living his life according to *Sharī‘ah* and remaining mindful of Allah. This is in line with Sayyid Aḥmad’s preference of *ṭarīq al-nubuwwah* over *ṭarīq al-wilāyah*.<sup>23</sup>

### **Sūfī Iqbāl’s Methodology**

Sūfī Iqbāl, a prominent successor of Muḥammad Zakariyyā, compiled a number of shorter works on *taṣawwuf* under the command of his shaykh. In these, he has extensively quoted previous Deobandī masters. In his books, we find a slightly more trimmed down version of *taṣawwuf*.

In *Fayz-e-shaykh* [Spiritual effulgence of the spiritual master], he starts out by defining *wuṣūl ilallāh* (reaching Allah) as the goal of *taṣawwuf*.<sup>24</sup> The desire to reach Allah is the logical result of *‘ishq* (extreme passionate love for Allah). In order for one to develop the ability to aim for Allah, one has to purify one’s heart. Then, he goes on to suggest a short-cut method for this. There are three main components of this method, namely, *irādat* (consciously focusing on one’s shaykh as one’s spiritual guide), *ṣuḥbat* (company of the shaykh), and *iṣlāhī dhikr* (Sufi *dhikr*).<sup>25</sup> In his other book *Maḥabbat* [Love], which deals with the same subject, he also declares that there

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<sup>23</sup> This is the main theme of the first chapter of *Ṣirāt-e-mustaḳīm*. See Ismā‘īl, 10-60.

<sup>24</sup> Muḥammad Iqbāl, *Fayz-e-shaykh*, (Karachi: Maktabat al-Shaykh, n.d.), 11. [Urd]

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 10. It is called *iṣlāhī* (reforming) because this *dhikr* leads to giving up blameworthy traits and acquiring praiseworthy traits.

are three main components of the short-cut path; but here, the things are: *ṣuḥbat-e-‘ushshāq* (company of the lovers), *dhikr* and *shughl*, and *murāqabāt*.<sup>26</sup>

This appears to be a contradiction, but a closer examination of the two books reveals that he has merely expanded and compressed different steps in the two books. When he says *iṣlāhī dhikr* in *Fayz-e-shaykh*, he includes under its rubric all the *adhkār*, *ashghāl* and *murāqabāt* that one’s shaykh orders one to do; and when he says *ṣuḥbat-e-‘ushshāq* in *Maḥabbat*, he takes that to include both *irādat* and *ṣuḥbat*.

### THE SHAYKH

The Deobandī approach is not limited to the Ghazalian methodology as found in his works which only focuses on self-reformation and does not deal with pledging allegiance to a shaykh. Deobandīs also emphasize the need for a qualified shaykh and the importance and position of pledging allegiance to such a shaykh. The main argument for this is rational. The example given in this regard is that of a person aspiring to be a doctor or a craftsman. He cannot achieve his goal by merely reading books. He also has to spend time in the company of a doctor or a craftsman to learn from him how to apply the knowledge contained in books. Similarly, studying about praiseworthy traits and blameworthy traits is not enough. It is mere information. It is the shaykh who helps one identify one’s blameworthy traits and guides one to acquire praiseworthy traits and to be steadfast in them. The shaykh also identifies the causes that stop one from carrying out the rulings of *Sharī‘ah*. Thānvī does acknowledge the theoretical possibility that a person can achieve steadfastness in *Sharī‘ah* without doing *bay‘ah* to a shaykh.<sup>27</sup> There are examples of such individuals in Islamic history. However, the possibility is remote, especially in these times. Generally, people need

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<sup>26</sup> Iqbāl, *Maḥabbat*, 62.

<sup>27</sup> Dīn, 60.

someone to prod them on the way and guide them on the spiritual path where the danger of going astray is ever present.

Sūfī Iqbāl has put forward his arguments for needing a shaykh around the theme of love. He says that the company of those who are already intoxicated with the love of Allah is the first step.<sup>28</sup> It is their company, which develops in man the desire to seek this love himself. Notwithstanding what Ṭayyib mentions about maintaining balance between adhering to the book and obeying saintly personalities,<sup>29</sup> Deobandī Sufis are characterized by a high degree of submission to their elders. Some of their detractors label it as *akābir parastī* (worshipping the elders).<sup>30</sup> At the same time, many rank and file Deobandīs have developed major doubts about *taṣawwuf*.<sup>31</sup> In this respect, Deobandīs as a whole are representative of the broader Sunni community. This wider Sunni community embraces within it diverging tendencies that are apparently irreconcilable and yet are Sunni. The same can be said of Deobandīs. They contain within them sub-groups with at times, diametrically opposite agendas but their identification with the elders of Deoband gives them the label Deobandī.

### **Qualifications of a Shaykh**

It is important to know the qualifications or signs of a qualified shaykh. Not everyone is qualified to be a shaykh. According to Gangohī, “many seekers have perished on this way because of taking heretics as shaykhs. In fact, most of the time a person ruins himself in this path because of not properly looking for a qualified shaykh.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Iqbāl, *Maḥabbat*, 62-62.

<sup>29</sup> Ṭayyib, 102.

<sup>30</sup> Personal interaction with detractors.

<sup>31</sup> Personal interaction with students at various Deobandi institutions.

<sup>32</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 60.

In this context, two terms are used, *kāmil* (perfect) and *mukammil* (the one who makes someone else perfect). Alternatively, they are called *ṣāliḥ* (righteous) and *muṣliḥ* (the one who can make someone else righteous). Only such a person is qualified to become a shaykh who is perfect and righteous himself and has the ability to make others perfect and righteous. In terms of *jadhb* and *sulūk* mentioned earlier, only *sālik* is qualified to guide others. This is because he has achieved the goal by traversing the path and knows the obstacles on the way.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, the *majdhūb* has also reached the goal but without traversing the path. Thus, he does not know the obstacles on the way. He is not qualified to guide others on the way.<sup>34</sup>

Gangohī mentioned the qualities of a shaykh in *Imdād al-sulūk*. Thānvī also outlined the characteristics to look for in a shaykh in a number of his books. Muḥammad Zakariyyā and his successor Sūfī Iqbāl have quoted him extensively for this purpose in their works. In the following, we list the required characteristics of a *kāmil* and *mukammil* shaykh based upon *Imdād al-sulūk*,<sup>35</sup> *Qaṣd al-sabīl*<sup>36</sup> and *Taʿlīm al-dīn*.<sup>37</sup> These are:

1. He should have knowledge of *Sharīʿah* as much as is needed by everyone. This could be either through formal studies or through the company of scholars. This way, he will be free of corruption in *ʿaqīdah* and deeds and will save the disciples from such corruption as well. Deobandī scholars concur with each other that being a formally trained scholar is not necessary. As much knowledge as is required to know the permissible and the forbidden in *fiqhī* terms is enough.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 66-69.

<sup>36</sup> Luṭf-e-Rasūl, 582.

<sup>37</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *Taʿlīm al-dīn*, 524.

2. He should adhere to the *Sharī'ah* in *‘aqīdah*, ethics and deeds. He should be pious and should abstain from major sins and from insisting on minor ones.
3. He should have been in the company of *awliyā* and should have gained blessings from them.
4. He should have undertaken *sulūk* under the command of his shaykh and should have completed it.
5. His chain up to the Prophet (pbuh) should be continuous. Any break in the chain renders it unreliable.<sup>38</sup>
6. He should have tamed his *nafs*, and should have conditioned it to hard work.
7. He should have renounced the world; and should be eager for the hereafter. He should be regular in outward and inward acts of worship. Otherwise, he will have a bad effect upon the heart of the disciple.
8. He should have adorned himself with all the praiseworthy traits and should have removed from himself all the blameworthy traits.
9. He should have moved on from apparent hardship to actual delight in worship.
10. He should not claim perfection. This is a type of worldly behaviour.
11. His actions and speech should display his wisdom.
12. He should not be *maghlūb al-ḥāl* (overpowered by his spiritual state). He should be in control of himself.
13. He should have the ability to make people righteous. Merely being righteous is not enough.

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<sup>38</sup> Amongst contemporary non-Deobandi scholars, Nūḥ Keller expresses the same idea. See Nūḥ Ḥā Mīm Keller, *al-Maqasid: Nawawi's manual of Islam*, (Beltsville: Amana Publications, 2002), 167.



14. He should have such insight that he should be able to recognize the potentials of others. He should be an expert in diagnosing people's spiritual problems and should know how to rectify them. He should be able to recognize the personalities and temperaments of his disciples. In this regard, Gangohī has mentioned the following verse of the Qur'an:<sup>39</sup>

قُلْ هَذِهِ سَبِيلِي أَدْعُو إِلَى اللَّهِ عَلَىٰ بَصِيرَةٍ أَنَا وَمَنِ اتَّبَعَنِي (يوسف: 108)

Say: This is my way. I call to Allah with sure knowledge, both I and my followers. (Yūsuf: 108)

In this context, it is important to contrast this condition of insight with the previously mentioned condition of knowledge.

15. He should keep an eye on the disciples. If anyone of them violates the *Sharī'ah*, he should reprimand him. He should not let the disciples do whatever they feel like.
16. The condition of those who have done *bay'ah* to him should be good in terms of following the *Sharī'ah* and having minimal love for the world.
17. Fair-minded scholars and shaykhs of his time should have a good opinion of him.
18. Compared to the commonality, religious people should be more inclined towards him.
19. A few days in his company should lead to lessening of the love for this world and increase in the love for Allah.
20. He should engage in *dhikr* and *shughl* himself. There is no spiritual benefit in the teaching of the one who does not act upon it himself or does not intend to act.

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<sup>39</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 69.

In addition to all these, another important element is *munāsabat* (compatibility) between the shaykh and the disciple. Sufi Iqbāl declares this to be the most important condition which enables a disciple to derive benefit from his shaykh.<sup>40</sup> He quotes the famous *ḥadīth*,

الأرواح جنودٌ مُجَنَّدَةٌ. فَمَا تَعَارَفَ مِنْهَا ائْتَلَفَ وَ مَا تَنَافَرَ مِنْهَا اخْتَلَفَ. (متفق عليه)<sup>41</sup>

The spirits were like a gathered army. Those who became acquainted [then] are in harmony [now]; and those who became estranged [then] are [now] separate. (Agreed upon by al-Bukhārī and Muslim)

Basing his argument upon this *ḥadīth*, he says that *munāsabat* is essential for mutual love and a strong bond to exist between the shaykh and the disciple. Without love and a strong bond, the disciple will be susceptible to whisperings of Shayṭān and will also continue to have objections in his mind against the shaykh. Objection to the shaykh whether outwardly or inwardly is deadly for the disciple. This aspect of *munāsabat* is unfortunately ignored by many with disastrous consequences. The same thing has been reported from Thānvī.<sup>42</sup> In fact, he goes further. His successor ‘Abd al-Ḥayy ‘Ārifī quotes him in his book *Ma’āsir Ḥakīm-ul-ummat* saying:

Whoever does not have *munāsabat* with any shaykh, it is best for him that he act upon the Qur’an and *Sunnah* and should regularly pray to Allah for guidance and personal reformation. Allah willing, he will also reach the goal.<sup>43</sup>

Another aspect of a properly qualified shaykh is that he should comply with the Prophet (pbuh) fully. Thus, his exterior should comply with the Prophet’s (pbuh) exterior and his interior should comply with the Prophet’s (pbuh) interior.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Iqbāl, *Fayz-e-shaykh*, 15.

<sup>41</sup> Al-Bukhārī, 679.

<sup>42</sup> Qurayshī, *Ma’ārif al-akābir*, 438.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Abd al-Ḥayy ‘Ārifī, *Ma’āsir Ḥakīm-ul-ummat*, ed. Mas‘ūd Aḥsan ‘Alvī, (Karachi: H. M. Sa‘īd & Co., 2000), 304. [Urd]

<sup>44</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *Malfūzāt kamālāt-e-Ashrafīa*, 36.

## Pledging Allegiance to the Shaykh (*Bay'ah*)

*Bay'ah* is an agreement between the shaykh and the disciple that the latter will repent from disobedience and sins and will hold fast to the *Sharī'ah*, as well as the commands of his shaykh regarding spiritual matters. From the shaykh's side, it is an acknowledgement of accepting the disciple.

During the period that the Deobandī scholars operated, a number of people including many externalist scholars had raised major doubts about the validity of *bay'ah*. They claimed that *bay'ah* as practiced amongst the Sufis is an innovation. The only *bay'ah* that the Prophet took was for Islam or jihad. Deobandīs countered by providing proofs from *ḥadīths* to prove that *bay'ah* as practiced by Sufis has basis in the *ḥadīths*. One of these *ḥadīths* is as follows:

... حَدَّثَنِي... عَوْفُ بْنُ مَالِكٍ الْأَشْجَعِيُّ قَالَ كُنَّا عِنْدَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ -صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ- تِسْعَةً أَوْ ثَمَانِيَةً أَوْ سَبْعَةً فَقَالَ "أَلَا تُبَايِعُونَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ" وَكُنَّا حَدِيثَ عَهْدٍ بِبَيْعَةِ. فَقُلْنَا قَدْ بَايَعْنَاكَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ. ثُمَّ قَالَ "أَلَا تُبَايِعُونَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ." فَقُلْنَا قَدْ بَايَعْنَاكَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ. ثُمَّ قَالَ "أَلَا تُبَايِعُونَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ." قَالَ فَبَسَطْنَا أَيْدِيَنَا وَقُلْنَا قَدْ بَايَعْنَاكَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، فَعَلَّامٌ تُبَايِعُكَ؟ قَالَ "عَلَى أَنْ تَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَلَا تُشْرِكُوا بِهِ شَيْئًا وَالصَّلَاةَ الْحَمْسَ وَتُطِيعُوا - وَأَسْرَ كَلِمَةً خَفِيَّةً - وَلَا تَسْأَلُوا النَّاسَ شَيْئًا." فَلَقَدْ رَأَيْتُ بَعْضَ أَوْلِيَاكَ النَّفَرِ يَسْتَمُطُّ سَوْطَ أَحَدِهِمْ فَمَا يَسْأَلُ أَحَدًا يُنَاوِلُهُ إِيَّاهُ. رواه مسلم<sup>45</sup>

It is narrated from 'Awf ibn Mālik al-Ashja'ī that he said, "We were with the Prophet, Allah bless him and give him peace. It was nine of us or eight or seven." He said, "Will you not pledge to the Messenger of Allah [pbuh]?" We had only recently pledged [allegiance]. We said, "We have already pledged to you, O Messenger of Allah [pbuh]." He said, "Will you not pledge to the Messenger of Allah [pbuh]?" We said, "We have already pledged to you, O Messenger of Allah [pbuh]." He said, "Will you not pledge to the Messenger of Allah [pbuh]?" We extended our hands and said, "What should we pledge about, O Messenger of Allah [pbuh]?" He said, "[pledge] that you will worship Allah, and will not associate any partners with him, and will pray the five prayers, and will obey." [Then] he said in a low voice, "and [that] you will not ask anyone for anything." He ['Awf] said, "I have seen some of them that the whip of one of them would fall [from his mount] and he would not ask anyone to pick it up and give it to him." Reported by Muslim.

