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ʿABD-AL-QODDŪS GANGŌHĪ

ʿABD-AL-**QODDŪS GANGŌHĪ,** Indo-Muslim saint and litterateur, pivotal member in the Ṣāberīya Češtīya, a branch limited to present-day Uttar Pradesh and Pakistan but enormously influential among the émigré elite of that large region.

The details of ʿAbd-al-Qoddūs's life are comparatively well known. His family, which had produced many illustrious *ʿolamā'*, claimed descent from Imam Abū Ḥanīfa. During the period of the early Turkish sultanates, they had migrated from Ḡazna to Delhi, but toward the end of the 14th century ʿAbd-al-Qoddūs's great grandfather, one Shaikh Naṣīr-al-dīn, moved eastward to Jawnpur, settling near Rudawli, where he and his descendants maintained close ties with the ruling Šarqī dynasty. ʿAbd-al-Qoddūs was born into the family of Shaikh Moḥammad Esmāʿīl b. Ṣafī-al-dīn b. Naṣīr-al-dīn ca. 860/1456.

The spiritual quest of ʿAbd-al-Qoddūs closely resembles that of his Sufi preceptor, Aḥmad ʿAbd-al-Ḥaqq Rodawlavī (d. 838/1434): Both began their formal studies with the then standard curriculum in external sciences (*ʿolūm-e ẓāher*), only to be diverted and finally overwhelmed by passionate love of God (*ʿešq-e mawlā*), after which they became students, disciples, and eventual exemplars of the Sufi path (*ṭarīqa*). ʿAbd-al-Qoddūs was not, however, linked to Aḥmad in a generational sequence; the older saint had predeceased him by more than a hundred years. Instead, he became acquainted with the relatively obscure Ṣāberīya Češtīya through Aḥmad's grandson, Shaikh Moḥammad, who was the *sajjāda nešīn* of the Rudawli *ḵānaqāh* in ʿAbd-al-Qoddūs's youth and whose sister ʿAbd-al-Qoddūs later married. But ʿAbd-al-Qoddūs himself claimed

that it was direct communication with the spirit of the deceased saint in a dream that prompted his profession of spiritual allegiance (*bayʿat*) to the Ṣāberīya Češtīya (*Laṭāʾef-e Qoddūsī*, p. 10), much in the same manner that the illiterate Ḵaraqānī (d. 426/1034) was said to have been initiated by the awe-inspiring spirit of the deceased Bāyazīd Besṭamī (d. 261/874).

The remainder of ʿAbd-al-Qoddūs's life may be divided into 3 phases: 1. For approximately seventeen years after his initiation into the Ṣāberīya Češtīya discipline, he remained near Rudawli, spending his time in private devotional pursuits (some of which, e.g., *namāz-e maʿkūs* "inverted prayer" and *solṭān-e ḏekr* "supreme meditation," were extraordinarily rigorous) but also accepting Afghan disciples from the Lōdī armies that conquered and intermittently ruled eastern Uttar Pradesh during the latter part of the 15th century. (In this connection, see especially S. Digby, "Dattu Sarvani.") 2. In 896/1491, at the invitation of one of his Afghan disciples, ʿAbd-al-Qoddūs, with his family, moved to Shahabad in the Panjab, not far from Gangoh, where the saint eventually died and was buried. For over 30 years he resided there, raised his sons, and continued to groom Afghan disciples. Inevitably he was entangled in the battle of Panipat (1526). Sultan Ebrāhīm compelled him to bless the ill-fated Lōdī army. The now aged saint was captured and later released by the invading Mughals. 3. He then moved to Gangoh, where he lived for his remaining eleven years. He developed minimal but apparently cordial relations with both Bābor and Homāyūn. Like Shaikh Aḥmad Serhendī (d. 1034/1624, who is spiritually linked to ʿAbd-al-Qoddūs through his father, ʿAbd-al-Aḥad, a disciple of the saint's son, Rokn-al-dīn), ʿAbd-al-Qoddūs recorded his exchanges with the Lōdī and Mughal royalty in letters, copies of which were retained, collected, and later transcribed by scrupulous disciples. Though not as theologically speculative as the letters of Serhendī, these letters (the *Maktūbāt-e Qoddūsī*) provide insights into the saint's relations with contemporary rulers and government officials. (For a detailed analysis, consult S. Digby, "'Abd-al-Qoddūs," pp. 28-34.)

When he died at Gangoh on 23 Jomādā II 944/28 November 1537, ʿAbd-al-Qoddūs was laid to rest in a tomb already under construction and possibly built in part by a donation from the emperor Homāyūn. The tomb, having survived centuries of intense political strife, continues today as a focal point for the annual celebration of the saint's *ʿors*.

ʿAbd-al-Qoddūs's posthumous success was enhanced by his physical and spiritual progeny. His son, Rokn-al-dīn, compiled the biographically rich series

of anecdotes about his father, *Laṭāʾef-e Qoddūsī* (Delhi, 1311/1894). Jalāl-al-dīn Th ānēsarī, the saint's principal successor, enjoyed fame and recognition during Akbar's reign; he also authored a treatise on land settlement practices (*Taḥqīq arāżī al-Hend*, ed. S. A. Nadvī, Karachi, 1383/1963). Not all ʿAbd-al-Qoddūs's offspring, however, were inclined to mystical pursuits or shared his spiritual outlook. Theological arguments with his sons have been noted (*Laṭāʾef-e Qoddūsī*, p. 58), while his grandson, ʿAbd-al-Nabī, attacked the Češtī tradition of *samāʿ* (a mainstay of ʿAbd-al-Qoddūs's own devotional endeavors) and later infuriated Akbar by his scandalous behavior as *ṣadr al-ṣodūr*. The 19th-century spiritual descendants of the shaikh included founders of the ultra-orthodox *madrasa* at Deoband (viz., Moḥammad Qāsem and Moḥammad Yaʿqūb Nanawtavī), both of whom were openly hostile to Sufism. Yet, as K. A. Nizami has made clear (see "Chishtiyya," *EI* [2] II, p. 53), without ʿAbd-al-Qoddūs there would have been no branch of the Češtī Order (*selsela*), to rival main tradition traced through Shaikh Neẓām-al-dīn Awlīāʾ (q.v.; d. 726/1325) and his numerous successors.

