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## Introduction

### A Long View of Sufism and Political Culture in India

**D**URING ITS THREE centuries of rule over India, the Mughal dynasty encountered a series of challenges and successfully overcame a number of them. These included armed resistance from several ethnic groups, such as Rajputs, Afghans, Marathas, etc. There was also periodic dissatisfaction, sometimes expressed even as open rebellion, by the same military and political elites – the so-called “Turans” – that had accompanied the founding families from Central Asia into northern India. The chief challenge that the Mughals faced was similar to that which confronted a number of other empires of the time from China to Europe: how to manage a diverse and varied subject population spread out across a vast territory.<sup>1</sup> Compounding the difficulty was the fact that the bulk of their subjects did not share the same religion as the Mughals, i.e. they were non-Muslims. Preceding Muslim dynasties had encountered this challenge too. With the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate had come a demand from the *‘ulama* for non-Muslims to be given the option of either accepting Islam or facing extermination. The sultan of his day had resolved this question by suggesting that since Muslims did not have the required strength and resources – the Muslim state

<sup>1</sup> Faroqhi, *The Ottoman and Mughal Empires*, pp. 107–37.

having just been founded – it was difficult to implement such a drastic injunction. The ruler was supported in his stance by the powerful – and indeed virtually uncontested – Sufis of the time.<sup>2</sup>

The Mughals, however, had to deal with a more complex situation, having to walk a tightrope to placate, accommodate, and negotiate with divergent interest groups and ideologies. Unlike the “self-made” sultan of the thirteenth century, who came from an obscure and humble background, the Mughals had their own significant cultural and religious heritage to contend with. They were the direct descendants of Timur, a highly significant figure in the cultural and political history of Sunni Muslim dynasties. Their ancestors in Central Asia had also had their own religious masters, who were virtually royal *pirs*. With the Mughals, the rule established had not merely been familial and dynastic but included the rule of their spiritual masters. So the traditions that Indo-Muslim rulers had relied on before the Mughals were not uncontested any more; as a matter of fact this had grown into a contest that persisted throughout the Mughal period.

My book, *The Languages of Political Islam* (2004), had focused on this problem, but I have since been impelled to look at this large issue of Mughal governance in related other directions and with greater attention. The shape this interest has taken over the past years has meant several short studies on Mughal politics and Muslim religious thought – in particular Sufism. Some – but not all – of that research having been published, this book now brings together my existing reflections on the subject as a coherent set of chapters.

I should also clarify that these chapters are interconnected in terms of the questions and issues raised, though the individual actors dealt with vary; and that in ordering them I have kept chronology and logical sequence in mind to the extent desirable. The central and overarching questions I have posed are these:

<sup>2</sup> This is at the broadest level my argument in an earlier work: see Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India*.

What was the position of the various Sufi orders in the context of Mughal politics? Did their discourses contain arguments and discussions, explicit or implicit, that had been conceived to resolve the political and social issues of the time? Were such writings hortatory and persuasive in intent? Did these writings convey guidance to followers in an effort to reach accommodative or palliative or conciliatory or non-combative positions in the prevalent circumstances of the applicability of Islamic laws and tenets on non-Muslim subject populations?

There is no dearth of literature on Mughal Indian Sufism. But the perspective from which I have tried to see the connection between prevailing politics and Sufism is not at the heart of this literature. I would argue that my attempt here is to read some important Mughal Indian Sufi texts in a fresh light, which is to say in terms of the relationship of Sufism and the Sufi orders with the Mughal political order, as well as the interrelationships among Sufi orders – particularly the Naqshbandis and the Chishtis, and to a lesser extent the Qadiris. Viewed from this perspective of Mughal history, it will become apparent that the texts I examine have not received the attention they deserve in relation to the complexity of the Mughal political order. Moreover, from the perspective of religious studies the interrelationship of the various Sufi orders – whether that relationship was one of appreciation and give-and-take or rivalry and hostility – has not been thoroughly analysed.<sup>3</sup> Therefore I believe a significant advantage of the approach adopted here is that it brings to light new and crucially important dimensions of previously known historical actors from Mughal India, dimensions that have been occluded from

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, on the Naqshbandi Sufis, Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, 2 vols; Nizami, “Naqshbandi Influence on Mughal Rulers”, pp. 41–52; Friedmann, *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi*; Rahman, *Islam*; and ter Haar, *Follower and Heir of the Prophet*. For the Chishtis, see Ernst and Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love*; Nizami, *Tarikh-i Masha'ikh-i Chisht*. Important recent reconsiderations include Amin, *Conquest and Community*; Moin, “The Millennium and Saintly Sovereignty of Emperor Shahjahan”, pp. 205–17.

the vantage points both of religious studies and Mughal political history.<sup>4</sup>

In the Introduction, my purpose is also more extensive. As someone who has had a long teaching career in both India and abroad – where many of my students have been of South Asian origin – it has become clear to me that very few people now approach the Mughals and their history directly. By this I mean that their readings are often informed by a set of perceptions that have been handed down from the post-Mughal period, including by some major political and intellectual figures of nineteenth- and twentieth-century South Asia. These later figures had their own agendas and were responding to the politics of their own time, which had in turn been shaped by colonialism, anti-colonialism, pan-Islamism, and other ideologies and movements that for the most part did not exist before 1750. Therefore, I have thought it useful to provide a *longue durée* view of writings on Sufism and politics, going well beyond the Mughal period, because of the profound impact some of these later writings continue to have on both historians and the general public today.