<sup>45</sup> Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj al-Qushayrī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ li Muslim*, (Multan: Maktabat Dār al-Qur'ān wa al-Ḥadīth, n.d.), 1:334. [Arb]

Thānvī cited this *ḥadīth* in *al-Takashshuf*.<sup>46</sup> Later, Muḥammad Zakariyyā also cited this *ḥadīth* in his *Sharīʿat-o-ṭarīqat kā talāzum*.<sup>47</sup> This *ḥadīth* indicates that pledge was taken from those companions who had just accepted Islam and had already pledged allegiance to the Prophet (pbuh) on Islam. Yet, the Prophet (pbuh) took another pledge from them re-affirming the main commands of *Sharīʿah* along with an additional directive.

The *bayʿah* among the Sufis serves the same purpose. Its primary purpose is to affirm the commitment of the disciple to uphold the commands of *Sharīʿah*. It also confirms the desire of the disciple to follow his shaykh in leading him to Allah and it is a sign of the shaykh's acknowledgement of this. It is also a commitment from the shaykh that he will teach *dhikr* and will remind the disciple of the commands of Allah. Deobandī scholars, in their characteristic style, also emphasize that this is merely a means. Its purpose can be achieved without the physical placing of the hand on the hand of the shaykh. The main element is commitment from the disciple and focused attention of the shaykh upon the disciple. Hence, a letter or a verbal contract is sufficient to do *bayʿah*. The physical act only re-enforces this verbal contract. During the early period of Islam, when the *bayʿah* of Sufis was similar to the *bayʿah* given to the caliph, the Sufis discontinued it. Instead, they started the practice of giving *khirqah* (cloak) to their disciples as a sign of their affiliation. Later on, when the *bayʿah* for political office was discontinued, the Sufis revived this abandoned *Sunnah*.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *al-Takashshuf*..., 260

<sup>47</sup> Zakariyyā Kāndhlavī, *Sharīʿat-o-ṭarīqat*..., 122-123.

<sup>48</sup> Dīn, 59.

## Relationship with the Shaykh

When it comes to defining the relationship between the disciple and the shaykh, Deobandīs refer to the famous Sufi dictum “*ka al-mayyit fi yad al-ghassāl*” (like a dead person in the hands of the washing man).<sup>49</sup> In Persianized Urdu, it is called “*murda badast-e-zinda*” which means that the disciple should be as a dead person is in the hands of a living person.

Gangohī has quoted al-Ghazālī who narrated a *ḥadīth* from the Prophet (pbuh) that “the shaykh amongst his group is like the prophet amongst his nation” to suggest that the shaykh must be obeyed like the Prophet.<sup>50</sup> Sūfī Iqbāl repeats the same idea and says that the shaykh is the deputy of the Prophet and Allah, and must be treated as such, i.e., he must be obeyed in all that is in accordance with *Sharī‘ah*.<sup>51</sup>

According to Thānvī, the shaykh has three rights over his disciples: *i‘tiqād*, *i‘timād* and *inqiyād*.<sup>52</sup> Sūfī Iqbāl explained this a little more and said that four things are necessary for a disciple to benefit from his shaykh. These are *iṭṭilā‘*, *ittibā‘*, *i‘tiqād*, and *inqiyād*.<sup>53</sup> These are all Arabic words also used in High Urdu. We deal with them in some detail.

1. *Iṭṭilā‘*: It is a verbal noun, which means to inform someone. In the present context, it means that the disciple must inform his shaykh of his spiritual condition. He must not hide anything from his shaykh.
2. *Ittibā‘*: It means to follow. When the disciple informs the shaykh of his condition and the shaykh recommends something, the disciple must follow him. Similarly, whatever command the shaykh gives, the disciple must

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<sup>49</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 110.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>51</sup> Iqbāl, *Akābir kā...*, 99.

<sup>52</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *Malfūzāt kamālāt-e-Ashrafīa*, 37.

<sup>53</sup> Muḥammad Iqbāl, *Bay‘at kay ba‘d*, (Buffalo: Dār al-‘Ulūm al-Madania, n.d.), 11. [Urd]

follow it. Regarding this, Gangohī has given the example of Khidr and Mūsā (pbuh).<sup>54</sup> Mūsā chose to be the former's student but because of his objections, Khidr sent him away. The same applies to the disciple. If he objects to the shaykh, he will not benefit.

3. *I'tiqād*: It means faith or conviction. Thus, a disciple must have complete faith in his shaykh and should be convinced that his shaykh is the best for him. It is not necessary for a disciple to consider his shaykh to be superior to every other shaykh. Rather, he should regard his shaykh to be the most beneficial for him.
4. *Inqiyād*: It means inner obedience. In the present context, it means that when the disciple obeys the commands of his shaykh outwardly, he must do so inwardly as well. There should be no objections in his mind.

These conditions are quite demanding. Most people are unable to fulfill these. Many more are doubtful about their validity especially considering the shaykh like a prophet. This explains why the rank and file Deobandīs have grown to distrust the idea of *taṣawwuf* altogether. To them, Qur'an and *Sunnah* are enough. This is leading to a blurring of the divide between the Ahl-e-Ḥadīs and Deobandīs in this matter. The differences still remain because of their diametrically opposed approaches towards *fiqh*.

### **Oneness of Goal (*Tawḥīd-e-Maṭlab*)**

It is an important ingredient of one's relationship with one's shaykh. Technically, it means that the disciple should believe that his shaykh is the only one who can take him to his goal. Even though there might other shaykhs in the world who are as

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<sup>54</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 70.

qualified as his shaykh or more, yet his success lies with him only. Thinking that other shaykhs of the time can help him out as well is dangerous and causes one to not reach the goal.<sup>55</sup> The reason for this is that without *tawhīd-e-maṭlab* one does not develop enough devotion to his shaykh. Moreover, there is a danger that Shayṭān might come in the form of a shaykh and because he trusts every shaykh; therefore, he could be easily manipulated by him. Sūfī Iqbāl has listed disciple's weakness in it as one of the main impediments to the path.<sup>56</sup>

### **Maintaining Constant Spiritual Connection with the Shaykh (*Rabṭ al-Qalb bi al-Shaykh*)**

Gangohī has suggested in *Imdād al-sulūk* that the disciple should think that the spirit of the shaykh is not confined by time or space. Rather, wherever the disciple is, the shaykh's spirituality is with him. Knowing this will help the disciple to achieve constant connection with the shaykh which itself is a means to reaching Allah.<sup>57</sup> This idea raises important questions, not the least of which is the powers of the Prophet (pbuh) as understood by the Barelvīs and propagated by them. If it is permissible for the disciple to imagine that the shaykh's spirituality is everywhere, then it should be permissible for Barelvīs to consider the Prophet (pbuh) to be omnipresent. After all, he is the shaykh of shaykhs. Realizing this, the translator Mīrathī has added a footnote saying that this is just a means to an end and does not imply that the shaykh himself knows what is happening with the disciple. In fact, it is Allah who guides the disciple because of his good intentions.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 62-63. Also see Iqbāl, *Fayz-e-shaykh*, 39-49.

<sup>56</sup> Iqbāl, *Akābir kā...*, 83.

<sup>57</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 65.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. Obviously, this is a weak answer.

Gangohī declares *rabṭ al-qalb* to be the key for the disciple to open his communication channel with Allah. He sees this as the reason why ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was called *muḥdath* by the Prophet (pbuh). He had proper connection with the latter’s heart allowing him to plug into the channel of divine commands.<sup>59</sup>

### Company of the Shaykh

An important element of the spiritual path is company of the shaykh. However, Thānvī makes clear that this does not imply leaving everything to come live with the shaykh. Rather, occasional visits and regular correspondence is all that is needed.<sup>60</sup>

As mentioned above, Thānvī did acknowledge the theoretical possibility of achieving *tazkiyat al-nafs* without keeping the company of a shaykh but was quick to point out that this is rare.<sup>61</sup>

The proof presented for justifying keeping company of the shaykh is the following Qur’anic verse:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَكُونُوا مَعَ الصَّادِقِينَ (التوبة: 119)

O you who believe! Fear Allah and be with those who are true (in word and deed). (Al-Tawbah: 119)

This verse establishes the obligation for Muslims to seek righteous company.

The same idea is reinforced by the divine command to the Prophet (pbuh) to stay with those who call upon their Lord.

وَاصْبِرْ نَفْسَكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ بِالْعَدَاةِ وَالْعَشِيِّ يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَهُ (الكهف: 28)

And keep your soul content with those who call on their Lord morning and evening, seeking His Face. (Al-Kahf: 28)

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>60</sup> Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *al-Ifādāt al-yawmiyyah min al-ifādāt al-qawmiyyah*, (Multan: Idāra tālīfāt-e-ashrafia, 1984), 1:52. [Urd]

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.



### **Role of the *Khānqāh***

A *khānqāh* is a Sufi center, which is supervised by a certain shaykh and is used by him for training his disciples according to his particular methodology. *Khānqāhs* have occupied a central position throughout the history of *taṣawwuf*. They have been known by other names as well, such as *zāwiyah*, *dā'irah*, *ribāṭ* and *jamā'at khāna*. Initially, there were some differences between these terms, but over time, these differences lost their importance. These days, the difference is basically that of prevalence of a certain term in a certain region. *Khānqāh* is used in the regions historically influenced by Persian such as Iran, Afghanistan, and the Indo-Pak subcontinent; and *zāwiyah* is mostly used in the Arab world. The concept is the same.

The group activities that can be conducted in a *khānqāh* are hard to implement in a mosque, which has its own set of *Sharī'ah*-required rituals to be performed. Moreover, a mosque is supposed to be open to all Muslims and cannot be closed to non-members while entry into and stay in a *khānqāh* can be controlled. Thus, a *khānqāh* gives the shaykh more freedom of action.

*Khānqāhs* also provide disciples with a place where they can get together with like-minded people and bond with them. It allows them to create a space, which is highly focused and free of distractions. The environment acts as a booster for the weak and provides them a chance to leave behind their previous lives and start afresh.

Historically, *khānqāhs* had their own elaborate set of rituals. Following them was considered very important. In traditional *khānqāhs* that are generally attached to the grave of a *walī*, these rituals are still upheld and adhered to strictly; at times even overtaking the commands of *Sharī'ah* in their perceived importance. With Deobandīs, these rituals were done away with and more simplified rules of conduct were

established to facilitate the disciples. Historically, the main Deobandī *khānqāhs* were the following:

1. Imdād Allāh’s *khānqāh* in Thana Bhawan and then in Makkah. The one in Thana Bhawan was called “dokān-e-ma‘rifat” (shop of gnosis). Along with Imdād Allāh, two other successors of Miānjī Nūr Muḥammad Jhinhānvī, Shaykh Muḥammad and Ḥāfiẓ Zamin used to live there. It was abandoned after the war of 1857.
2. Gangohī’s *khānqāh* in Gangoh.
3. The Rāipūrī *khānqāh* of ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Rāipūrī. After his death in 1919, it was run by his main successor ‘Abd al-Qādir Rāipūrī (d. 1962). After his death, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Rāipūrī took over and remained at its helm until his own death in 1992. After him, his son Sa‘īd Aḥmad Rāipūrī took over and is currently managing it. This is the longest running Deobandī *khānqāh*.
4. Thānvī’s *khānqāh* in Thana Bhawan. This was originally the “dokān-e-ma‘rifat” mentioned above. Later, Thānvī revived it when he moved back to Thana Bhawan in 1897. He named it “Khānqāh Imdādia.” It remained active under him for 47 years until his death in 1943.

In addition to these, there were the new forms of mobile *khānqāhs*. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this was started by Muḥammad Ilyās who envisioned his Tablīghī Jamā‘at to be a series of mobile *khānqāhs*. His nephew Muḥammad Zakariyyā had a similar temperament. He ran his *khānqāh* part-time from his home and established temporary *khānqāhs* wherever he stayed for Ramadhan. He would exhort his successors to turn these temporary *khānqāhs* into permanent ones. Many of his successors have continued his legacy and have established *khānqāhs* in

different parts of the world. Some of these are attached to *madrasahs*.<sup>62</sup> Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madnī used to establish his temporary *khānqāh* in Ramaḍān in Sylhet, Bangladesh.

Having discussed other aspects of a shaykh's relationship with the disciple, we must now refer to an important but somewhat neglected aspect of the master-disciple relationship.

### **Greco-Arabic Medicine and *Taşawwuf***

Traditional *taşawwuf* is deeply intertwined with Greco-Arabic medicine and its view of human anatomy and composition. Thus, the human being is seen to be composed of four elements, viz., water, dirt, air, and fire, each of which brings darkness to it.<sup>63</sup> *Nafs* is considered to be like air and is dark.<sup>64</sup> Shayṭān is like fire and is also dark. It permeates the human body through its blood stream.<sup>65</sup> The darkness brought about by these things is further compounded by all the images and information that the *qalb* has been exposed to. These are registered in the *qalb* as darkness and cause it to rust and to become heedless. The elements of the Sufī path, viz., purity, prayer, *dhikr*, meditation, isolation, silence, negation of unnecessary thoughts, and strong relationship with the shaykh, etc., help one to get rid of the darkness of these elements. The hitting of the heart during *dhikr* helps to create heat in the body, which helps develop passionate love for Allah. These processes purify the heart and allow it

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<sup>62</sup> For example, the *khānqāh* established by Muḥammad Zakariyyā's successor Yūsuf Motālā in Dār al-ʿUlūm, Holcombe Bury, UK and the one established by his other successor, Dr. Ismāʿīl Memon in Dār al-ʿUlūm al-Madania, Buffalo, USA.

