



## 'ABD-AL-RAḤMĀN ČEŠŤĪ

'ABD-AL-RAḤMĀN ČEŠŤĪ, 17th century Mughal saint and biographer. He belonged to the Šāberī branch of the Češtī order (*selsela*), which had been founded at Kalyar (Saharanpur district, U.P., India) by 'Alā'-al-dīn 'Alī b. Aḥmad Šāber (d. 690/1291), a disciple of the illustrious Farīd-al-dīn Ganj-e Šakar of Pakpattan (d. 663/1265). One of 'Abd-al-Raḥmān's ancestors had been Aḥmad 'Abd-al-Ḥaqq of Rudawli (d. 837-38/1434) under whose leadership, continued by his able disciple, 'Abd-al-Qoddūs Gangōhī (d. 943-44/1537), the Šāberī Češtīya had risen to great prominence. Nearly all the famous members of the Šāberī Češtīya traced their spiritual lineage through 'Abd-al-Qoddūs to Aḥmad 'Abd-al-Ḥaqq, but 'Abd-al-Raḥmān represents a major branch linked to a contemporary of 'Abd-al-Qoddūs, Shaikh Budh. On the death of his brother, Shaikh Ḥamīd, in 1032/1623, 'Abd-al-Raḥmān succeeded him as the head of this minor branch of the Šāberī Češtīya.

*Mer'āt al-asrār* is the major literary testament of 'Abd-al-Raḥmān. He states that he undertook the work after spending 40 days in meditative seclusion. The initial inspiration, he alleges, came to him in 1029/1620 while studying the account of Abū Yazīd Bestāmī in Farīd-al-dīn 'Aṭṭār's *Tadkerat al-awliā'*, but it was not till 1044-45/1635 that he actually began to compile his famed *tadkera*, which he completed in 1064/1654. It contains biographies of almost all the well-known saints from the early centuries of Islam till the period of Ḥosām-al-dīn Mānekpūrī (d. 881-82/1477). The lives are arranged under 23 *ṭabaqāt* describing successive generations of Sufī saints, each of which begins with an account of the *qoṭb*, i.e., the Češtī shaikh, of that generation. Though never



lithographed, *Mer’āt al-asrār* exists in numerous manuscript copies in British as well as Indian libraries.

‘Abd-al-Raḥmān wrote two other notable *taḍkeras*: *Mer’āt-e Madārī* and *Mer’āt-e Mas’ūdī*. In the former, he set forth a detailed biographical eulogy of Shaikh Badī’-al-dīn, better known as Šāh Madār (d. 839-40/1436), a saint of legendary longevity. After spending 35 years in Syria and 40 years at Mecca, Medina, and Najaf, he allegedly came to India where he spent the next (and last) 50 years of his life at Makanpur (Kanpur district). It was during a visit to the tomb of Šāh Madār at Makanpur that ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān was inspired to write his *taḍkera* of the saint. He admits to using two earlier literary sources: *Īmān-e Maḥmūdī* by Qāzī Maḥmūd Kantūrī, a spiritual successor of Šāh Madār, and *Laṭā’ef-e Ašrafī, taḍkera* of the renowned Sayyed Ašraf Jahāngīr Semnānī, who allegedly knew Šāh Madār. In addition to the manuscript copies of *Mer’āt-e Madārī* available in Indian and British libraries, see also *Tawāqeb al-anwār le-maṭāle’ goṭb al-Madār*, an Urdu translation by M. ‘Abd-al-Rašīd Zohūr-al-eslām published at Farrukhabad in 1328/1910.

*Mer’āt-e Mas’ūdī*, the other *taḍkera* of ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān, reflects his interest in the stories concerning Sālār Mas’ūd Ġāzī, popularly known as Ġāzī Mīān, who was believed to have been a nephew of Sultan Maḥmūd of Ġazna. He was allegedly martyred in 424/1033 at Bahraich, where he was subsequently buried in a magnificent tomb that continues to attract large numbers of pilgrims to the present day. *Mer’āt-e Mas’ūdī* is based on a contemporary biography of Ġāzī Mīān written by Mollā M. Ġaznavī, a subject of Sultan Maḥmūd. It, together with an abridgment entitled *Qeṣṣa-ye Sālār Mas’ūd Ġāzī*, exists in several manuscripts housed in South Asian and European libraries. A summary English translation, prepared by B. W. Chapman, has been partially extracted in Elliot, *History of India* II, pp. 513-49. An abridged Urdu translation, *Ḳolāṣa-ye tavārīḳ-e Mas’ūdī*, was also published at Lucknow in 1871.

Other works by ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān include *Awrād-e češtīya*; *Nafā’es-e Raḥmānī*; *Mer’āt al-maḳlūqāt*, the translation of a Sanskrit treatise on Hindu cosmogony; and *Mer’āt al-ḥaqā’eq*, an abridged rendition of the *Bhagavad Gītā* (Storey, I, p. 1005).

According to Moḥammad Baqā, author of *Mer’āt al-‘ālam* (Marshall, *Mughal in India*, no. 1146) and a personal friend of ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān Češtī, the latter died in 1049/1683 at Dhaniti, a village in the vicinity of Lucknow.



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## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Storey, I, pp. 1005-07.

On *Mer'āt-e Madārī*, note especially *Cat. Bankipore VIII*, p. 677.

Amīr Ḥasan Madārī Faṣṣūrī, *Taḍkerat al-mottaqīn*, Kanpur, 1898; and M. M. Haq, "Shāh Badi' al-dīn Madār and his Ṭariqah in Bengal," *JASP* 12, 1967, pp. 95-103.

On *Mer'āt-e Mas'ūdī*, in addition to the Elliot excerpt quoted above, see 'Enāyat Ḥosayn Belgrāmī, *Gāzīnāma-ye Mas'ūdī* (Urdu), Kanpur, 1876.