### ***Tasawwuf* in Mughal Society**

In Mughal India of the seventeenth century, *tasawwuf* – or what is usually termed Sufism – had a pre-eminent position with all its manifestations: doctrinally, *wahdat al-wujud* (Unity of Being) and *wahdat al-shuhud* (Unity of Perception); in practice, the ties between *pir* and *murid* (master and disciple), as well as visits to shrines, audition parties (*sama'*), etc. In the time of Shah Jahan

<sup>4</sup> For instance, when Mughal emperors and nobles met with Sufis, it is interesting to examine the questions they sought clarifications on. For instance, the *wazir* Sa'd-Allah Khan was chosen to serve as a *hakim* (judge) by both the advocates and the opponents of the practice of *sama'*; Shah Jahan met Sufis and asked them for their help in understanding matters of beliefs and religious practices, such as the question of the differences between 'Ali and Mu'awiya. Earlier, Jahangir also met a Chishti Sufi and expressed his inability to give up drinking and be regular in his daily prayers.

(r. 1628–58) this finds fitting expression in the words of his daughter, Princess Jahanara, in the preface to her text *Munis al-Arwah*, examined in some detail later in this volume. It is her view there that every Muslim needs to be associated with one or the other of the Sufi orders. She writes that stability and strength in the human world are due to the felicitous presence of and blessings from the dust of the feet of saints:

All blessings descend from the sky to the earth by virtue of the blessed souls of this majestic group. Fortunate is the one who associates with them with sincerity and devotion, and thereby secures the full share of their blessings and absolute benefit. It is the source of the Muslim's salvation, and elevates his status in the life hereafter. Almighty God made association and devotion with this noble group a means and source of salvation for believers, protecting them from the fire-pits of Hell and elevating them to high places in Paradise. The master-disciple practice (*piri-muridi*) is an essential part of pious Islamic life and a manifestation of absolute benefit for believers. It is manifested solely from God's perfect and eternal grace. The fates and fortunes of believers are interwoven with the path (*tariqa*) of *piri-muridi* and principles (*qa'ida*) of *silsila*. Thus, all Muslims, men and women, are integrated or organised into groups of one or the other Sufi order.

Thereafter she adds that “on the day when all will be fearful and terrified for their own selves, rows of disciples will rise under the banners of their masters (*safha-i muridan dar saya-i 'alam-i piran-i khud khwahand istad*). And on account of the blessings of these masters, they will remain safe from that day's terror.”<sup>5</sup> In this conception of the world and the afterlife, therefore, the very fabric of social life is held together by Sufis and their networks.

At the same time, we need to be careful when characterising the nature and consequences of competition between different groups of Sufis. Jahanara had connections with both the Chishti

<sup>5</sup> Jahanara, *Munis al-Arwah*, Preface. All translations from non-English sources are mine, unless otherwise specified by the source citation in the bibliography.

and the Qadiri orders, but the Naqshbandis too flourished during this period. Subsequently, during Aurangzeb's reign, because of the emperor's close relationship with the Naqshbandi–Mujaddidis, they came to be especially prominent in later-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century Delhi. Thereafter, in the eighteenth century, we see the growing importance of figures such as Shaikh Muhammad Zubair, the fourth Naqshbandi *qaiyum*, as well as Mirza Mazhar Jan-i Janan, Khwaja Muhammad Nasir 'Andalib and his son Mir Dard, and finally Shaikh Ghulam 'Ali (d. 1824). But this did not imply that other *silsilas* – the Chishtis in particular – had faded away. Indeed, under the leadership of Shah Kalim-Allah Shahjahanabadi, Shaikh Fakhr al-Din Dehlavi, and his successors the Chishtis regained popularity amongst the Delhi elites, including the royal court, after a relative eclipse in their fortune when the Mujaddidis were gaining ascendancy, especially via their presence at the royal court.<sup>6</sup>

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there seems therefore to have been a kind of spiritual competitiveness and rivalry among the Sufis, in particular between the Chishtis and the Naqshbandis. At the time the Mughals established their power in India, the Chishtis still enjoyed a supreme position in the country, with even the dethroned sultan and nobles from whom the Mughals wrested power having been associated with the Chishti order. With the Naqshbandi shaikhs, who also began to settle in north India, there seem to have emerged conditions for debate and dispute regarding the spiritual authority of various figures. It was a situation of competitive spirituality in which the master of one or the other order could be projected as imperfect and lacking in accomplishment, or even as having strayed from the path of true Islam. There is evidence of this, of which some examples are notable. One such example took shape as the report that in Lahore a Chishti saint, Saiyid Ilah Bakhsh, was known

<sup>6</sup> Nizami, *Tarikh-e Masha'ikh-i Chisht*, Vol. 5, pp. 222–49; Sahir, *Mibrab-e Tabqiq*, pp.77–91.