<sup>63</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 140.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 141. Gangohī talks about the *nafs* and Shayṭān and connects them to air and fire but does not mention anything about the water and dirt except that they comprise veils.

to be lit up with the light of divine companionship and vision. Then, the following Qur’anic verses are experienced by the *sālik*.

وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ (الحديد: 4)

He is with you wherever you are. (Al-Ḥadīd: 4)

And,

فَأَيْنَمَا تُوَلُّوا فَثَمَّ وَجْهَ اللَّهِ (البقرة: 115)

So, whichever way you turn, there is the countenance of Allah. (Al-Baqarah: 115)

This subject is not dealt comprehensively in any Deobandī work although there are numerous references to it. Amongst these, Imdād Allāh has mentioned regarding the qualifications of a shaykh that he should be a *ḥakīm* (expert in traditional Greco-Arabic medicine).<sup>66</sup> He should be able to differentiate between regular medical conditions and physical changes brought about as a result of Sufi *adhkār* and *ashghāl*. We have not found other Deobandī shaykhs mentioning this particular condition for the shaykh. However, we do find them occasionally directing their disciple(s) to have himself examined by a *ḥakīm* so that the shaykh can determine whether the physiological changes taking place in him are due to Sufi practices or not.

The relationship between traditional Greco-Arabic medicine and *taṣawwuf* is an important one and needs to be examined in detail. However, it is beyond the scope of this research to go beyond what we have discussed so far.

## **TRAINING OF THE *MURĪD* (DISCIPLE)**

Most prominent Deobandī figures who taught in the *madrasahs* were also Sufis. Many of their students eventually became their disciples. This was, thus, a

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<sup>66</sup> Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Imdād al-mushtāq ilā ashraf al-akhlāq*, (Lahore: Islāmī Kutub Khāna, n.d.), 69-70. [Urd]. The word *ḥakīm* is here being used in its Urdu sense where it refers to an expert in traditional Greek medicine.

continuation of the Islamic training that the teachers had been imparting in the *madrasahs* except that now it was more formal and more spiritual. Apart from former students, there were other people who became their disciples. Then there were those shaykhs who did not engage in any academic teaching but were based in their respective *khānqāhs* such as the Rāipūrī shaykhs and Thānvī.

As we have stated earlier, with the Deobandīs, the focus was not the *ṭarīqah* anymore; rather, it was the shaykh. The shaykh could be from any *ṭarīqah*. In fact, most Deobandī masters had and many contemporary ones still have permission to train disciples according to the four main *ṭarīqahs* prevalent in the sub-continent. It can be said that in a way, *Deobandiat* (Deobandīsm) became the new group identity.

The approaches of the various Deobandī shaykhs towards spiritual aspirants are well documented, especially that of Thānvī's. The main sources are the numerous collections of correspondence between shaykhs and their disciples. One such compilation is *Tarbiyyat al-sālik* [Training of the wayfarer], which was authorized by Thānvī himself. It is a necessary part of any Deobandī Sufi curriculum especially for those who have been authorized to accept others as disciples. Similar compilations exist for other shaykhs as well such as Gangohī, Muḥammad Zakariyyā, Ḥusayn Aḥmad, etc.

### **Thānvī's Approach**

Amongst Deobandī shaykhs, Thānvī is especially noted for his detailed rules and regulations, which he devised for his disciples, and whoever else wanted to visit his *khānqāh* or engage in correspondence with him. These rules were not like the rules of

traditional *khānqāhs*; rather, they resembled British bureaucratic models.<sup>67</sup> He earned a reputation for excessive strictness, although, he did not see it that way. To him, rules were meant to save his time and others', and to facilitate his work.

If someone sought to do *bay'ah* with him, he would instruct him to learn about the basics of Islam and its necessary rulings through some of the many books that he had written. These included *Qaṣd al-sabīl*, *Ta'līm al-dīn*, *Behishtī zewar*, as well as transcripts of his lectures. These were intended to teach the aspiring disciple purposes of the "path." Once that person informed him that he had read these, he would ask him as to what change did he feel in himself. He would continue this question-answer process with the aspirant until the aspirant fully understood the basic concepts associated with *dīn* and *taṣawwuf*. Once these were clarified, the actual process would begin. The main component of this process was written correspondence, which was to take place once a week. Each letter could have only one main topic concerning one's spiritual condition. Moreover, it had to be written in a way that half of each side was used by the disciple, while the other half was left for Thānvī to write his responses. Each letter had to be accompanied by the previous letter and all letters had to be kept so that one could review them later on.<sup>68</sup>

Apart from letters, Thānvī's gatherings were a major means of training those who were present in the *khānqāh*. These included his disciples, as well as other visitors. Many of his *malfūzāt* (utterances) in such gatherings have been compiled and published. Such compilations have been a regular part of South Asian *taṣawwuf*. Numerous collections of different saints are popular. Many are authentic and many more are apocryphal. In the case of Thānvī, he reviewed his collections himself and

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<sup>67</sup> Muḥammad Qasim Zaman, *Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi: Islam in modern South Asia*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2008), 92

<sup>68</sup> 'Ārifī, *Ma'āsir Ḥakīm-ul-ummat*, 153.

had them published. A recurring theme in all of Thānvī's letters and utterances is his emphasis upon understanding the essence of *taṣawwuf*. He wanted to raise public's awareness of the *dīn* in general and *taṣawwuf* in particular. Another theme was emphasizing following the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (pbuh). He wanted people to understand the path for themselves so that they would no longer remain a burden upon the shaykh; rather, they would become active partners in their spiritual rehabilitation. At the same time, Thānvī was conscious to maintain the authority of the shaykh. In numerous incidences, which have been recorded in his letters and utterances, he reprimands people for trying to dictate to the shaykh.<sup>69</sup> For him, maintaining the delicate balance between knowledge and humility was essential for progressing on the path.

### **Other Observations**

Daily gatherings were also a prominent feature of Muḥammad Zakariyyā's *khānqāh*, which he ran from his home. The difference was that he did not talk much. Rather, books by various authors, which he approved would be read. These were primarily written by other Deobandī authors. These books were meant to fulfill the same role, as a shaykh's lecture would normally do. Some of his successors still continue this practice of reading books in their gatherings.

These gatherings of Muḥammad Zakariyyā and other shaykhs are, in fact, gatherings of *tawajjuh* (spiritual attention) for the disciples. The mode of reading books was chosen so that newcomers would not feel uncomfortable sitting in a quiet gathering for 45 minutes or an hour, which is how a regular gathering of *tawajjuh* would have been.

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<sup>69</sup> Thānvī's collection of correspondences with his disciples, *Tarbiyyat al-salik* is filled with such instances.

Deobandīs were conscious of the need to treat every disciple differently. They behaved like psychologists except that they had no formal degrees. Their degree was the *khilafah* (successorship) given to them by their shaykh. They would employ different tactics with different disciples. Some of these would appear as politicking to the casual observer. The shaykhs and their followers understood it differently. This aspect is, particularly observed in Thānvī's *Tarbiyyat al-sālik*. To his followers, this is the proof of the superiority of *'ilm ladunnī* (God-given knowledge) over formal education.

Deobandī shaykhs sought to make their disciples realize the combination of forces that dwell inside man. These forces or faculties, as we discussed in the previous chapter, cannot be rooted out. These masters sought to re-channel these into right directions. They understood that merely submitting to Allah outwardly was not enough for a person to achieve closeness to Allah. Rather, his worldview had to be changed. Sūfī Iqbāl wrote *Fayz-e-shaykh* for this very purpose. It contains his short-cut method, which relies primarily upon re-orienting one's thought process.

### **Obstacles to the Path (*Mawāni*')**

An important part of Deobandī methodology is their emphasis on avoiding those things, which are obstacles on the way. In principle, all sins and attachment to anything besides Allah is an obstacle on the way. However, the main impediments as identified by Deobandīs are the following: opposing the *Sunnah*, looking at forbidden things especially unrelated women and boys, pretension (*riyā'*), weakness in *tawhīd-e-maṭlab*, lack of determination regarding volitional matters and to seek things that are not in one's power, opposing one's shaykh, and to wish to expedite fruits of one's



labour.<sup>70</sup> All the blameworthy traits are also impediments on the way. The idea behind informing the shaykh of one’s spiritual condition is that the shaykh will be able to determine which vices afflict the disciple. He will then suggest a way to correct them. Over a period of time, if the disciple remains honest about his problems and follows the orders of the shaykh, his blameworthy traits will be replaced by praiseworthy traits.

### **MUJĀHADAH**

*Mujāhadah* is a verbal noun from the root letters j-h-d on the pattern of *mufā’alah*. It means to struggle, strive, exert, labour, etc.<sup>71</sup> The word “*jihād*” comes from the same root and has the same meaning. While acknowledging the legitimacy of jihad as armed struggle, amongst themselves Sufis use *mujāhadah* and jihad in the meaning of struggle against one’s self. As such, it has an important place in any path of *taṣawwuf*. It has basis in the Qur’an, as well as *ḥadīth*. Among the many verses of the Qur’an dealing with this issue, the following are especially relevant:

وَجَاهِدُوا فِي اللَّهِ حَقَّ جِهَادِهِ (الحج: 78)

And struggle for Allah, a struggle that is owed to Him. (al-Ḥajj: 78)

And in the following verse, Allah promises reward for those who strive in His way,

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَمَعَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ (العنكبوت: ٦٩)

As for those who strive in Us, We surely guide them to Our paths, and lo! Allah is with the good.

Thānvī has classified *mujāhadah* in a number of different ways.<sup>72</sup> One is the distinction between voluntary (*ikhtiyārī*) and forced (*iḍṭirārī*). As their names

<sup>70</sup> Iqbāl, *Akābir kā...*, 83.

<sup>71</sup> Lane, book 1, part 2, 473.

<sup>72</sup> Din, 78-81.

indicate, voluntary *mujāhadah* is undertaken voluntarily while the forced one is forced upon one by Allah. For example, a person cuts down on food or sleep voluntarily. This will be voluntary *mujāhadah*. On the other hand, if Allah afflicts one with something and one is forced to cut down on food, it is forced *mujāhadah*. This latter is quite effective and indicates that Allah wishes him well. Amongst these types of afflictions is sorrow and grief over something. It helps one to progress faster in *sulūk* than voluntary *mujāhadah*.<sup>73</sup>

Its proof is from the following Qur'an verse:

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ (البقرة: 155)

Surely, We shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods or lives or the fruits (of your toil), and give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere. (Al-Baqarah: 155)

Gangohī has mentioned a *ḥadīth* as a proof of this in which the Prophet (pbuh) said, “When Allah makes someone His friend, He afflicts him. If that person remains patient, He chooses him; and if he remains pleased [with Allah], He chooses him and pulls him to Himself.”<sup>74</sup>

Another classification divides *mujāhadah* into summary (*ijmālī*) and detailed (*tafṣīlī*). These are also called bodily (*jismānī*), and against the lower self (*nafsānī*), respectively. We discuss these two in more detail below.

### **Summary *Mujāhadah* (Against the Body)**

According to Thānvī, summary *mujāhadah* involves four things, viz., minimal eating and drinking, minimal sleep, minimal social interaction, and minimal speech. These four have also been identified by Gangohī as part of the eight main things that he

<sup>73</sup> Thānvī, *Malfūzāt kamālāt-e-Ashrafīa*, 31.

<sup>74</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 123.

mentions, which a disciple must do to progress on the path.<sup>75</sup> With respect to these, all Deobandī scholars acknowledge the need for moderation. This moderation has to be in accordance with the advice of the qualified (*kāmil* and *mukammil*) shaykh. Neither should one indulge in eating, drinking, sleeping, interacting and talking to such an extent that it leads to hard heartedness and heedlessness; nor should one reduce these so much that it leads to poor health. Moderation is the key. We find Gangohī stating a general principle, which can easily sum up everything. He says that all worships are done through the *nafs*. *Nafs* is like a horse. We ride it to get to the destination. If a person overburdens the *nafs*, it will rebel and *Shayṭān* will get a chance to lead him astray. The *nafs* must be given respite so that it can handle more burdens.<sup>76</sup>

At the same time, we find Gangohī emphasizing these *mujāhadahs* to the extent of almost starving oneself.<sup>77</sup> Obviously, to him this is not starvation; rather this is moderation. In this, he is following the classical Sufis. Al-Ghazālī stands out as a clear example. On the other hand, Sūfī Iqbāl uses Gangohī's above-mentioned principle to point out that one must feed oneself well because people are not as strong physically as they used to be. However, one must distinguish between nutritious food and junk food. The former should not be reduced while the latter should be eliminated.<sup>78</sup>

Thānvī called his particular brand of *taṣawwuf* as royal *sulūk* (*shāhī sulūk* in Urdu). By this, he meant that there was no hardship in it. According to Thānvī, one should not overburden oneself. Rather, one should keep oneself in comfort so that one develops love for Allah out of gratitude and remains active, which is useful for

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>78</sup> Muḥammad Iqbāl, *Ṣiqālat al-qulūb*, (Lahore: Idāra-e-Islāmiāt, 1982), 110. [Urd]

worship. The main focus, according to him, is watching over the *nafs* so that it does not engage in any sin. One should engage in some *dhikr* and *shughl* according to the time that one has. He categorically says that minimizing food and sleep are not necessary. Only talking needs to be reduced but not to the extent, that one becomes depressed and dry.<sup>79</sup> The same attitude is observed with Muḥammad Zakariyyā and his successors.<sup>80</sup>

It should also be noted here that one's self has two types of demands. One is *ḥuqūq* (rights); the other is *ḥuḏūz* (enjoyments). *Ḥuqūq* are those things, which are necessary for survival. *Ḥuḏūz* are extras. It is necessary for a Sufi to know the difference between the two. In this regard, Gangohī has contrasted between the beginner and the advanced Sufi. He says that “it is a sin for the beginner to go beyond that which is necessary [i.e., he should only fulfill the *ḥuqūq*]; while the door opens for the advanced ... Fulfilling *ḥuḏūz* does not harm him.”<sup>81</sup>

### **Detailed *Mujāhadah* (Against the Lower Self)**

Detailed *mujāhadah* refers to removing the blameworthy traits (*radhā'il*) and adorning oneself with praiseworthy ones (*faḏā'il*). As each praiseworthy trait is acquired and it becomes stable, it is called a station (*maqām*). It is not enough to free oneself of a few blameworthy traits because whatever is left dominating upon oneself will cause other traits to return and dominate. The reason is that all of these are interconnected. Complete spiritual health cannot be had by removing some of the diseases. Rather, all the diseases need to be removed to achieve perfection. Just as physical beauty is not attained through beauty of some of the body but requires that the whole body be

<sup>79</sup> 'Ārifī, *Baṣā'ir Ḥakīm-ul-ummat*, 57.

