



'ABDALLĀH, ŠĀH

'**ABDALLĀH, ŠĀH** (d. 890/1485), Persian Sufi who introduced the Šaṭṭārī order into India. His family claimed descent from Shaikh Šehāb-al-dīn Sohrawardī, while he traced his spiritual genealogy to Shaikh Abū Yazīd Ṭayfūr Beštāmī. His *selsela* was known as 'Ešqīya in Iran and Beštāmīya in Asia Minor (*Golzār-e abrār*, fol. 101a), but in India as Šaṭṭārī; and 'Abdallāh is the first saint with whose name the term Šaṭṭārī appears (*Ma'āref al-welāya*, ms.; *Ḳazīnat al-ašfīā'*, p. 947). Unlike the many orders named after some outstanding saint, his is named after a spiritual talent—speed in traversing the mystic path (*Golzār-e abrār*, fol. 102a). According to the saints of this *selsela* (*Laṭā'ef-e ḡaybīya*, ms.), there are three types of mystics who strive for *ma'refat* "gnosis"—the *akyār* "the good," the *abrār* "the pious," and the *šaṭṭār* "the swift." The course followed by the *šaṭṭār* is said to be the shortest and quickest to true gnosis.

'Abdallāh traveled extensively, visiting a number of eminent saints in Iraq and Khorasan before reaching India. In Bokhara he heard about the spiritual prowess of Shaikh Moẓaffar Kītānī Ḳalvatī and went to see him at Nīšāpūr. It was from him that 'Abdallāh learned different types of *dekr*. In Azarbaijan he visited Sayyed 'Alī Movaḥḥed, who taught him many mystic practices. 'Abdallāh arrived in India at a time when the minor dynasties that had followed the decline of the centralized Delhi sultanate were coming to an end. There was widespread chaos and instability in northern India. He ultimately settled in Mandu, where he died in 832/1429 (*Ḳazīnat al-ašfīā'*, p. 949) or, according to others, 890/1485.

The Šaṭṭārī teachings centered on *asrār-e tawḥīd*, secrets of divine unity, in a



distinctive manner. Wherever ‘Abdallāh went he sent a message to local saints to come and instruct him about divine unity; if they were unable to do so, they were asked to come and learn it from him. Shaikh Moḥammad ‘Alā’ (later known as Shaikh Qaḏen Šaṭṭārī) at first challenged Šāh ‘Abdallāh but subsequently became one of his ardent disciples, popularizing the Šaṭṭārī *selsela* in Bengal. Thereafter Šaṭṭārī centers came to be established at Jaunpur, Rudawli, Sambhal, Kalpi, Gwalior, Agra, Bhanpur, Baroda, Ahmadabad, and Mandu.

Šāh ‘Abdallāh lived with great pomp and panoply, put on royal apparel, and moved from place to place with a band of disciples clad in military uniform, displaying banners and beating drums. They appeared to be a militia, and every ruler initially reacted with suspicion. But when it became evident that the objectives of Šāh ‘Abdallāh were non-political, he was allowed to carry on his propaganda. It is said that before admitting a person to his discipline, the saint gave him a piece of bread with some gravy on it. If the person consumed the bread and the gravy together, he was admitted; if not, he was rejected as one lacking insight and wisdom and therefore unfit for higher spiritual work (*Aḳbār al-ak̄yār*, p. 169).

One of Šāh ‘Abdallāh’s claims was the simultaneous attainment of opposite but complementary spiritual states through his meditative discipline—*hejāb* “concealment” with *enkešāf* “exposition,” *qabẓ* “depression” with *baṣṭ* “expansion,” *hast* “existence” with *nīst* “non-existence,” *tanhā’ī* “solitude” with *hamrāhī* “company,” and *ḳāmūšī* “silence” with *gūyā’ī* “speech” (*Golzār-e abrār*, fol. 183a). He emphasized the interiorization of religious practices more than other Sufis, and it was partially for this reason that the impact of his teachings remained confined to the selected few around him.

Šāh ‘Abdallāh compiled a single work, *Laṭā’ef-e ḡaybiya*, which he allegedly dedicated to Sultan Ġiāṭ-al-dīn Ḳal̄jī of Malwa (1469-1500). It still exists in manuscript form (e.g., Maner ms. dated 1025/1616), and sets forth the doctrines that remained normative for the Šaṭṭārī *selsela*.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Moḥammad Ġawṭī Šaṭṭārī, *Golzār-e abrār* (ms. in John Rylands Library, fols. 101a-02b) contains an authentic and detailed account of the saint and other Sufis of the *selsela*. Shaikh ‘Abd-al-Ḥaqq Moḥaddet Dehlavī, *Akbār al-akyār*, Delhi, 1280/1863-64, p. 169.

Ġolām Mo‘īn-al-dīn ‘Abdallāh Kvešgī, *Ma‘āref al-welāya*, ms. in private collection. Ġolām Sarvar Lāhūrī, *Kazīnat al-aṣfiā’*, Lahore, 1284/1867, pp. 947-49.

Qāzī Mo‘īn-al-dīn Aḥmad, “History of the Šaṭṭārī Selsela,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Aligarh Muslim University, 1963, pp. 1-16.

K. A. Nizami, “Šaṭṭārī Saints and their Attitude towards the State,” *MIQ* 1/2, pp. 56-70.