to be God-seeing (*khuda-bin*) and God-showing (*khuda-numa*). When Shaikh Adam Binori (d. 1643), a prominent disciple of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, heard of this, he sent a message to Saiyid Ilah Bakhsh through one of his servitors: “I have heard that people call you *khuda-bin-o-khuda-numa*. Do you endorse it? If you do, then you must repent from this condemnable belief (*‘aqida-i bad*), for any person who believes he can see God in this world is a heretic (*mulhid-o-zindiq*).” The report adds that when the servitor delivered his letter the Chishti shaikh graced him with the same bliss by showing him God. As a result the bearer of the letter, being intoxicated with the experience, vowed upon recovering consciousness to stay with the shaikh and not return to Binori, his erstwhile master. Yet Shaikh Ilah Bakhsh told him to go and report his experience to Binori. Thereupon, Adam Binori too desired to be similarly blessed, but there was an intractable problem: Ilah Bakhsh wanted Binori to first become his disciple, which of course Binori could not possibly accept, being himself an eminent shaikh of his own order.<sup>7</sup> In other words, amongst the Sufis were some practices and beliefs not approved of by others, to the extent that these practices could be projected as heresy. As a result, we encounter radically opposed portrayals of the same individual – as with Akbar and Dara Shukoh – in two sets of Sufi texts. Such differences, it can be presumed, would have had implications for the laity seeking association with one or the other Sufi. Doubts proliferated on the best way of attaining not just exemplary piety and virtue but even one’s basic Muslim identity.

It is therefore important to historically contextualise incidents suggesting conflict and rivalry between the Chishtis and the Naqshbandis. Most such instances of competitive spirituality come from the Sufi *tazkiras*, texts compiled during the second half of the seventeenth century by the Chishti–Sabiris, who appear at the

<sup>7</sup> ‘Ali, *Sawati al-Anwar*, British Library, India Office MSS, Ethé 654 (I.O. Islamic 2705), fl. 405: “*qaid-i mashikhat-i u paiband-i way shud, wa u ra az ni‘mat-i ‘uzma ki ru‘yat bashad mahrum sakht.*” Needless to add, the author is himself a Chishti.

time to have been projecting their doctrinal positions and ritual practices rather aggressively. Of two such incidents, the first relates to certain anti-Sunna *bid'a* acts that a noted Chishti shaikh from Gangoh, Shaikh Muhammad Da'ud (d. 1683–4), who frequented Delhi in Aurangzeb's time, practised in the city. When the emperor came to know of these acts, he appointed Mulla 'Abd al-Qawi to find out the truth and stop them. The shaikh tried initially to make the mulla see reason by explaining his acts in the light of *hadith* and jurisprudence. But when the mulla was not persuaded, the shaikh apparently recited a Hindi couplet (*doha*) and, in a state of trance, proclaimed that since he himself was a maker of the injunctions of the *shari'a* (*bani-yi ahkam* and *sahib-i shar'*), the mulla had no basis on which to ask for any proof of validity for his acts. The result of the shaikh's rage was that Mulla 'Abd al-Qawi lost all knowledge of the *shari'a*, which he regained only after the shaikh forgave him. The mulla then advised the emperor to refrain from interfering in the shaikh's acts.<sup>8</sup>

The second incident consists in the report that at a *sama'* session at the *'urs* (annual death commemorative celebrations) of Shaikh Sufi Badhani in the *qasba* of Kaithal, a certain Shaikh 'Abd al-Qadir, *pir* of the above-mentioned Ilah Bakhsh of Lahore, declared in a state of trance: "Look here! Khwaja Mu'in al-Din, the Prophet of India (*nabi-i Hind*) has arrived." Alarmed by this, the *qazi* of the *qasba*, who was present there, said this was blasphemous; he accused the shaikh of having become a *kafir* for calling a mere Sufi a prophet, and declared he deserved to be executed. In defence of the shaikh, the plea was made that since he had made his statement in a state of trance (*wajd*), he could not be punished. It was also maintained that his use of the word *nabi* had not implied prophethood as such; rather, he had meant by it a person "who tells us about the Essence and Attributes of God (*mukhbir-i zat-o-sifat-i Haqq*).” The *qazi*, however, refused to budge. After

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., ffs 439 b-440a. For Mulla 'Abd al-Qawi, see Sheikh, "Aurangzeb as Seen from Gujarat", pp. 557–81.



which, so the report goes, a special sort of Sabiriya–Chishtiya wrath became manifest, and the shaikh declared: “O Qazi! Since you have vowed to shed the blood of a dervish unjustly, you will die yelping like a dog.” Whereupon the *qazi* was seized with pain and fell ill. He appealed for the shaikh’s forgiveness but it was too late: the *qazi* consequently died.<sup>9</sup>

It would, all the same, be stretching the point from these examples of conflict to generalise the notion that the Chishti and the Naqshbandi shaikhs, whom we often see competing with each other during the seventeenth century, were always trying to outdo their rivals and hell-bent on establishing their own supremacy over the other. One counter-example suggesting the opposite of contention is of a prominent Naqshbandi–Mujaddidi shaikh in Delhi, Shah Ghulam ‘Ali, who lived in the later-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century (d. 1824), and who writes: “I gained so much from the splendid Chishtiya *silsila* that I fear people [if they come to know] will think I had no sincere devotion to the Naqshbandiya, and that I have developed the habit of eating the bread of one person and thanking another.”<sup>10</sup> Later in the nineteenth century, as we will see below, there is clear evidence of close interactions between the two orders, as well as of the borrowing of ideas and practices from each other, to the extent that towards the end of the century it became increasingly difficult to distinguish between the practices of the two orders as they came together.