<sup>80</sup> Dr. Ismā'īl Memon, Interview by Author, Buffalo, NY, USA, November, 2003.

<sup>81</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 133.

beautiful; similarly, spiritual beauty requires that the whole be spiritually clean of these diseases.

Thānvī has stated that the blameworthy traits are not blameworthy in themselves; rather acting upon their impulse is blameworthy.<sup>82</sup> Thus, anger is not blameworthy in itself; rather acting upon its impulse in the wrong way is blameworthy. Moreover, these impulses cannot be removed altogether. However, they can be redirected to good causes. Thus, the proper method of *tazkiyat al-nafs* is *imālah* (redirection) and not *izālah* (removal).<sup>83</sup> In this, he is echoing al-Ghazālī.<sup>84</sup>

As for the method of dealing with blameworthy traits, Thānvī writes,

The short treatment for blameworthy traits is *ta'ammul* (deliberation) and *taḥammul* (patience).<sup>85</sup> This means that whatever one does, one first thinks about it whether it is Islamically permissible or not. Secondly, one should not be hasty. Rather, one should be calm.<sup>86</sup>

Through constant observation and control, gradually these impulses will become weak and will become easier to control. Initially, the *nafs* will resist because the *nafs* is in its lowest state, that of *al-nafs al-ammārah* (the commanding self). In this state, the *nafs* commands one to engage in vices and to fulfill the desires of the *nafs*. Thus, *shahwah* and *ghaḍab* command man. After some time, through persistent effort this will change into *al-nafs al-lawwāmah* (the self-reproaching self). Now, man has become conscious of his faults and feels bad every time he does something bad. With continuous effort and help from Allah, this will finally change into *al-nafs al-muṭma'innah* (the peaceful self). In this state, man will be at ease with himself and God.

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<sup>82</sup> Dīn, 170.

<sup>72</sup> 'Ārifī, *Baṣā'ir Ḥakīm-ul-ummat*, 344.

<sup>84</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, 3:56-57.

<sup>85</sup> Here, he is using the word *taḥammul* in its Urdu sense.

<sup>86</sup> Thānvī, *Malfūzāt kamālāt-e-Ashrafīa*, 25.

In other words, we could also say that the path is as follows: First, one acquires knowledge of good actions. Then one acts upon it repeatedly until he develops its habit. This is *ḥāl*. He continues repeating it until it becomes his second nature. This is *maqām*. At this stage, he does not have to force himself to do it. This is also called *malakah* (habitus).

“Man’s *rūḥ* already contains in it the element of love for the Divine.”<sup>87</sup> As long as the *nafs* dominates man it seeks to pull him down. When this *nafs* is tamed, it frees him to connect with the Divine and fulfill his original mission of worshipping Him as contained in the following Qur’anic verse.

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ (الذاريات: 51)

And I have not created the jinn and the men except that they should worship Me. (Al-Dhāriyāt: 56)

The *nafs* and the body are just servants, which must aid the *rūḥ* in carrying out its divinely ordained mission. *Nafs* is also the trainer of man’s being. It causes its evils to reflect on man’s being. When it is itself purified then it will cause good to flow onto the being.<sup>88</sup>

### ***Takhliyah* and *Taḥliyah***

There are two processes in *sulūk*. One is *takhliyah* (literally, emptying), which as a Sufi term refers to emptying oneself of blameworthy traits and of all attachments with other than Allah. The other is *taḥliyah* (literally, adorning), which as a Sufi term means adorning oneself with praiseworthy traits and with *ta‘alluq ma‘a Allāh*. Both of these processes are needed. Historically, Chishtīs tended to focus on *takhliyah* first, and *taḥliyah* later. Naqshbandīs tended to focus on *taḥliyah* first, and *takhliyah* later.

<sup>87</sup> Iqbāl, *Maḥabbat*, 20.

<sup>88</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 72.

The later masters of both *ṭarīqahs* realized that lives are short and people have low ambitions such that if they were to focus on *takhliyah* they would spend their entire lives doing that and would thus be deprived of the benefits of *taḥliyyah*. Similarly, at times one is so enveloped in evil traits that *taḥliyyah* becomes ineffective. Therefore, the later *muḥaqqiq* (rigorously exacting) masters of both *ṭarīqahs* began to conduct both processes simultaneously. The difference still remained that the Chishtīs give more importance to *takhliyah*, and Naqshbandīs give more importance to *taḥliyyah*.<sup>89</sup>

For both the processes of *taḥliyyah* and *takhliyyah*, the first step is that of the preliminary practices called “*ibtidā’ī ma‘mūlāt*.” Any practicing Muslim is expected to engage in these any way. Deobandī shaykhs start by insisting on their disciples to make these a part of one’s daily routine. These include group activities such as the five congregational prayers and individual activities such as reading a portion of Qur’an each day, reading 100 counts of certain formulae including *istighfār*, sending blessings upon the Prophet (pbuh), *subḥānallāh*, *alḥamdulillāh*, *lā ilāha illallāh*, *Allāh Akbar*, and *lā ḥawl wa lā quwwatah illā billāh*, and reading a section of the shaykh’s chosen book of prayers. In Thānvī’s sub-order, it is *Munājāt-e-maqbūl*; and in Muḥammad Zakariyyā’s sub-order, it is *al-Ḥizb al-a‘ẓam*. These preliminary practices are accepted by almost all Deobandīs with a few additions or subtractions. Tablīghī Jamā‘at also acknowledges them and this is the basic daily routine for its members.

### **Differences between the Ghazalian Method and the Deobandī Method**

Beyond the preliminary practices, the second level is that of removing blameworthy traits, negating all attachments to the world, acquiring praiseworthy traits and

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<sup>89</sup> Qurayshī, *Ma‘ārif al-akābir*, 88; and Dīn, 82-83.

strengthening one's connection with Allah. Special Sufi *adhkār*, *ashghāl* and *murāqabāt* have a role to play here. Here, different shaykhs have different approaches, which vary with each disciple. However, with respect to Deobandī shaykhs there are some broad themes that emerge. In response to a lengthy letter by one of his disciples, Thānvī explained the general methodology of Imdād Allāh, which could be defined as the general methodology of all Deobandī shaykhs.<sup>90</sup> He contrasted this with the Ghazalian method.

According to Thānvī, the Ghazalian method is based upon the idea that blameworthy traits are an obstacle to achieving closeness and must be rooted out completely. One must go after all the bad traits individually that exist in one's self. This requires a lot of effort and is a never-ending process because human nature cannot change. We have elements of good and bad traits built into us. We cannot root out bad traits all together. This method requires one to be almost paranoid in going after one's moral problems. Such paranoia is generally beyond the ability of today's Muslims. Imdād Allāh's method, on the other hand, does not include such paranoid obsession with one's natural traits. Rather, it relies upon excessive *dhikr*, which serves as the main tool for both *takhliyyah* and *tahliyyah*. Most Deobandīs use this method.

Deobandīs focus on those things that are within one's power. The instruction given to disciples is that spiritual states and impulses should not be given too much attention. If there is a good impulse, one should neither pay attention to it nor seek to make it last forever. Similarly, if there is a negative impulse, one should neither blame oneself for that nor should he exaggerate in repelling it. Ignoring it is the best course of action. One should do things that one knows will please Allah and bring

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<sup>90</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *Tarbiyyat al-sālik*, 1:26-34.



one closer to Him and should abstain from things that one knows will anger Him and take one away from Him. *Dhikr* should be done with the intention of gaining closeness to Allah and not with the intention of repelling bad thoughts. All of one's time should be filled with actions that are appropriate for that time. This includes outward and inward actions.

On the face of it, Thānvī's description leads us to believe that al-Ghazālī actually seeks to root out one's natural traits. In reality, that is not the case. Al-Ghazālī also speaks of *imālah* (re-direction) and not *izālah* (removal) as we mentioned earlier.<sup>91</sup> The truth, then, is that the difference is in terms of focus. Al-Ghazālī's method has a much larger focus on fighting one's negative traits in detail. Gīlānī has explained this on the basis of al-Ghazālī's particular background and his milieu.<sup>92</sup> Deobandī method is more focused on carrying out the commands of *Sharī'ah* and doing *dhikr* while paying nominal attention to removing blameworthy traits. *Dhikr* is used as the main tool to achieve all of the objectives of this level listed above.

Attention to detail is not just al-Ghazālī's hallmark. Thānvī indulged in it too and is known amongst his followers as *mujaddid* because of this very reason. Thānvī sought to enforce Islamic rulings in all aspects of one's life. He paid special attention to one's dealings with others, both social and business. It is this aspect, which continues to distinguish Thānvī's followers from other Deobandīs. Current shaykhs of his sub-order tend to focus more on *ṣafā'ī-e-mu'āmalāt* (honesty of dealings)<sup>93</sup> at the expense of Sufī *adhkār*. The idea being that an easier way to attain *iḥsān* and to

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<sup>91</sup> See above, chapter 5, page 41.

<sup>92</sup> Gīlānī, *Maqālāt-e-Iḥsānī*, 62-94.

<sup>93</sup> Strictly speaking *mu'āmalāt* as a legal (*fiqhī*) term refers to one's economic dealings. Thānvī identified this as one of the five components of *sharī'ah*. He also composed a small treatise titled *Ṣafā'ī-e-mu'āmalāt* explaining to all those who engage in business dealings the proper Islamic way of executing them. In common Urdu usage, *mu'āmalāt* also has a broader meaning where it refers to all one's dealings with people whether social (*mu'āsharat*) or economic. It is in this latter sense that we talk of *mu'āmalāt* as a distinctive focus of Thānvī and his followers.

achieve Allah's pleasure is to lead an upright moral life by remaining mindful of His commands and prohibitions (as explained by the scholars) in all one's dealings. In contrast, the focus in the sub-order of Muḥammad Zakariyyā is more on *dhikr* even though they also acknowledge the importance of honesty in dealings.

### **Isolation (*khalwah*)**

*Khalwah* means isolating oneself from the world for an extended period of time. Sufis have long considered it to be an important part of the Sufi way. Gangohī has devoted many pages in *Imdād al-sulūk* to outlining the need for *khalwah*. He has also provided proofs for the legitimacy of *khalwah*. As part of the age-old rivalry between externalist scholars and Sufis, the *khalwah* championed by Sufis has been labeled by externalists as monasticism (*rahbāniyyah*) which is against Islam. This explains the need for Gangohī to justify it.

There are two issues here. One is the justification of prolonged *khalwah*. The other is the relative merit of *khalwah* with respect to social interaction. The essence of Gangohī's arguments is that *khalwah* is not an end in itself; rather, it is a means to an end. It is used to help a person disassociate himself emotionally from the attractions of the world. It frees his heart from creation and allows him to focus on the Creator.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, *khalwah* helps one to reform one's character, to adopt praiseworthy traits, and to give up blameworthy ones.<sup>95</sup> It is thus an aid for *dhikr*. If the same could be achieved through other means then there will be no need for this *khalwah*.

It was practiced by the Prophet (pbuh) himself before he formally received prophet hood.<sup>96</sup> In fact, Gangohī goes on to assert that even before his *khalwah*, the

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<sup>94</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 89.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 83-85.

Prophet (pbuh) had become a prophet because of his true visions.<sup>97</sup> These true visions led him to love *khalwah*, which brought forth the prophet hood that “was hidden in him.”<sup>98</sup> The proof for this is the *ḥadīth*: كُنْتُ نَبِيًّا وَ آدَمُ بَيْنَ الْمَاءِ وَ الطِّينِ “I was a prophet when Adam was still between water and clay.” This, Gangohī contends, proves that *khalwah* is a *Sharī‘ah*-ordained practice. He extends the same argument to say that “the *wilāyah* of a *walī* is hidden in him and is brought out through *khalwah*.”<sup>99</sup>

The companions of the Prophet (pbuh) did not engage in *khalwah* because their companionship of the Prophet (pbuh) helped them to rise above their lower selves and achieve the state of *iḥsān* and self-purification. For them, company of the Prophet (pbuh) was more beneficial than *khalwah*. The same process continued in the next generation where the followers achieved self-purification through their company of the companions. However, with the passage of time, as the spiritual strengths of each succeeding generation decreased, the shaykhs of *taṣawwuf* brought back *khalwah*, which was the original practice of the Prophet (pbuh).<sup>100</sup>

Later, commenting on the Prophet’s (pbuh) saying that “the Muslim who stays with people and is patient over their harshness is better than the one who stays in isolation,” Gangohī says:

This *ḥadīth* means that the Muslim who has civilized and tamed his *nafs* through *mujāhadah* and purification, whom Allah has given patience and contentment in abundance, in whose heart Allah has poured peace and tranquility, and who has acquired forbearance, steadfastness, patience over affliction, grace, moderation in all matters, chastity, generosity of character, tolerance, manliness, contentment, piety, and who has removed greed, anger, self-praise, and arrogance; then this person’s interaction with people and his remaining patient over their harshness is better because he will benefit Muslims and this interaction will not harm his [internal] *khalwah*. On the other hand, the one who

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 88-89.

has not reached this stage and his beastly, brutish, and demonic qualities are still present; then the Prophet (pbuh) does not command him that interaction is better than *khalwah*. Rather, it is obligatory for this person to remain in isolation so that his interaction [with others] does not hurt them and people remain safe from his mischief such as backbiting, slander, jealousy, etc.<sup>101</sup>

Like Gangohī, the Rāipūrī shaykhs (‘Abd al-Raḥīm and his successor, ‘Abd al-Qādir), had *khalwah* as an important part of their Sufi methodology. With Thānvī and the Kāndhlavīs (Muḥammad Ilyās and Muḥammad Zakariyyā), it changed. *Khalwah*, as in prolonged isolation in a *khānqah*, was less emphasized. Rather, *khalwah*, as in minimizing one’s social interaction, was more emphasized. Most Deobandī shaykhs of today practice this latter form of diffused *khalwah*.