ʿAbd-al-Qoddūs himself has been narrowly stereotyped by an oft-cited quotation which Moḥammad Eqbāl Lāhūrī (d. 1358/1938) attributed to him: "Muhammad of Arabia ascended the highest heaven and returned. I swear by God that if I had reached that point, I should never have returned" (M. Iqbal, *Six Lectures on the Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Lahore, 1930, p. 193). For Eqbāl this statement summarizes the contrast between the mystic and prophetic levels of consciousness; and in condemning the former, he also minimizes the spiritual attainments of ʿAbd-al-Qoddūs. But it is important to remember that the saying, if it can be genuinely attributed to the saint from Gangoh, was uttered as a *šaṭḥ* " ecstatic aphorism" during one of his intoxicated states perhaps while attending a *samāʿ* assembly. Like every major Sufi saint, however, ʿAbd-al-Qoddūs was able to combine opposite qualities and tendencies; in his sober states he maintained his obligations as a strict Sunni Muslim, as a husband and father, and as a nurturer of other men in the mystical path of the Ṣāberīya Češtīya.

He was also a prolific writer in Persian, Arabic, and Hindi. (For his Hindi verses, most of which are set forth in marginal notes or glosses to his major speculative treatise, the *Rošd* [*Moršed*] *nāma*, see S. Digby, " ʿAbd al-Quddus," pp. 56-66.) Of his seventeen compositions, many are no longer extant, but those that are give an adequate insight into his varied literary talents. *Anwār al-ʿoyūn* is a Persian *taḏkera* of his *pīr*, Aḥmad ʿAbd-al-Ḥaqq Rodawlavī; while

Rošd [*Moršed*] *nāma* is a Persian *ešāra* "instructional tract" with numerous Arabic citations that summarizes the saint's mystical outlook and obliquely incorporates meditative exercises of Nathanpanthī yogins. Other minor Persian *rasāʾel* "treatises" have survived, as have two collections of his Persian letters (*Maktūbāt-e Qoddūsī* and a smaller *Montaḵab-e maktūbāt-e Qoddūsī*) and an important Arabic commentary on Šehāb-al-dīn Sohravardī's *ʿAwāref al-maʿāref*, the favorite organizational manual for Indian Češtīs.

ʿAbd-al-Qoddūs had a great fondness for Persian poetry: As a young man he made a partial translation of the *Čandāyān* of Mawlānā Dāʾūd, a late 14th century verse romance in Avadhi or Eastern Hindi (excerpts of which are given in the *Laṭāʾef-e Qoddūsī*); he frequently cited the distichs of both Indian and non-Indian Persian poets; and he composed his own Persian verse under the *taḵalloṣ* Aḥmadī.

ʿAbd-al-Qoddūs is most often remembered for his theological legacy; he has been viewed as one of the staunchest Indian proponents of *waḥdat al-wojūd* (see, e.g., S. H. ʿAskarī, "Hazrat Abdul Quddus Gangohi," pp. 10-12, and A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill, 1975, p. 357). Although the commentary which he wrote on Ebn ʿArabī's *Foṣūṣ al-ḥekam* is no longer extant, there are numerous observations on *waḥdat al-wojūd* in the *Rošdnāma* and a reference in *Laṭāʾef-e Qoddūsī* (p. 55) to the protracted debate which ʿAbd-al-Qoddūs had with a contemporary scholar, Mīrān Sayyedī Aḥmad Moltānī, on the correctness of *waḥdat al-wojūd*; according to the *Laṭāʾef* (p. 55), the debate continued for nearly six months till ʿAbd-al-Qoddūs finally convinced his stubborn opponent that Shaikh al-Akbar's teaching was indeed an accurate interpretation of Islam. Ironically, M. Mujeeb (*The Indian Muslims*, Montreal, 1967, pp. 197-98) has criticized Gangōhī for not adhering to the principles of *waḥdat al-wojūd* in the political sphere; otherwise, argues Mujeeb, he would not have written solicitous letters to Muslim rulers and their high officers in order to promote the financial interests of the Islamic religious classes. ʿAbd-al-Qoddūs, however, was not the first saint to use his spiritual charisma to obtain favors from political authorities on behalf of his fellow Muslims; his Češtī predecessor at Jawnpur, Sayyed Ašraf Jahāngīr Semnānī (q.v.; d. 808/1405), also interceded with the Šarqī rulers to plead the case of distressed co-religionists. The position of the Indian *mašāʾeḵ* as members of the Muslim elite almost compelled them to have some relationship with the ruling classes, whether they espoused the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wojūd* or its antithesis, *waḥdat al-šohūd*. In counseling against the assignment of

government posts to non-Muslims, ʿAbd-al-Qoddūs was simply revealing the sober, militantly orthodox side of his multifaceted personality.

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