### **Eighteenth-Century Delhi**

Conscious efforts were certainly made in the eighteenth century to efface or at least attenuate the earlier rivalry. A major illustration of this direction is to be found in the century’s greatest religious scholar and Sufi, Shah Wali-Allah, noted for his attempt to

<sup>9</sup> ‘Ali, *Sawati al-Anwar*, British Library, India Office manuscripts, Ethé 654 (I.O. Islamic 2705), fls 453b–454a.

<sup>10</sup> Dehlavi, *Makatib-i Sharifa*, , Letter 101, p. 424.

reconcile the doctrinal basis of the Mujaddidi–Naqshbandis on the one hand and the Chishtis on the other.<sup>11</sup> Shah Wali-Allah (d. 1762) is perhaps best known as a scholar who tried to reconcile the different schools of jurisprudence in works such as *al-Insaf fi al-Bayan Sabab al-Ikhtilaf* and *Iqd al-Jid fi al-Ijtihad wa al-Taqlid*, as well as for reconciling the Sunni–Shi‘i division more generally in his text entitled *Izalat al-Khafa ‘an Khilafat al-Khulafa’*. But a factor in his attempt at harmonising varying Sufi doctrines could also have been his uncle Shaikh Abu al-Riza’s (d. 1690) strong positions on *wahdat al-wujud*. Shaikh Abu al-Riza was a disciple of Khwaja Khwurd, son of Khwaja Baqi Billah, who was well known for a strong *wujudi* position.<sup>12</sup> Also, Shah Wali-Allah’s father, Shaikh ‘Abd al-Rahim (d. 1719), who was initiated into the Naqshbandi order by a disciple of Shaikh Adam Binori, was a great admirer of Ibn ‘Arabi and a believer in *wahdat al-wujud*. According to a report, he expressed this belief in one of his vernacular *dohas*:

The Beloved existed before Creation;  
 Now there is Creation, but the Beloved cannot be found.  
 Rahim wishes to join the Beloved,  
 In the manner raindrops join the ocean.<sup>13</sup>

Shaikh ‘Abd al-Rahim is well known as a great scholar who founded the Madrasa Rahimiya, and his claims in terms of *tasawwuf* were also very high; and in parallel with Shaikh Muhammad Ma‘sum’s claim to *qaiyumiyat*, he too claimed to be a *qaiyum*. Shah Wali-Allah records several miracles (*kashf-o-karamat*) of his father

<sup>11</sup> The reconciliation, Shah Wali-Allah writes, follows a vision in which the Prophet himself assigned him this task. See *Fuyuz al-Haramain*, pp. 53–7 and 197–202, cited in Rizvi, *Shah Wali-Allah and His Times*, p. 217.

<sup>12</sup> For his account, see Wali-Allah, *Anfas al-Arifin*, pp. 87–158. Shah Wali-Allah also reproduces his correspondence with Shaikh ‘Abd al-Ahad Wahdat, pp. 123–58, on the question of *wujud* and some other issues of *tasawwuf*. He also writes that the Mughal army, initially in trouble against the Satnami rebels, finally overcame them with his prayers (p. 90).

<sup>13</sup> Rizvi, *Shah Wali-Allah*, pp. 206–12. Rizvi cites the *doha* from Shah Wali-Allah, *Anfas al-Arifin*, p. 81.

and his own prime focus, when discussing *tasawwuf*, is in terms of the concept of *ihsan*. He writes that Islam has two principal dimensions: one relates to a Muslim's everyday life, including his prayers and dealings with others, and the responsibility for protecting and promoting this dimension lies with jurists and traditionalists (*fuyūḥa wa muḥaddisun*); the other dimension concerns the purification of hearts, which belongs to the domain of Sufis and the friends of God (*awliya'*). The core of this second aspect is *ihsan*, which the Prophet has interpreted as "worshipping God as if you are watching Him and if you are unable to watch Him, the belief should be that you are being watched by Him."<sup>14</sup> In his book *Hama'at* (Teardrops) he elaborates jointly on this idea of *tasawwuf* as *ihsan* with a brief discussion of its historical development. He says his book is based on his personal vision of the truth, and that it was completed "solely from inspiration, and without mixing it with [Hellenistic] philosophy". He intends it to provide a guideline for the direct path (*sirat-i mustaqim*), both for his own self and for those who follow him.<sup>15</sup> The first phase in the historical development of *tasawwuf*, he writes, was the time of the Prophet and his companions, followed by a period when the term *tasawwuf* began to be used more commonly. Those who engaged with *tasawwuf* were known as Sufis; they are to be found listening to *sama'*, intoxicated, dancing, and ripping at their clothes; many such have forsaken worldliness and become ascetic. They recognised the Essence of Divinity (*zat*) and realised that everything in this world is derived from Him (*tanazzulat*, i.e. stages of descent). There was no discussion then, let alone any distinction, at this point in time between the *shuhudi* and *wujudi wahdat*. Also, there were no distinct groupings as yet, though among individuals there appeared to be differences; despite this, all were acceptable to God, and the world was graced with

<sup>14</sup> "Al-Ihsan an ta'buda Allah ka'annaka tara-hu, fa-in lam tara-hu fa-innahu yaraka".