### ***Khawāṭir* (Addressed Intuition)**

*Khawāṭir* is the plural of *khaṭrah*, which means an addressed intuition. It is similar to *wārid* except that the latter is general and includes all types of intuition whether they are in the form of an address or not. According to al-Qushayrī, *khaṭrah* has a limited meaning and refers to only those intuitions that are in the form of an address.<sup>102</sup> In Deobandī literature, we find this term used somewhat loosely referring to all thoughts. An important element of *tazkiyat al-naḥs* is permanent negation of thoughts (*naḥy al-khawāṭir*). On the face of it, Sufī texts and their general emphasis upon negating *khawāṭir* suggests that all thoughts must be negated. However, there is detail to it. Gangohī has defined four types of *khawāṭir* in *Imdād al-sulūk*. These are:

1. *Khāṭir-e-Ḥaq* or *khāṭir-e-Raḥmānī* or *khāṭir-e-Rabbānī*: This comes directly from Allah and is the strongest. One cannot oppose it. Gangohī says that “nothing can oppose *khāṭir-e- Raḥmānī*. When it dominates the

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>102</sup> Al-Qushayrī, 119.

[physical] body, all of its organs submit themselves to it and all other *khawāṭir* die out.”<sup>103</sup>

2. *Khāṭir-e-malakī*<sup>104</sup>: This comes from angels. It could be from the angel assigned to each individual or from other angels. It commands good, submission to Allah, and urges one to do acts of worship. It is not as strong as the previous one. *Khāṭir-e-nafsānī* and *khāṭir-e-shayṭānī* can oppose it. Thus, a person sometimes follows *khāṭir-e-malakī* and sometimes ignores it.
3. *Khāṭir-e-nafsānī* or *khāṭir-e-nafsī*<sup>105</sup>: This comes from one’s own soul and pulls one towards fulfilling its desires. It does not go away easily and is recurring. The light of *dhikr* does not weaken it much.
4. *Khāṭir-e-Shayṭānī*<sup>106</sup>: This comes from Shayṭān and urges one to disobey Allah and commit sins. Compared to *khāṭir-e-nafsānī*, it is not recurring. The light of *dhikr* removes it.

In fact, all four *khawāṭir* are from Allah but one is directly from Him and the others are through the means of angels, *nafs* and Shayṭān. That which is pure good and comes directly from Him is called *Rabbānī*; while others are not attributed to Allah out of respect for His exalted status.<sup>107</sup> Some Sufis have listed additional *khawāṭir* as well. However, a closer inspection would suggest that all *khawāṭir* fall under the above-mentioned four.<sup>108</sup> It should be noted here that Gangohī has also

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<sup>103</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 130-131.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 131-132.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 133.

relied upon *‘Awārif al-ma‘ārif*, which is a classical Sufi work by Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī, for his analysis.<sup>109</sup>

Gangohī goes on to point out that “the *sālīks* are subject to an immense flood of *khawāṭir*.” These include the good ones, as well as the bad ones. Since, the beginner does not know how to differentiate between the good ones and the bad ones; therefore, Gangohī suggests that “he must negate all of these.... because busying oneself in *khawāṭir* and trying to distinguish between them is openly harmful.”<sup>110</sup> The only way remaining, then, is that he focuses on the words and meanings of the *dhikr* that he has been instructed to do. This will repel the *khawāṭir-e-shayṭānī* and will weaken the *khawāṭir-e-nafsānī*. The other two types will not be weakened or repelled by *dhikr*. After a while, they will be the strongest ones remaining and will find a firm place in his heart. It should be mentioned here that *khawāṭir-e-nafsānī* cannot be eliminated. They are only somewhat weakened. The need to struggle against oneself will always be there.

Analysis and classification of *khawāṭir* is important for *taṣawwuf*. The reason is that whatever a person sees gets registered in his *mukhayyilah* (imaginative faculty). When he sits down to do *dhikr*, these things keep coming back in his head and take his attention away from *dhikr*. Through *dhikr*, the *mukhayyilah* is filled with the divine name “Allah.” Now, the *khawāṭir-e-nafsānī* is transformed. It no longer reminds one of base things. Rather, it reminds one of the divine name. This is not an end in itself. The end is focusing on Allah Himself. Gangohī contends that this is easy to achieve once the divine name is registered in the *mukhayyilah*.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>111</sup> Iqbāl, *Akābir kā...*, 40.

Gangohī has mentioned two levels here. The first level is *tajrīd*, which is consciousness that Allah is the Most Exalted, worthy of all love, and the ultimate Goal. This is easily achieved. The other level is that of *tafrīd*.<sup>112</sup> It refers to complete removal of all things other than Allah that are registered in one’s mind. This is hard to achieve and takes a long time. Once it is achieved, *ḥadīth al-naḥs* (one’s *naḥs* talking to oneself) is replaced with *mukālamat al-rūḥ wa al-qalb* (dialogue of the spirit and the heart).<sup>113</sup> *Khalwah* allows one to get rid of these *khawāṭir* and speeds up the process of achieving *tafrīd*.

### ***ADHKĀR, ASHGĪĀL AND MURĀQABĀT***

Among the various means employed by Sufis to help one progress on the path are the various types of *adhkār*, *ashghāl* and *murāqabāt*. These are used for the second level of *sulūk* i.e., removing blameworthy traits, negating all attachments to the world, acquiring praiseworthy traits, and strengthening one’s connection with Allah. We discuss them below in some detail.

#### ***Adhkār***

*Adhkār* is the plural of *dhikr*, which literally means “to remember.” This is the opposite of “to forget.” The command to do *dhikr* is found in numerous places in the Qur’an. In fact, the Qur’an does not place any limit on how much *dhikr* one should perform; rather, there is an encouragement to remember Allah abundantly. Sufis take this to mean that a lover must love the Beloved (Allah) at all times.<sup>114</sup> In this context,

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<sup>112</sup> Lexically both of these terms (*tajrīd* and *tafrīd*) mean the same, namely, to isolate something. However, technically, they have different meanings.

<sup>113</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 136.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

a *ḥadīth* is cited in which the Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said, “Do the *dhikr* of *lā ilāha illallāh* in [such] abundance that people start calling you crazy.”<sup>115</sup>

The Qur’anic verses alluded to above form the bases for *dhikr* practiced by the Sufis. One such verse is:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ ذِكْرًا كَثِيرًا (الأحزاب: 41)

O you who believe! Remember Allah abundantly. (Al-Aḥzāb: 41)

Gangohī regards *dhikr* to be the best of all deeds basing it upon the *kashf* (unveiling) of people of insight and the following Qur’anic verse:<sup>116</sup>

وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ (العنكبوت: 45)

Indeed, remembrance of Allah is the greatest of all things. (Al-‘Ankabūt: 45).

Similarly, in *ḥadīths*, *dhikr* is defined as the tool for the cleansing of the soul.

A *ḥadīth* states,

لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ صِغَالَةٌ وَ صِغَالَةُ الْقُلُوبِ ذِكْرُ اللَّهِ (كنز العمال)

For everything, there is a polisher and the polisher of hearts is *dhikr*. (Kanz al-‘Ummāl)<sup>117</sup>

*Dhikr* as understood by Sufis is somewhat different from the *dhikr* mentioned in the Qur’an although there are also many points of intersection. To begin with, the particular methods of doing *dhikr* as practiced by Sufis are not mentioned in the Qur’an or *ḥadīth*. Deobandīs always point that out. Secondly, the counts that are considered important are not mentioned in the Qur’an or *ḥadīth*. The methods and the counts are the result of the experiments of various Sufis. However, the essence of Sufi *dhikrs*, as well as the Qur’an-ordained and *ḥadīth*-explained *dhikrs* is the same, namely, remembering Allah.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 125-126. Muḥammad Zakariyyā has discussed the various sources for this *ḥadīth* in *Fazā’il-e-zikr*. See Muḥammad Zakariyyā Kāndhlavī, “Fazā’il-e-zikr,” in Muḥammad Zakariyyā Kāndhlavī, *Fazā’il-e-a‘māl*, (Karachi: Altaf and Sons, 2003), 645. [Urd]

<sup>116</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 104.

<sup>117</sup> ‘Alī al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, *Kanz al-‘ummāl fi al-sunan wa al-aqwāl*, (Damascus: Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 1981), 1:428. [Arb]



Sufi *dhikr* also involves hitting the heart. This is done with a jerking motion of the head as if one is about to hit the heart. The physical heart does not get hit but the spiritual heart does get hit through this jerking motion. This hitting is called *ḍarb* (*zarb* in Urdu). This is based upon the idea that hearts of men can become like stones, which need to be broken through the hits of *dhikr*. This is derived from the following Qur’anic verse:

ثُمَّ قَسَتْ قُلُوبُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ فَهِيَ كَالْحِجَارَةِ أَوْ أَشَدُّ قَسْوَةً (البقرة: 74)

Then after that, your hearts were hardened, as if they were rocks, or still worse in hardness. (Al-Baqarah: 74)

Here, Allah has declared the hearts of Israelites as having become like stones. Deobandīs always mention that this hitting is not *Sunnah* but merely the result of the experiments of various Sufis. Regarding it to be *Sunnah* would be an innovation.

As mentioned above, Sufi *adhkār* were devised based upon Greco-Arabic medicine’s view of the human being. Sometimes, these *adhkār* can harm one physically. Thānvī and shaykhs of his sub-order in particular amongst all Deobandīs keep this dimension in mind. Thānvī points out that a Sufi *dhikr* is merely a tool. If for some reason (such as physical weakness), *dhikr* begins to hurt a person (physically or otherwise), then it is impermissible for him to engage in it.<sup>118</sup>

### ***Purpose of Dhikr***

The purpose of all Sufi exercises, namely *adhkār*, *ashghāl* and *murāqabāt*, is to develop constant consciousness of Allah.<sup>119</sup> This consciousness has two levels. The first is that of imprinting the divine name “Allah” in one’s *mukhayyilah* (imaginative

<sup>118</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *Anfās-e-Īsā*, 1:73.

<sup>119</sup> Raḥīmī, 38.

faculty). From there one moves to the Divine Essence. This is the second level.<sup>120</sup> Consistent *dhikr* leads to greater gnosis and love of the mentioned one (Allah), and strengthens one in *tawḥīd* and *īmān*.<sup>121</sup> Allah lightens up hearts with the light of His Essence and Attributes because of *dhikr*. When a person persists with *dhikr*, this light occupies such a firm position in the heart that it cannot be removed from it. This happens until it becomes the intrinsic attribute of the heart. Its sign is that the one doing *dhikr* feels tranquility and calmness. The sign of this tranquility is that such a person gives up the world, and loses interest in the ephemeral things of this world.<sup>122</sup>

*Dhikr* is to be done remembering the Qur'anic verse, which mentions that when someone remembers Allah, He remembers him (*al-Baqarah*: 152). With consistent *dhikr* a person finally reaches the stage that he is fully immersed in the remembered one which is the pure Divine Essence. At this stage, his heart acquires praiseworthy states and his body acquires praiseworthy deeds.<sup>123</sup> *Dhikr* acts as both *nūr* (spiritual light) and *nār* (fire). Its light brings coolness and calmness to the heart, and its fire burns the coarseness present due to one's humanness. This relieves one of earthly weights and he rises above human burdens. Then, he crosses the angelic field with his heart and reaches the heaven of greatest lordness.<sup>124</sup>

### ***Conditions for Dhikr***

To begin with, *dhikr* is most beneficial and effective when a person is free of all engagements and attachments to anything else. Moreover, Gangohī has mentioned that the person doing *dhikr* should be clean himself physically, as well as his clothes,

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<sup>120</sup> Iqbāl, *Akābir kā...*, 40.

<sup>121</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 105.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

and the place where he intends to do *dhikr*. Having a small *khalwat khāna* (place for isolation) also helps in this regard.<sup>125</sup> He should perform ritual ablution (*wuḍū*) and/or take a ritual bath (*ghusl*) to achieve complete purity. This is not a necessary condition but is preferable. He should sit cross-legged, facing the *qiblah*, and keep both his hands on his thighs near the knees.<sup>126</sup> These basic conditions apply to all *adhkār* with some exceptions.

Another of the basic conditions as enunciated by almost all Deobandī writers on the subject is that the *dhikr* must be acquired from an authentic shaykh. When a person does not learn *dhikr* from an authorized shaykh and just starts doing a *dhikr*, which he heard from other people or read about in a book, it is called *taqlīdī dhikr* (imitative). When *dhikr* is acquired from an authorized shaykh who has an unbroken chain going back to the Prophet (pbuh), it is called *taḥqīqī dhikr* (actually effective). According to Gangohī, “this [*taqlīdī*] *dhikr* does repel Shayṭān and strengthens faith but cannot support the person doing *dhikr* to reach that station of closeness [to Allah] and *wilāyah*, which the *taḥqīqī dhikr* can.”<sup>127</sup> Other Deobandī scholars echo the same view regarding these two types of *dhikrs*.<sup>128</sup>

Gangohī has provided a proof for acquisition of *dhikr* from an authorized shaykh. He has narrated the incident reported by Shaddād ibn Aws and ‘Ubādah ibn Ṣāmit. They narrate that once they were in the company of the Prophet (pbuh). He asked us, “Is there any stranger amongst you?” We said, “No.” He said, “Close the door.” When we closed the door, he said, “Raise your hands and say *lā ilāha illallāh*.” We did so.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 112-113.

<sup>128</sup> Iqbāl, *Fayz-e-shaykh*, 39.

<sup>129</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 108.