<sup>15</sup> Wali-Allah, *Hama'at*, pp. 60–7.

their blessings. In view of subsequent differences that split and divided the Sufis, the conclusion of this section deserves special notice. Shah Wali-Allah argues that “when we discuss the Sufis, we should take care that the states (*ahwal*) and sayings (*aqwal*) of the members of a given group should be judged according to [the] taste of the times when they lived. Likewise, it is not appropriate to compare, collate, and judge the states and sayings of one era of Sufis by another.”<sup>16</sup>

Then follows a chapter wherein Shah Wali-Allah discusses the first stage of a *salik* (or devotee), which is *ta'at* or worship. He says that nearly all *tariqas* or paths to reality (*haqiqa*), though different, begin with Junaid Baghdadi, except those who claim to have direct connection to the Prophet, and those are called Uwaisis. Significantly, he mentions in particular the figure of Shah Badi' al-Din Madar among followers of the latter path. It is particularly noteworthy that, in relation to nearly all the *tariqas* that he discusses in this book, Shah Wali-Allah mentions his own connection with them. In this specific chapter he avers that the *salik* should not get involved in discussion over the stages of descent (*tanazzulat*) from the Divine Essence (*zat-i ahad*), through Oneness (*wahdaniyat*), souls (*arwah*), and the world beyond ('*alam-i misal*), to this world ('*alam-i ajsam*). Another important piece of advice he provides the *salik* here is to the effect that after he has made some progress, and if on his own he is capable of appreciating the traditions of the Prophet, the Prophet's companions, and their immediate successors (*ahadis* and *asar*), he should act along those traditions. Alternatively, he may follow any one of the four schools of jurisprudence.<sup>17</sup> He then discusses the litanies and prayers (*aurad*, *azkar*, and *waza'if*) of the different *tariqas*.<sup>18</sup> Thereafter, he expatiates for about eighty pages on the forms of relation (*nisbat*), and states that once a person reaches the climax

<sup>16</sup> *Hama'at*, pp. 73–6, and 77.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 78–81.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82–7.

of a *nisbat*, he becomes a *qutb*. Shah Wali-Allah then has an entire chapter on miracles performed by Sufis (*karamat* and *khawariq*), which he explains in terms of the ability of Sufis to discern what is lying in store in the world beyond (*'alam-i misal*) for the future of this world: "This *faqir* has been told that *karamat* and *khawariq*, which are usually considered unnatural acts are, in themselves and within their limits, very much according to nature."<sup>19</sup>

As has been noted briefly above, an important part of Shah Wali-Allah's discourse on *tasawwuf* relates to the possibility of harmony and reconciliation between the doctrines of *wahdat al-wujud* and *wahdat al-shuhud*. He builds the argument in his long letter to the noted Medina-based scholar Shaikh Abu Tahir al-Kurdi al-Madani, the text of which is incorporated in his *Al-Tafhimat al-Ilahiya* and reproduced there entitled *Faisla-i Wahdat al-Wujud wa Wahdat al-Shuhud*. In it he says that the common Sufi objective is spiritual attainment, and that they all see the reality of *wujud* in the Being of God. The difference is only that one group considers and calls the created world a manifestation (*mazhar*) and the other a reflection (*zill*); therefore, the distinction between them lies only in matters of interpretation and synthesis.<sup>20</sup> However, Shah Wali-Allah's intervention was not wholly welcomed in Mujaddidi Sufi circles. A certain Ghulam Yahya, at Mirza Mazhar Jan-i Janan's instance, compiled a treatise entitled *Kalimat al-Haqq* (The True Word) in refutation of his position. Later, in reply Shah Wali-Allah's son Shah Rafi' al-Din (d. 1833) wrote another treatise entitled *Damgh al-Batil* (Piercing the False).<sup>21</sup> Shah Wali-Allah's grandson Shah Isma'il Shahid (d. 1831) too commented in depth on these doctrinal questions in his book *Abaqat* (Perfumes), reiterating and reaffirming his position, albeit in a more nuanced way. With a view to mollifying the Mujaddidis

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 258.

<sup>20</sup> Wali-Allah, *Al-Tafhimat al-Ilahiya*, Vol. 2, *tafhim* 243, pp. 261–83. For a discussion of this text, see Faruqi, *The Mujaddid's Conception of Taubid*, pp. 95–100; Baljon, *Religion and Thought of Shah Wali-Allah Dihlawi*, pp. 56–63.

<sup>21</sup> Shah Rafi' al-Din Dehlavi, *Majmu'a-i Rasa'il; Ma'arif*, October 2020.

perhaps, he added, clarified, and elaborated the point that Shah Wali-Allah accepted Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi as a *mujaddid* (*irhas*), and that he had actually completed the work that Sirhindi had started.<sup>22</sup> Later, however, Isma‘il Shahid seems to have changed his position and inclined more toward the truth of *wahdat al-shuhud*. This was after he joined the Tariqa-i Muhammadiya, which was a much more radical reformulation of the Mujaddidi order under Saiyid Ahmad Shahid. A statement of his changed stance is given in *Sirat al-Mustaqim*, a *malfuz* collection of Saiyid Ahmad Shahid, the first textual expression of the new order.