Gangohī has also mentioned that Sufis consider authentic a *ḥadīth* in which ‘Alī asked the Prophet (pbuh) to teach him that path which is the closest and easiest for people and which Allah regards to be the most excellent. The Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said, “Hold on to *dhikr* in isolation.” ‘Alī asked him, “How should I do *dhikr*?” The Prophet (pbuh) said, “Close your eyes and listen to me.” Then the Prophet (pbuh) said *lā ilāha illallāh* three times and ‘Alī was listening. Then ‘Alī taught this to Ḥasan Baṣrī who taught it to ‘Abd al-Wāḥid ibn Zayd and Ḥabīb ‘Ajāmī. Thus, the various *ṭarīqahs* developed and branched out. Gangohī has not provided any chain for this *ḥadīth* or a reference to any book of *ḥadīth*.<sup>130</sup>

### ***Types of Dhikr***

In terms of the focus of the person doing *dhikr*, there are various levels. The first level is *dhikr-e-lisānī*, which is *dhikr* through the tongue without attention. This is also called *laqlaqah*. The second level is *dhikr-e-naḥs*, in which a person thinks of the words of *dhikr* in his heart. The third is *dhikr-e-qalbī*, which is *dhikr* with attention. The next level is that of *dhikr-e-sirr*, which is meditating for unveiling of divine secrets. This is followed by *dhikr-e-rūḥ*, which is observation of the manifestations of Divine Attributes. The last level is that of *dhikr-e-khafī*, which is observing the Divine Essence.<sup>131</sup>

Another classification of *adhkār* divides them into two types: *ṣūrī* (apparent) and *ḥaqīqī* (real). Apparent *dhikr* means to remember Allah by repeating His name. This could be through the tongue or through the heart. Real *dhikr* is remembering Allah through fulfilling His rights. This encompasses the whole of *Sharī‘ah* for His

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 117.

rights include all the commands and prohibitions of *Sharī‘ah*.<sup>132</sup> What is really desired in *Sharī‘ah* is the latter while the former is a preparation for it. That is why it is also beneficial and praiseworthy.<sup>133</sup> Allah says in the Qur’an:

إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ (العنكبوت: 45)

Surely, *ṣalāh* restrains one from shameful and evil acts.  
(Al-‘Ankabūt: 45)

Apparent *dhikr*, which is merely repeating the name of Allah has two further types; one is *dhikr-e-lisānī* (*dhikr* with the tongue); the other is *dhikr-e-qalbī* (*dhikr* without the tongue and only in the heart, with or without presence of mind). As is obvious, there is an overlapping of terms between the one in the beginning of the section and this classification. The latter is more commonly used than the former. Then, within the latter classification, Sufis have long debated which one is more excellent. Opinions vary and each side is armed with proofs. Amongst the Deobandīs, most tend to favour *dhikr-e-lisānī* over *dhikr-e-qalbī*.<sup>134</sup> Perhaps this is due to their being Chishtīs since *dhikr-e-lisānī* is the main *dhikr* amongst them. Zulfiqār Naqshbandī, who is a contemporary Deobandī shaykh has tried to prove that *dhikr-e-qalbī* is superior.<sup>135</sup> This could be on account of his being Naqshbandī, since *dhikr-e-qalbī* is the main *dhikr* amongst them. It is not our job to weigh in on the debate; however, this much can be said that both sides agree that whichever *dhikr* is done with the presence of mind is superior to the one done without it.

Different *ṭarīqahs* use different types of *dhikr*. Over the centuries, these *ṭarīqahs* have also borrowed from one another. The same process is visible with the Deobandīs as well. Thus, while they are strict *Ḥanafīs* in matters of *fiqh*, in *taṣawwuf*

<sup>132</sup> Dīn, 260.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 259-260.

<sup>135</sup> Zulfiqār Naqshbandī, *Taṣawwuf-o-sulūk*, (Faisalabad: Maktabat al-Faqīr, 2000), 114-119. [Urd]

they tend to be flexible. The main *ṭarīqah* of most Deobandī shaykhs is Chishtī Ṣābirī but they also have permission in other three *ṭarīqahs*. On the orders of Muḥammad Zakariyyā, his successor Sūfī Iqbāl wrote a book *Ṣiqālat al-qulūb* [Polishing of the hearts] detailing the main *adhkār*, *ashghāl* and other practices of the four *ṭarīqahs*. As he says in the introduction to the book, it was written for the successors of Muḥammad Zakariyyā so that they could have a handy reference and could prescribe whatever *dhikr*, *shughl*, or *murāqabah* they felt was more appropriate for the disciple.<sup>136</sup> Before him, Imdād Allāh had written a similar book in Persian titled *Ḍiyā' al-qulūb*. Sūfī Iqbāl has relied heavily upon this work.

### ***Dawāzdah Tasbīh***

The main *dhikr* amongst the Chishtīs is *dawāzdah tasbīh* (in Persian) or *barā tasbīh* (in Urdu). A *tasbīh* is a 100 count of any *dhikr* formula. *Barā tasbīh* means twelve such counts (1200 repetitions) even though in reality these are thirteen *tasbīhs*. So far, we have yet to come across any plausible explanation for this discrepancy. Nevertheless, the Chishtīs do not seem to mind this. The sequence is as follows: first, two hundred repetitions of *lā ilāha illallāh*; then four hundred repetitions of *illallāh*, then six hundred repetitions of *Allāhū Allāh*; and finally one hundred repetitions of “*Allāh*” (also called *ism-e-dhāt* which means “name of the [Divine] Essence”).

One can do the *dhikr* loudly or in a moderate voice depending on how one’s shaykh has taught him the *dhikr*. Thānvī and those of his sub-order emphasize that loud *dhikr* can be harmful. They insist that nowadays, people have become physically weak. *Dhikr* in a moderate to low voice is sufficient to achieve results. Moreover,

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<sup>136</sup> Iqbāl, *Ṣiqālat al-qulūb*, 14-17.

moving the neck right and left, and hitting the heart strongly are also dangerous. A light movement and slight vocal stress instead of hitting is sufficient.

In addition to the general conditions stated above, Gangohī has also explained a complex way of holding hands, which he claims to have basis in *ḥadīth*. However, he does not provide any reference for it. He also mentions holding a vein in one's left leg with the big toe of the right foot.<sup>137</sup> Thānvī does not mention the holding of the hands but he does mention the holding of the vein.<sup>138</sup> Contemporary Deobandī shaykhs do not seem to worry about this method of holding the hands or the vein.<sup>139</sup>

The way to do this *dhikr* is as follows: At any time of tranquility when one has peace of mind, he should start by seeking Allah's forgiveness for all ones sins. Then he should pray that Allah purify his heart and give him His gnosis. Then, according to Thānvī he should repeat the formula for *istighfār* and sending blessings upon the Prophet (pbuh) 11 times each. Sūfī Iqbāl does not mention *istighfār* but says that he should send blessings upon the Prophet (pbuh) 11 times and recite Surat al-Ikhlāṣ 13 times. Sūfī Iqbāl also says that he should send the rewards for these to all the shaykhs in his chain. Thānvī does not make such a suggestion.

Then, he should sit cross-legged while keeping his back straight. He should begin doing the actual *dhikr* with deep reverence. He should first lower his head towards his heart and then while saying the word *lā* with *madd* (prolongation), he should move his head towards his right shoulder. There he should say *ilāha*. While saying *lā*, he should imagine pulling out of his heart all things besides Allah and when his head is over his right shoulder, he should imagine throwing all such things besides Allah behind his back. These things include one's *nafs*, *Shayṭān*, desires, and all such

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<sup>137</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 106.

<sup>138</sup> Dīn, 270.

<sup>139</sup> See the method given in Iqbāl, *Ṣiqālat al-qulūb*, 50.

things, which have the potential of claiming to be one's Lord.<sup>140</sup> Then, he should say *illallāh* while moving his head to the left aiming for his heart and should hit it by putting stress on the *lām* of the word “*illā*” while jerking the head as if physically hitting the heart with the head. During this, he should imagine that passionate love for Allah and His light is entering his heart. He should do two hundred repetitions of *lā ilāha illallāh*. During these, after each ten or eleven repetitions, he should send blessings upon the Prophet (pbuh). After two hundred repetitions, he should close his eyes for some time and imagine that divine effulgence is entering his heart from the divine throne.

Then, he should do four hundred repetitions of *illallāh* with the same hitting on the heart. During this, he should imagine declaring the existence of Allah and should imagine bringing Allah's love into his heart with full force.<sup>141</sup> Then, he should do six hundred repetitions of *Allāhū Allāh*. During these, he should pronounce the *ḍammah* on the “*hā*” of the first “*Allāh*” and should prolong it. The “*hā*” at the end of the second “*Allāh*” should be *sākin* i.e., should not have any declension. While saying the first “*Allāh*,” he should move his head to the right and while saying the second “*Allāh*,” he should move it to the left and move his head with a jerk as if hitting the heart. During this, he should also imagine that the love of Allah is entering his heart. During these repetitions, he should pause after some time and say *Allāhū ḥāḍirī* (Allah is present with me), *Allāhū nāẓirī* (Allah is looking at me), *Allāhū ma'ī* (Allah is with me). After these six hundred repetitions, he should do hundred repetitions of the divine name “*Allāh*,” and should hit his heart with the jerk of the head while putting stress on the “*lām*” of “*Allāh*.”<sup>142</sup>

<sup>140</sup> Gangohī, *Imdād al-sulūk*, 115.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>142</sup> This description of *barā tasbīh* has been taken from Iqbāl, *Fayz-e-shaykh*, 54.



The jerking of the head is according to the method provided by Sūfī Iqbāl, as well as Thānvī.<sup>143</sup> However, Thānvī has also clarified that extensive movements of the head and jerking of the head are merely a means. As we mentioned above, according to him, these days, a light movement and only slight stress on the *lām* of *illallāh* is enough.<sup>144</sup>

There is a gradual progression in this *dhikr*. One begins by intellectually negating all that which is other than Allah. In Urdu, it is called *fanā-e-‘ilmī ghayr Allāh*. It also includes growing in one’s focus on Allah. Thus, in the beginning people see many other things besides Allah. These are all denied through abundant repetitions of *lā ilāha illallāh*. When one achieves a certain degree of success in this negation, he proceeds to confirm the existence of Allah in his mind through repetition of *illallāh*. This confirmation is also merely an intellectual endeavour. Then, there is a need to rise from this to the next level, which is that of registering the divine essence in one’s mind. This is achieved through repetition of the divine name “*Allāh*.”

### ***Contentious Issues***

Within the Deobandī circles, some issues have emerged as contentious. The first and foremost is the questioning of Sufi *dhikr* itself. This is more pronounced in Tablīghī Jamā‘at and the rank and file Deobandīs of today. The problem with these doubts and questions is that these people also claim themselves to be Deobandīs who are following in the footsteps of the early masters of the school. However, a study of the works of the early masters of the school establishes beyond doubt that they were in

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<sup>143</sup> Iqbāl, *Ṣiqālat al-qulūb*, 50-51; and Luṭf-e-Rasūl, 593

<sup>144</sup> Luṭf-e-Rasūl, 593-594.

favour of *dhikr* and emphasized it. The truth, then, is that most of these questioners of *dhikr* who claim to be Deobandī have not studied the biographies of their elders.<sup>145</sup>

Then, there are those among Deobandīs who do not deny the validity of *dhikr* but question doing it in a loud voice (*dhikr bi al-jahr*). Deobandī *fatwa* literature contains numerous references to people calling loud *dhikr* an innovation and censuring its practitioners. Historically, these opponents were Ahl-e-Ḥadīs. The responses in the *fatwā* literature almost always point out that loud *dhikr* is permissible with the condition that it does not disturb someone praying *ṣalāh*, or sleeping, or someone who is sick.<sup>146</sup> As for the Deobandīs of today who question loud *dhikr*, the typical response to their doubts focuses on providing proofs from the writings of early Deobandī masters.<sup>147</sup>

Another issue is that of doing *dhikr* in a gathering (*majlis al-dhikr*). This has proven to be more contentious and divisive. Historically, Deobandīs did not do *dhikr* in gatherings. Nowadays, amongst all Deobandīs, it is mainly the followers of Muḥammad Zakariyyā who do *dhikr* in gatherings. Other Deobandīs have questioned it and opposed it.<sup>148</sup> The responses given by its supporters center around defining Muḥammad Zakariyyā as the *mujaddid* whose decision should be enough as evidence. The underlying assumption, of course, is that there are enough evidences in the *Shari'ah* to support both sides. It is the duty of the *mujaddid* to see what is needed for the time and give preference to it.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Sūfī Iqbāl penned a treatise specifically for the purpose of refuting such doubts. See Iqbāl, *Zikr-o-i'tikāf kī ahmiyyat*.

<sup>146</sup> See Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī, *Imdād al-fatāwā*, (Karachi: Maktabat Dār al-'Ulūm Karachi, 1992), 5:218-219. Also see Thānvī's *fatwā* on the Shādhilī way of doing *dhikr* in *Ibid.*, 5:151-155. [Urd]

<sup>147</sup> See, for example, Muḥammad Ilyās Shaykh, *Zikr-e-jahri-o-ijtimā'ī shari'at kay ā'inay main*, (Lenasia: Dār al-'Ulūm Zakariyyā, n.d.). [Urd]

<sup>148</sup> See, for example, 'Abd al-Wāḥid, *Dāstān-e-ibrat*, (Lahore: n.p., n.d.). [Urd]

<sup>149</sup> This line of reasoning is especially visible in Muḥammad Iqbāl, *Quṭb al-aqtāb Shaykh al-Ḥadīth Hazrat Mawlānā Muḥammad Zakariyyā Muhājir Madanī aur majālis-e-zikr*, (Lahore: 'Imrān Academy, n.d.). [Urd]

## ***Ashghāl***

*Ashghāl* is the plural of *shughl*. In Sufi terminology, *shughl* means to imagine a *dhikr*.<sup>150</sup> Its purpose is to increase concentration. According to Thānvī, if a person has enough concentration in *dhikr*, then no *shughl* is needed. However, if he does not develop enough concentration in *dhikr*, then he recommends engaging in some *shughl*.<sup>151</sup> Amongst the various *ashghāl*, Thānvī prefers *shughl anḥad* (also called *sulṭān al-adhkār* meaning “king of all *adhkār*”) which he considers to be the easiest and most beneficial.<sup>152</sup> In it, one imagines that all pores of the body are saying “Allāh hū.” Another common *shughl* is *shughl ism-e-dhāt*. In it, one imagines that one’s heart is saying “Allāh” with passionate love. It is also called *dhikr-e-qalbī* (in its primary meaning i.e., *dhikr* in the heart, with or without presence of mind). Other forms of *shughl* include *ḥabs-e-dam* (holding one’s breath) and *ḥabs-e-baṣar* (visually focusing on something). These last mentioned ones are not generally common amongst the Deobandīs.

## **Meditations (*Murāqabāt*)**

*Murāqabāt* is the plural of *murāqabah*. It means to keep an idea or concept in one’s mind for a specific period of time or during most times so that one starts acting upon it due to its dominance over oneself.<sup>153</sup> There are several different types of *murāqabāt*. Amongst these the commonly used ones are as follows: *murāqabah-e-maḥabbat-e-Ḥaqq* (meditating that Allah loves me), *murāqabah-e-du‘āia* (praying to Allah in ones heart), *murāqabah-e-maut* (meditating over death and after-death), and *murāqabah-e-*

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<sup>150</sup> Dīn, 258.

<sup>151</sup> ‘Ārifī, *Baṣā’ir Ḥakīm-ul-ummat*, 145.

<sup>152</sup> Dīn, 274.

<sup>153</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *al-Takashshuf...*, 267.

*ma'iyat* (imagining Allah to be with oneself). *Murāqabāt* tend to be more common amongst Deobandīs than *ashghāl*.

There are two more things related to *murāqabah*. These are *mushārāṭah* and *muḥāsabah*. *Mushārāṭah* means that one should sit alone in the morning for some time and tell one's *nafs* that during the day it should do such and such good deeds, and abstain from such and such bad deeds. Then, during the day one should remain mindful of this. This consciousness is also called *murāqabah*. This is the use of the word *murāqabah* in its general sense. At the end of the day, one should sit down again with oneself and review one's actions during the day. Those that were good, one should thank Allah for them; and those that were bad, one should reprimand oneself for them. If needed one could also impose a punishment upon oneself for these. This is *muḥāsabah*.

## **RISKY MEANS**

We mentioned in the previous chapter that Deobandī writers differentiate between the means, which are beneficial and those which are risky. The former includes different types of *mujāhadahs*, *adhkār*, *murāqabāt* and some *ashghāl*. The latter include *taṣawwur-e-shaykh*, *‘ishq-e-majāzī* and *samā’* (audition). Out of these three, we will discuss the first two below while the third will be discussed in the next section as part of the differed upon practices.

### **Imagining the Shaykh (*Taṣawwur-e-Shaykh*)**

*Taṣawwur-e-shaykh* means to imagine the shaykh in one's mind. It could be the image of the shaykh or his different qualities. The purpose is to develop love for the shaykh. Another benefit is improved concentration and repelling of stray thoughts.

Nevertheless, *taṣawwur-e-shaykh* is controversial. Amongst the non-Sufis, it is viewed with great suspicion. They think that it amounts to associating partners with Allah (*shirk*). Sayyid Aḥmad Barelvī, the acknowledged fore-runner of Deobandīs, refused to engage in it when ordered to do so by his shaykh, Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. Interestingly, the latter did not mind it. Rather, he said that “you seem to have preponderance of *tawḥīd* (*ghalabat al-tawḥīd*) over you. You will have to be trained in a different way.”<sup>154</sup>

Thānvī acknowledged the benefit of *taṣawwur-e-shaykh* but nevertheless, stated that it can be dangerous for common people and will be permissible for the elect with precautions.<sup>155</sup> The main risk is that the one engaging in it will end up regarding his shaykh as a helper at the expense of his trust in Allah, which will naturally weaken his own belief in *tawḥīd*.

### **Temporal Love (‘*Ishq-e-Majāzī*)**

Traditional Sufi writings have numerous references to temporal love. Examples include such classics as the *Mathnawī* of Rūmī and the *Divān* of Ḥāfiẓ. Over the years, people began to interpret these references literally and used these to justify their mingling with women and young boys. For such people, this type of love was a means to achieve true love of the Divine (‘*ishq-e-ḥaqīqī*). Thānvī has mentioned that while there is some truth in that temporal love removes all other attachments from the heart and humbles one’s *nafs*; yet this has become a means for these people to satisfy

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<sup>154</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *Hekāyat-e-awliyā*, 115.

<sup>155</sup> Private correspondence with Dr. Ismā‘īl Memon, (Early 2005). Also, see ‘Ārifī, *Baṣā’ir Ḥakīm-ul-ummat*, 129-130.

their base desires. Moreover, anything could have been made an object of this temporal love. Making it specific with women and boys indicates mal-intent.<sup>156</sup>

As for the statements of earlier Sufis, which seem to condone temporal love, Deobandīs explain them by saying that other parts of these works denounce temporal love. This means that these statements have to be interpreted differently. These are, in fact, metaphors. Thānvī wrote a commentary on the *Divān* of Ḥāfīz, as well as on *Mathnawī* of Rūmī with this purpose in mind.<sup>157</sup>

## **DIFFERED UPON PRACTICES**

We have discussed before the role of Shāh Ismā‘īl and Sayyid Aḥmad in combating practices, which they deemed to be against the *Sunnah*. Deobandīs followed their example in combating these practices. This placed them on a collision course with the traditional ‘*ulamā*’ and Sufis of the sub-continent. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss all the issues that divided these groups. We can only discuss the issues that have any relevance to *taṣawwuf*. These are as follows:

### **Celebration of the Birth of the Prophet (pbuh)**

*Mawlid* or *mawlūd* is an Arabic word which means birth. In Islamic usage, it is generally taken to mean the birth of the Prophet (pbuh). In South Asia, the word *mīlād* is more often used which means the same thing. Celebrating *mawlid al-Rasūl* (birth of the Prophet) is a highly contentious issue in Sunni circles throughout the Muslim world. In South Asia, Barelvīs are in favour of it and consider it to be the distinguishing mark of a Sunni. Deobandīs and Ahl-e-Ḥadīs oppose it and call it an

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<sup>156</sup> Ashraf Thānvī, *Ta‘līm al-dīn*, 554

<sup>157</sup> His commentary on the *Divān* of Ḥāfīz forms part of *al-Takashshuf*. His commentary on *Mathnawī* is a voluminous work spread over 18 volumes. It is titled *Kalīd-e-Masnavī* [Key to the *Mathnawī*]. [Urd]

innovation. To be sure, the birth of the Prophet (pbuh) is a joyous occasion for all Muslims. This much is accepted by all sides. Mentioning and remembering it is considered praiseworthy by all sides as well. The problem comes with the word *mīlād* (or *mawlid* or *mawlūd*). For its supporters, any way of commemorating the birth of the Prophet (pbuh) is *mīlād* irrespective of what name is given to it.<sup>158</sup> The opponents take *mīlād* to mean the common South Asian way of celebrating this birth. This popular practice involves elaborate rituals and specified dates and so on. To these opponents, all of these features turn this activity (which may have been permissible originally) into an innovation. A closer examination of the two sides' views suggests that this difference is semantic, as well as *fiqhī*. The supporters focus on the basic permissibility and virtue of remembering aspects of Prophet's (pbuh) life. The opponents focus on popular practices, which have become, in their view, an integral part of *mīlād* celebrations.

From the *Sunnah* it is proven that the Prophet (pbuh) would fast on Monday as a way of thanking Allah for his birth on that day. However, there is no evidence to suggest that this birth was ever celebrated in the form of a birthday gathering during his time or during the early generations of Islam. From historical accounts, it becomes clear that special *mīlād* celebrations were instituted by Sultan Abū Sa'īd Kūkubūrī (d. 630 AH), the ruler of Irbil.<sup>159</sup> These celebrations involved the setting of a particular date for this celebration, gathering of scholars and pious people, and sending rewards to the Prophet (pbuh) by giving food in charity.<sup>160</sup> From that time onwards, it became a matter of debate for scholars. Some supported it as a praiseworthy innovation while

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<sup>158</sup> 'Aṭā' Allāh, 223.

<sup>159</sup> Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa al-nihāyah*, (Giza: Dār al-Ḥajr, 1998), 17:205. [Arb]

<sup>160</sup> Muḥammad Yūsuf Ludhiānvī, *Ikhtilāf-e-ummat aur širāṭ-e-mustaqīm*, (Karachi: Zamzam Publishers, n.d.), 81. [Urd]

others opposed it as a reprehensible innovation because of the lack of precedence from the early generations of Islam. However, over time celebrating *mawlid* became a regular practice amongst most Sunnis around the world with some dissenting.

The dispute that we see today is essentially a repeat of the old one with an added dimension. This new dimension is the popular form of *mīlād* celebration in the sub-continent, which has evolved over the years and many times includes elements that would be censured by ‘*ulamā*’ of all sides.<sup>161</sup> When Deobandīs sought to oppose popular practices, which they felt were out of line with the *Sunnah*, they also opposed *mīlād*. The basis was that *mīlād* as it was commonly practiced by the public had become mixed with impermissible practices. It was rare that any celebration would be free of these vices. As a means to rectify that, Deobandīs opposed *mīlād* altogether.

However, they acknowledged the need to remember the life of the Prophet (pbuh), his noble traits, as well as the importance of following the *Sunnah*. To them, *mīlād* had been focusing narrowly on some dimensions of his life at the expense of other dimensions of his Prophetic mission. Thus, they started organizing lectures and *Sīrah* conferences without a fixation with a particular date to discuss and remember the life and the mission of the Prophet (pbuh) in a more comprehensive manner. These were to be done without making them specific to any particular date or format. Rather, the idea was to focus on the goal, which was increasing one’s love of the Prophet (pbuh) and reminding one of the obligations of that love namely, adhering to *Sunnah* in all aspects of one’s life.

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<sup>161</sup> ‘*Atā*’ Allāh, 243-245.



### **Celebrating the Death Anniversary of Saints (‘Urs)**

‘Urs literally means marriage. In South Asian terms, it refers to the death anniversary of a saint who is thought to have finally achieved *wiṣāl* (meaning he has reached his Beloved) through his death. Celebrating ‘urs at the tombs of saints is a regular feature of popular *taṣawwuf* in the sub-continent. Deobandīs opposed these celebrations for the same reason as they opposed *mīlād* viz., creation of a new practice, which was considered religious by many was an innovation; and more importantly, the ‘urs as it was celebrated in the sub-continent was rarely free of incorrect beliefs and practices. These included considering the fixed date to have a religious basis, playing of music, free mixing of men and women, etc. and in the case of *mīlād*, considering it to be a *Sunnah*, and believing that the Prophet (pbuh) comes to every *mīlād* celebration and that one should stand in his honour (this is called *qiyām*), etc.

The Deobandī stance on *mawlid* and ‘urs was opposed by Barelvīs who felt that censoring such celebrations altogether amounted to an organized conspiracy to lessen the masses’ attachment to the Prophet (pbuh) and the saints. They acknowledged the need to censure the vices that were present in numerous celebrations but did not need feel that it required prohibiting these celebrations altogether.

### **Audition (Samā’)**

*Samā’* refers to listening to some form of poetry so as to arouse love for the Divine in oneself. It may or may not be accompanied by musical instruments. In popular imagination in South Asia, it is especially associated with Chishtīs. Most tombs of Chishtī saints have some group of musicians singing different odes with musical instruments. This presents an obvious dilemma for Deobandīs who are Chishtīs and

consider most musical instruments to be forbidden in *Sharī'ah*. In his various primers and advanced books on *taṣawwuf*, Thānvī has dealt with the issue of *samā'*.<sup>162</sup> He begins by classifying the different types of *samā'*. Then, he utilizes the statements of various classical Chishtī masters to support his arguments. To begin with, he says that *samā'* accompanied by musical instruments has not been allowed by any Chishtī master. Their denunciations of those who engaged in it are provided as proof. Moreover, *samā'* unaccompanied by musical instruments is differed upon among the scholars. Ḥanafīs consider it to be impermissible. Thus, Deobandīs are remaining true to their legal school by declaring it to be impermissible. As for those Chishtīs who practiced it and were also Ḥanafīs, Thānvī makes some allowance for them by saying that they practiced it only because of their special spiritual needs. They were conscious of the scholar's condemnation of it, and therefore, had imposed strict conditions on it. Even then, some amongst them discontinued it altogether. The prime example is Naṣīr al-Dīn Chirāgh-e-Dehlī (d. 1356) who discontinued it, even though his own shaykh Niẓam al-Dīn Awliyā (d. 1325) used to engage in it.

### **Differences Between Deobandīs and Imdād Allāh, and Between Deobandīs and Barelvis**

The differences between Deobandīs and Barelvis are reflected in the differences between the former and their shaykh Imdād Allāh as well.<sup>163</sup> This, however, poses serious problems. How do you censure these differed upon practices and call them reprehensible innovations; and yet maintain respect for your shaykh who engages in these himself? Moreover, how can Imdād Allāh declare Gangohī his successor even though the latter openly declares his shaykh's practices to be misguided? This has

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<sup>162</sup> See, for example, Dīn, 291-297.

<sup>163</sup> We have discussed these in the previous chapter.

vexed Deobandīs since Gangohī's time and has continued ever since. The question was posed to Gangohī and later, Thānvī. Both answered; Gangohī did so briefly and Thānvī dealt with it in detail.

The response as provided by Gangohī and Thānvī brings out the truth behind these issues. Thānvī begins by stating that the issues in question are permissible in themselves (*jā'iz fi nafsihā*). He does not label them as belonging to the category of praiseworthy innovation but he also does not label them as reprehensible innovation. However, the problem is that certain other beliefs and practices have been combined with these practices. These include the *'aqīdah* that the Prophet (pbuh) is omnipresent and the fixation of the dates, as well as other vices. It is these beliefs and practices that invite censure from Deobandīs. As for Imdād Allāh, Thānvī suggests that he did not believe that these ideas and impermissible practices were that prevalent or if they were prevalent, he assumed that people could discriminate between the permissible and the impermissible. This is similar to the Barelvī viewpoint.

In other words, the difference is not in the evilness of these accretions. All sides involved agree that many of these are vices and hence, impermissible. There is disagreement regarding some issues, which Barelvīs consider to be permissible and Deobandīs do not, such as fixing a date. As for the vices, the problem is identifying the proper method of censuring them. Deobandīs consider these practices to be impermissible because vices have become a standard part of them. The Barelvīs, on the other hand, insist that these practices were originally permissible and whatever vices may have become part of these should be censured and not the actual practice itself.<sup>164</sup> In fact, this is a fundamental difference in approach to giving legal opinion (*fatwā*). The Deobandīs rely upon the Ḥanafī methodology which calls for declaring

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<sup>164</sup> There is some difference of opinion about the vices involved as well. For more details, see 'Aṭā' Allāh, 233-245.

something *mubāh* (permissible) to be impermissible when *ḥarām* elements become part of it. The common person cannot differentiate between the permissible and the impermissible while the religious elite can. However, both need to be stopped from engaging in these.<sup>165</sup> The Barelvīs follow the Shāfi‘ī methodology, which says that *mubāh* remains *mubāh* while such *ḥarām* accretions need to be combated and removed. The religious elite do not have to be stopped at all.<sup>166</sup>

Some Deobandīs consider Barelvīs to be conscious evildoers while others give them the benefit of the doubt. The latter describe the difference in the behavior of Barelvīs and Deobandīs as the difference between *ahl al-‘ishq* (lovers) and *ahl al-intizām* (administrators).<sup>167</sup> The lovers do what they think is needed to express their love. The administrators are also lovers but their administrative side dominates them. They are concerned about the impact of their actions on others. In this description, Imdād Allāh and Barelvīs would be called *ahl al-‘ishq* who do what they think is permissible because their love for the Prophet (pbuh) and the saints dominates them. The Deobandīs, on the other hand, also love the Prophet (pbuh) and the saints, but they are also conscious of the impact of their actions upon others. This description of the divide gives each side the benefit of the doubt while insisting on the validity of the Deobandī stance.