The *‘Abaqat* begins with a statement by Shah Isma‘il to the effect that he does not know much about the abstruse discourses of *tasawwuf*, but was lucky enough to have learnt about them from the treatises of his grandfather Shah Wali-Allah, works such as *Sat‘at* (Radiance) and *Lambhat* (Glances), and felt that the ideas discussed there needed detailed elaboration, in particular as many people did not read and interpret them correctly. The *‘Abaqat* thus presents itself as a defence and elaboration in profounder idiom of what Shah Wali-Allah had already said. Shah Isma‘il also asserts that were he to get the chance, he would write specific commentaries on these *risalas*.<sup>23</sup> Besides an introduction (*muqaddima*) and conclusion (*khatimat al-kitab*), he divides his book into four parts, each following after what he terms an *al-ishara* (lit. indication; signal). In the first part, which is the most comprehensive, we find forty-three sections (termed *‘abaqas*), in which he discusses stages of existence (*maratib-i tanazzul al-wujud al-haqiqi*) or descents (*tanazzulat*).<sup>24</sup> The remaining three parts are, respectively, on visions and manifestations (*tajalliyat*); on affirmation (*ijab*) and choice (*ikhtiyar*); and on the stages of souls (*maratib al-nafs*). In the conclusion he deals with the important idea of requital (*misal*) to be found in Shah Wali-Allah.

<sup>22</sup> Shah Isma‘il Shahid Dehlavi, *‘Abaqat*.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2–4.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4–9, *muqaddima*, and pp. 10–78, Part One.

In the first nineteen sections (*'abaqas*) of Part 1, the discussion is focused on monotheism (or *tauhid*). Later, in Sections 20 and 21, Shah Isma'īl asserts that there are two major groups among believers in *wujud* and *tauhid*. One comprises those who believe in what he terms *wujud-i 'ainiya*, in which many have included Ibn 'Arabi, though without providing appropriate justification. The other group coheres around *wujud-i wara'iyya*, their leader having been Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (the Imam al-Mujaddid). There was also a third group, which was the best, and the most important leader of this group was his grandfather, the finest of seekers after truth (*afzal al-muhaqqiqin*). In the twenty-first *'abaqa* he says the difference between the first two lay in words alone (*niza'-i lafzi*), as had been explained by his grandfather. But some of the later Sufis – meaning the Mujaddidis of Shah Wali-Allah's time – thought this conflict went beyond words and was real (*al-muta'akhhirun min al-mutasawwifa tawahhamu al-ikhhtilaf al-waqi'*), which, he claims, showed they had read neither Ibn 'Arabi nor Sirhindi closely. He therefore invites the reader to read these original thinkers as well as their interpreters – such as 'Abd al-Rahman Jami and Sadr al-Din Qunawi in the case of Ibn 'Arabi, and in Sirhindi's case his hagiographer Badr al-Din Sirhindi and Sirhindi's *maktubat*, themselves.<sup>25</sup> Shah Isma'īl also claims that the concept of *shuhudiyat* as employed by Abu al-Hasan Simnani is not the same as that of Shaikh Sirhindi.<sup>26</sup> The later *'abaqas* then contain the details of the same arguments. There is also an *'abaqa* on the variety of relationships of *al-Qaiyum*, i.e. God the Creator, with the created.

In sum, Shah Isma'īl seems to take very seriously the objections raised against Shah Wali-Allah's ideas by other Mujaddidis of his time, and replies to them in his own very philosophically charged language.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 39–41, *'abaqa* 20, Urdu translation, pp. 83–9, and 41–3, *'abaqa* 21, Urdu translation, pp. 89–93.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 43, Urdu translation, pp. 93–4.

### Sufis in Nineteenth-Century North India

However, as we know, Shah Isma‘il changed his position in course of time, his new position being manifest in his texts: namely, *Sirat-i Mustaqim*,<sup>27</sup> and *Radd-i Isbrak* – written in Arabic, which he later translated into Urdu as *Taqwiyat al-Iman*, and which was also elaborated upon as *Tazkir al-Ikhwan* in 1834–5, after his death, by one of his disciples.<sup>28</sup> Shah Isma‘il was above all a scholar and seems right from the start to have been – as Syed Ahmad Khan says of him – interested in reform and an insistence on Sunnat and Shari‘at. Later, he became a disciple of Saiyid Ahmad Shahid, a member of the family of Shah ‘Alam-Allah (d. 1684) of Rae Bareli (in Awadh), and a disciple and successor (*khalifa*) of Shaikh Adam Binori. Saiyid Ahmad had come to Delhi for his education as a young student, where he met Shah Wali-Allah’s son Shah ‘Abd al-‘Aziz (d. 1824) and, according to one report, became his spiritual disciple. Soon after, he left Delhi and joined the military bands of Nawab Amir Ali Khan of Tonk (d. 1834), the so-called Pindaris. On his second visit to Delhi, he had already earned repute as a great Sufi master. At this point Shah Isma‘il met

<sup>27</sup> See Shah Isma‘il Shahid Dehlavi’s *Sirat-i Mustaqim*. Originally written in Persian, this is a *malfuz* of Saiyid Ahmad Shahid divided into four chapters and an epilogue, besides an introduction and conclusion. Shah Isma‘il, who is generally described as the author-compiler, wrote the introduction, and perhaps also the epilogue, and only two chapters, while the other two chapters (the second and third) were compiled by Shah ‘Abd al-Hayy Phulati, son-in-law of Shah ‘Abd al-‘Aziz. The book focuses on defining *tasawwuf*, Saiyid Ahmad’s high spiritual stature in the context of all the major Sufi orders, including the guidance and instruction he received directly from God, and also the notion of *bid‘a* in contemporary Sufi traditions and practices. For an analysis of the text, see Gaborieau, “Sufism in the First Wahhabi Manifesto”, pp. 149–64.