## CONCLUSION

Deobandī methodology represents a shift in *taṣawwuf* from complexity to simplicity, and from distance from primary sources of *dīn* to closeness to the Qur’an and *ḥadīth*. This is reflective of their doctrine, which is similarly easier and simpler. Their

<sup>165</sup> Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Ashraf al-jawāb*, (Multan: Idāra Tālīfāt-e-Ashrafia, n.d.), 77. [Urd]

<sup>166</sup> Shafī‘, 234-235.

<sup>167</sup> Lecture on Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī by Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ashrafī at Jāmi‘a Ashrafia, Lahore (c. 2005)

*taṣawwuf* is easier to understand and easier still to practice. It is *Sharīʿah*-based and seeks to express *taṣawwuf*'s principles in all aspects of one's existence. The dosage of *mujāhadahs* and *adhkār* is generally, well balanced with other responsibilities imposed by the *Sharīʿah*. This is especially true of the Thānvī sub-order. In recent years, followers of Muḥammad Zakariyyā have emerged as prominent champions of *taṣawwuf*. Their methodology is characterized by a relatively greater emphasis upon *dhikr*.

The articulation of *taṣawwuf* by Ashraf ʿAlī Thānvī and other Deobandīs clarified the concepts and goals of *taṣawwuf*. Their training and treatment of their disciples is rational and focused. It is also well documented, and provides a handy reference to anyone who wants to travel on the “path.” The number of people who have benefited from Deobandī masters directly or indirectly is huge. The transformation in people's lives by reading their books and by being in their company is easy to witness and baffles many. Deobandī masters operate without a bureaucracy and proper organization. Yet their reach is extensive. In this, they are reflective of the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (pbuh) and of saints of old. Personal contact on a sustained basis is the single most important contributor to permanent transformation.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

It is a common theme of religious history and movements that means devised to achieve certain goals end up becoming the goals themselves, and terms coined to explain concepts themselves become a barrier to the concepts. Terms fulfill a natural need to teach, explain, and disseminate ideas. Similarly, new means are devised to help people achieve higher goals, which otherwise might have been difficult to achieve. However, terms and means are mere servants and aids to goals. These are adopted temporarily for fulfilling a need. Sometimes, they are emphasized and required just as the goals and realities would be emphasized and required. However, the expert stops using these means whenever he considers it necessary and sometimes, as a treatment, he even orders these to be given up permanently. He is not subordinate to the means; rather he commands them. He ensures that the means are not emphasized so much that they become harmful instead of being helpful, and a barrier on the path instead of taking one to the goal.

The case of *taṣawwuf* is no different. The science and art of *taṣawwuf* developed as a distinct branch of Islamic knowledge and practice, which focused on the spiritual dimension within Islam. This codification was a response to the needs of the time and helped to make important spiritual concepts accessible and the path to the Divine pursuable. However, one must admit that repeatedly, these means have acquired the status of goals and terms have hidden the realities causing them to remain hidden from view. Thus, the very name of *taṣawwuf* became controversial. A never-

ending battle began to determine whether *taṣawwuf* is an innovation or not. This has yet to end.

The concepts that *taṣawwuf* sought to convey had their roots in the Qur'an and *ḥadīth*. Amongst the various spiritual dimensions that *taṣawwuf* deals with, two prominent examples are *tazkiyah* and *iḥsān*. No opponent of *taṣawwuf* can deny their validity and importance to Islam. However, new terms became a barrier for these concepts and realities. The same is true of the various means devised by spiritual masters to achieve these goals. None of these masters had the intention of adding something to the *dīn*. They were merely using these as aids. However, gradually these means acquired the status of goals for their later followers. This in turn caused many sincere people to develop serious doubts about *taṣawwuf*. At the same time, these terms and means-turned-goals helped bring about another process. They led to the gradual drifting of *taṣawwuf* away from mainstream Islamic scholarly tradition. This gave enough reason to many of the supporters and opponents of *taṣawwuf* to declare it to be independent of *Shari'ah*. This was especially pronounced in historical India. The divide that emerged led to the loss of the impressive harmony between the outward and the inward that is the hallmark of normative Islam.<sup>1</sup>

A study of the numerous movements that emerged in Muslim India over the centuries can testify to this phenomenon repeating time and again. Well-intentioned Sufis sought to find common ground with the Hindus using general concepts with the intention of attracting them to the eternal message of Islam. In this, they succeeded to a certain extent. However, the price was heavy. The terms they used and the themes they emphasized led to their separation from mainstream Islamic discourse. More

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<sup>1</sup> The foregoing is based upon Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī Nadvī's forewords to 'Alī Nadvī, *Tazkiya-o-iḥsān...*, 13-25; and to Iqbāl, *Akābir kā...*, 7-14.

than once, this led to the formation of new sects and groups. The Sikhs and many amongst Shaṭṭariyyah are an example of this.

Nevertheless, it is also a fact of history that Islam has been blessed with a special renewal process, which repeats itself periodically. Starting from the first century after Hijrah until today, at regular intervals of about hundred years, individuals and movements have emerged that seek to remove the gap between popular understanding of Islam and the actual sources of Islam. This is true of all branches of Islamic faith and practice. Whenever the *ummah* is in need of something, multiple individuals feel the inspiration to respond to it and they seek out ways and means to deal with it. Nadvī calls it collective inspiration (*jamā'ī ilhām*).<sup>2</sup> From the earliest period of Islamic history, the institutionalization of *adhān* and *tarāwīḥ* are prime examples of this. Here, individuals were inspired with something that did not exist before but was needed, nevertheless. This inspiration is not of the same level as Qur'an and *Sunnah* but serves to complement them.

Amongst the many such individuals who graced Indian Muslim history with their presence, Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624) and Shah Wali Allah (d. 1762), are prominent in their contribution to almost all important aspects of Muslim faith and practice. They combined in them scholarly erudition, high spirituality and community activism. These were true *mujaddids* (renewers of the faith) who sought to reinvigorate Islam in its entirety. They felt that Muslim masses had drifted far from the true sources of Islam and had been lost in the maze of rituals and terminologies. Theirs was an attempt to lessen the distance between the masses and the two fundamental sources of *dīn*, Qur'an and *Sunnah*. At the same time, they realized that the contributions made by preceding Muslim societies were extremely useful. They

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 26.



treated this legacy with respect but analyzed it with confidence so as to separate that which was still useful from that which had become a burden. The legacy that these left behind still inspires the majority of Islamic movements of the sub-continent. Even apparent opponents seek their inspiration and justification from these giants.

It is an interesting aspect of Indian Muslim history that at the time of their greatest political defeat, Muslims gave birth to three movements, which surpassed their predecessors in the volume of their work and the scope of their activism. No doubt, they were aided by the easy availability of the printing press. It was further aided by their decision to adopt Urdu as their vehicle of expression. Arabic and Persian were left for Urdu with the idea of reaching as many people as possible. Ahl-e-Ḥadīs, Barelvīs, and Deobandīs were each other's competitors but in the course of that competition, they also made important contributions to Islam intellectually, spiritual, and politically. The contributions made by Deobandīs and Ahl-e-Ḥadīs in the field of *ḥadīth* are probably unmatched by any non-Indian group.

This study has attempted to investigate the approach to *taṣawwuf* of Deobandīs, an important Islamic movement that started in British India. The Deobandīs' Sufi roots are primarily Chishtī and Naqshbandī and their elders operated in colonial India's tumultuous milieu. This period was characterized by a great deal of confusion and questioning of old wisdoms that had been previously taken for granted. Amongst the various categories that this period threw up, Deobandīs are squarely within the reformist camp. This reformist movement sought to clarify the misconceptions in the minds of many about *Sharī'ah* and *taṣawwuf*; and sought to re-establish the clear and simple teachings of Islam. This required a re-stating of essential Sufi ideas that were in harmony with outward *Sharī'ah*. In the process, they also did away with a number

of innovated practices and doctrines, which had acquired the status of goals and did not exist at the time of the Prophet (pbuh).

The two main planks of Deobandī Sufi doctrine are *tawhīd* and following the *Sunnah*. In fact, the ideas of *ikhlas*, *ihsān*, *qurb*, *wuṣūl*, and love for Allah are different manifestations of *tawhīd*. Opposition to *bid'ah* in all its forms is a direct result of Deobandīs' emphasis upon *Sunnah*. Furthermore, there are two main characteristics of the Deobandī approach to *taṣawwuf*. One, they were keen to avoid those traditional practices, which invited criticism from externalist scholars. This, they called, *khurūj 'an al-khilāf* (leaving that which is differed upon). Second, they were singularly focused on the goals of *taṣawwuf* without a rigid beholding to particular means.

The main figures from the early period of the Deobandī movement, Mawlānās Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautvī, Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī were following in the tradition of Sirhindī and Walī Allāh. They also combined in them erudite scholarship, high spiritual rank and social activism. The works of these two had shaped their outlook towards *taṣawwuf* in particular, and *Sharī'ah* in general. Through their teachers and shaykhs, they possessed an unbroken chain to these important figures.

Deobandī movement was essentially a reform (*iṣlāh*) and renewal (*tajdīd*) movement. Amongst the Deobandī elders, Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī was the most important figure with respect to *taṣawwuf*. He helped to shape the ideas and personalities of a whole generation of scholars who were destined to play leading roles themselves. His work was further expanded by Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī, who has the best claim to be a *mujaddid* amongst all Deobandīs. The early decades of the Deobandī movement saw an almost perfect harmony between the outward and inward

aspects of *Sharī'ah*. *Taşawwuf* was regarded as the core of *Sharī'ah* and it permeated all aspects of the Deobandī movement.

Later, as the movement expanded, this balance which had been the hallmark of the early years began to be lost. Still, there were enough elders (*akābir*) who represented true Deobandī ideals and who had been trained by the older generation. Beginning with the partition of India, the vast network of *khānqāhs* established by Deobandī shaykhs began to unravel. Things reached such a point in Muḥammad Zakariyyā Kāndhlavī's last years that he felt the most important thing missing from Muslims' lives was the aspect of *dhikr* as practiced in these *khānqāhs*. His travels and works in his last years represent an attempt at reviving this aspect of *dīn*. He bequeathed the same to his successors who have been trying to bridge the growing divide between the external and internal aspects of *Sharī'ah*.

The works of Thānvī display his clear understanding of the various aspects of *Sharī'ah*. His ability to easily access all the main works of classical scholars from the various parts of the world and distill these to formulate a practical course of action for Indian Muslims is beyond comparison. His works display a logical mind at work unperturbed by the tumult surrounding it. The large group of followers that he trained and who spread his message represents one of the two main strands of current Deobandī *taşawwuf*. The other one is Muḥammad Zakariyyā's followers'. In fact, Thānvī *taşawwuf*, if we may call it, has the potential to make *taşawwuf* easily accessible to a large body of Muslims who otherwise could not even imagine indulging in spiritual pursuits.

Deobandīs realized the importance of education. They sought to bridge the gap between common Muslims and the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. An integral part of this effort was simplification of religious concepts and practice. The idea was to make

basic Islamic information accessible to all people. The printing press was utilized to the fullest to reach millions of Muslims in colonial India. This mass outreach was further aided by the string of *madrasahs* that were established, and through the increasing number of Deobandī *madrasah* graduates who spread the Deobandī revivalist message wherever they went.

A very interesting dimension of Deobandī *taṣawwuf* is its popularization of important Sufi values and concepts through Tablīghī Jamā‘at. Its founder Muḥammad Ilyās Kāndhlavī was a thoroughly trained Sufi who utilized Chishtī principles and made them the backbone of this movement.

Deobandīs’ focus on the original sources of *Sharī‘ah* to justify the goals of *taṣawwuf* had in it the potential to bridge the divide between the externalists and the Sufis. The tragedy is that instead of bridging the divide, it led to further divisions, with Deobandīs themselves becoming a distinct third group against the best intentions of its earliest masters. This is especially obvious with respect to their differences with the Barelvīs. Both are Sufis and Ḥanafīs, and yet have emerged as quasi-sects.

Over the last century and a half, since the foundation of Dār al-‘Ulūm Deoband, Deobandī *taṣawwuf* has taken some diverging paths. Some of them had the potential of bridging the divide with the Barelvīs. As fate was to have it, these attempts backfired and led to divisions within Deobandīs. Nevertheless, it is perhaps true to say that Deobandīs still represent a movement within Sunni Islam that is broad and comprehensive and has the potential of bringing together various Sunni groups.

The Deobandī movement continues to thrive today and has grown to become the largest traditional Islamic movement of South Asian Muslims. The *madrasahs* established by ‘*ulamā*’ who call themselves Deobandī are the largest in number in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. Moreover, it is no longer confined to the sub-

continent. Rather, it has spread to Southern Africa (South Africa, Zambia, etc.), Europe (UK in particular), North America and South East Asia. In each of these regions, we see a network of *madrasahs* who all share a common outlook towards *dīn*. Their graduates provide the largest single group of Imams throughout these regions except South East Asia.

The presence of Deobandīs in the West as part of the South Asian Muslim Diaspora has added another dimension to the problem. The original *fatwās* given by Deobandī '*ulamā*' regarding popular practices were based on the conditions obtaining in British North India. It will be useful to see how the Deobandī '*ulamā*' have reacted to the various varieties of *taṣawwuf* as practiced by Muslims of diverse backgrounds in these new settings. Perhaps, that can be the focus of a separate research.

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