<sup>28</sup> Shah Isma‘il Shahid Dehlavi, *Taqwiyat al-Iman*, a treatise exclusively on the refutation of *shirk* (idolatry) of different natures, discussed in five chapters (*fasl*), beginning with a general introductory chapter on monotheism (*tauhid*). In the *Tazkir al-Ikhwan*, divided into seven chapters on (*fasl*), the primary discussion is on prevailing customs and rituals.



him and asked, in order to test his spiritual accomplishments, if he, Saiyid Ahmad, could teach him how to say prayers (*namaz*) with *huzur-i qalb* (total devotion). Saiyid Ahmad did so, and as a result Shah Isma‘il became his disciple.<sup>29</sup> Saiyid Ahmad, even though he had begun as a Mujaddidi, then reformulated the order and called it Tariqa-i Muhammadiya.<sup>30</sup>

Shah Isma‘il thus became attached to the endeavours of Saiyid Ahmad Shahid and travelled with him to Arabia for the hajj, and also through several parts of India. He compiled his master’s utterances in the form of the *Sirat-i Mustaqim*. A brief review of the contents of this work shows his departure from his earlier positions on *tasawwuf*—those that we saw in his *‘Abaqat*. The contents include rejection and damnation of what are termed “the innovations of deviant Sufis”, “idolaters who behave as Sufis”, “heretical interpretations of Ontological Monism”, “excessive reverence for the *murshid*”, and “vows and gifts offered to the tombs of the saints”. The contemplation of the image of one’s shaikh (*tasawwur-i shaikh*) is absolutely prohibited and treated as a form of idolatry. Harsher in fact are his stances on *sunnat* and *shari‘a* in his *Taqwiyat al-Iman*. The Tariqa-i Muhammadiya was therefore different from all the Sufi orders of the time, including the Naqshbandi–Mujaddidi. In fact Saiyid Ahmad, though originally a Mujaddidi, claimed that his initiation was Uwaisi, directly from the Prophet, Fatima, ‘Ali, and ultimately God himself. The result was that, at the time, even the Delhi Naqshbandis of the school of Mirza Mazhar Jan-i Janan considered him and his followers adversaries. In their assessment Saiyid Ahmad, Isma‘il Shahid, and their followers had in effect acted like Wahhabis.<sup>31</sup> From a certain standpoint, then, this is an important turn in the history

<sup>29</sup> Khan, *Asar al-Sanadid*, Vol. 2, pp. 80–4. A similar incident is also reported about Shah ‘Abd al-Hayy’s relationship with Saiyid Ahmad.

<sup>30</sup> For a discussion of the history and context of this new order, see Gaborieau, “Criticising the Sufis”, pp. 45–67; Nizami, *Reform and Renewal in South Asian Islam*, pp. 167–85. See also Haroon, “Reformism and Orthodox Practice”, pp. 177–98.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 458.

of Sufism in India – certainly from what it was in the seventeenth century; and it was moreover a direction not in accord with Shah Wali-Allah's Sufism. Shah Wali-Allah, as we saw, showed reverence for nearly all the Sufi traditions, going so far as to claim that Sufis continue to be spiritually sublime even after death. His was a catholic perspective whereby the qualities of the stage a Sufi had attained persisted in the afterlife, legitimising visits to Sufi graves and seeking their intercession in prayer (*du'a*). For his part, Saiyid Ahmad Shahid did not reject *tasawwuf* as such, continuing with the existing practice of the master–disciple (*pir-o-murid*) relationship, and claiming for himself the highest stage of spirituality.<sup>32</sup> But Shah Isma'il and he did seek to put a distance between themselves and certain aspects of the received understanding of *tasawwuf*.

Among the Sufis who lived in the nineteenth century, Haji Imdad-Allah (1815–1898), a noted disciple of the Chishti–Sabiri Shaikh Nur Muhammad Jhanjhanvi (d. 1843), played a critical role in reconciling the different groups of the Sufis, an endeavour similar to Shah Wali-Allah's earlier. Haji Imdad-Allah, though a leading Chishti–Sabiri Sufi of his time, was also wholly familiar with the nuanced doctrinal and practical features of the Naqsh-bandi–Mujaddidi order, having been first initiated into and receiving a *khilafat* in that *silsila*.<sup>33</sup> With Imdad-Allah and his masters is associated a significant change in nineteenth-century Chishti–Sabiri Sufism, apparently following a detailed meeting with Saiyid Ahmad Shahid. It is reported that when in the course of his missionary tour in the Saharanpur–Muzaffarnagar region,

<sup>32</sup> Since his body was lost in the battle of Balakot where he died fighting against the Sikhs under Ranjit Singh, many of his followers believed he was still alive and in hiding, and would return to lead them to triumph. See Gaborieau, *Le Mahdi incompris*. See also Meerathi, *Tazkirat al-Rashid*, Vol. 2, pp. 270–2.

<sup>33</sup> Imdad-Allah writes that the Prophet himself guided him for both these initiations. Thanawi, *Karamat-e Imdadiya*, p. 50; and Rahman, *Tazkira-e Masha'ikh-e Deoband*, p. 71, cited in Kamal, *Masha'ikh-e Chishtiya Sabiriya*, pp. 197–8.

north of Delhi, Saiyid Ahmad arrived in Nanauta, the birthplace of Imdad-Allah, the infant Imdad-Allah was placed in his lap. Saiyid Ahmad blessed the child by accepting him via the practice of *bai'at al-tabarruk* (pledging allegiance to a shaikh for his blessing). Then, in Saharanpur, Saiyid Ahmad met Shah 'Abd al-Rahim Wilayati (d. 1830), a Chishti–Sabiri shaikh who pledged allegiance to him and ordered his disciples to do the same. Amongst these was Miyanji Nur Muhammad (d. 1843), the future teacher of Imdad-Allah, who had been especially summoned for this purpose to Saharanpur from Lohari, a nearby village. Later, Saiyid Ahmad and Wilayati again met in private, and, as the two emerged from the meeting room, both were apparently mutually inspired by the other's *nisba*. Saiyid Ahmad was overcome with weeping (a sign among the Chishti Sufis), while Wilayati was calm (a sign of the Naqshbandi shaikhs).<sup>34</sup> Thereafter, Wilayati remained with Saiyid Ahmad until his death in the battle of Mayar in October 1830. His main successor, Miyanji Nur Muhammad, also accompanied Saiyid Ahmad to the north-west frontier region but was later sent back to help with logistics.<sup>35</sup> Thus, Haji Imdad-Allah, who emerged as the *pir* of all the notable late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Deobandi scholars and Sufis, was connected to Saiyid Ahmad's movement. Imdad-Allah also advocated and actually participated in *jihad* against the East India Company and its power,<sup>36</sup> this at a time when some who had accompanied

<sup>34</sup> Husaini, *Saiyid Ahmad Shahid se Haji Imdad-Allah ke Rubani Rishte*, p. 59. For a slightly different version, see Thanawi, *Hikayat-i Auliya*, pp. 149–50. Interestingly, Thanawi says the spiritual level that Wilayati possessed before was greatly enhanced after he pledged allegiance to Saiyid Ahmad. I owe these references to Aamir Bashir (University of Chicago): see his “*Shari'at and Tariqat*”. Also see the discussion in Nizami, *Reform and Renewal in South Asian Islam*, pp. 153–95, where he traces the sources of such changes to the earlier connection between the Delhi-based Wali-Allahi scholars and the Chishti–Sabiris of Amroha.

<sup>35</sup> Husaini, *Saiyid Ahmad Shahid se Haji Imdad-Allah ke Rubani Rishte*, p. 91.

<sup>36</sup> Alavi, *Muslim Cosmopolitanism*, pp. 222–66. This has been an integral

Saiyid Ahmad in Balakot were prepared for a kind of reconciliation with the British.<sup>37</sup>

We must also note Imdad-Allah's attempt to bring the *'ulama* of the time closer to Sufism. *Tasawwuf*, of course, continued with its primary concern with purification of the soul (*tazkiya-i nafs*), with revelation and miracles (*kashf-o-karamat*) as salient features. This is visible in both Thanawi, who advocated struggle against what he considered a regime of *kafirs*, and in Husain Ahmad Madani, who was in favour of fighting shoulder to shoulder with Hindus against the British. Among Imdad-Allah's *'ulama* disciples were some notable in their own right, influenced by Saiyid Ahmad Shahid and Shah Isma'il Shahid's somewhat uncompromising attitude to certain basic tenets of Sufism, while several others held different views; in short, his disciples were not in unison in relation to certain religious matters in Sunni Islam. We have on the one hand Deobandi *'ulama* – such as Muhammad Qasim Nanautwi, Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, Khalil Ahmad Saharanpuri, and Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi – flatly disputing the validity of practices and ceremonies such as *fatihah*, *'urs*, and *sama'*. On the other are Imdad-Allah's equally dear disciples – such as Maulana Lutfullah of Aligarh, Maulana Ahmad Husain of Kanpur, and Maulana 'Abdus Sami' of Rampur – who continue strongly advocating these very practices. These differences among them could have been owing to the impact of larger reform movements in the world of Islam. In order to resolve the differences, Haji Imdad-Allah was, in his own words, forced to write a treatise entitled *Faisla-i Haft Mas'ala* (Judgment on Seven Questions), which in some measure follows the footsteps of Shah Wali-Allah. Of the seven issues in-

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part of history and memory among the *'ulama*: see, for instance, Madani, *Naqsh-e Hayat*, Vol. 2, pp. 52–67. Some scholars question the validity of this claim: see Haq, *Muslim Politics in Modern India*, pp. 6–12; and Kamal, *Masha'ikh-e Chishtiya Sabiriya*, pp. 202–7, for a rejoinder.

<sup>37</sup> For Karamat Ali Jaunpuri, for instance, see Ghose, "Politics of Faith", Chapter 2, pp. 81–135.