



## AḤMAD RODAWLAVĪ

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**AḤMAD RODAWLAVĪ**, ‘ABD-AL-ḤAQQ (d. 837/1434), early Muslim saint of the Šāberīya Češtīya (a branch of the Češtī *selsela* only scantily documented). He was probably born ca. 751/1350 (cf. his disciple ‘Abd-al-Qoddūs Gangōhī, *Anwār al-‘oyūn*, lith. ed., Lucknow, 1296/1879, p. 26) in Rudawli, a town in eastern Uttar Pradesh near Jawnpur. His family had migrated from Balk in the second half of the 7th/13th century (ibid., pp. 120-21) and must have settled for a time in Delhi, since his grandfather is said to have been a disciple of Naṣīr-al-dīn Čerāg-e Dehlī (d. 757/1356; ibid., p. 121). Aḥmad and his brother, Taqī-al-dīn (later a skilled poet), went to Delhi to pursue their formal religious studies. Aḥmad’s mystical promptings and experiences (ibid., pp. 11-12) led him to Panipat and his *pīr* Shaikh Jalāl-al-dīn, who is recorded as the third head of the Šāberīya Češtīya (for the chronological problems in this lineage).

The mystical discipline which Aḥmad underwent at Panipat and practiced when he succeeded Jalāl-al-dīn was tinged with the wrath of God (*qahr-e kodā*; ibid., p. 21), as if he exemplified his master’s very name *jalāl-al-dīn* “the majesty of the faith.” Hojvīrī (*Kašf al-maḥjūb*, tr. R. A. Nicholson, London, 1911, p. 288) noted that those who testify to the divine majesty (*jalāl*) “are always abhorring their own attributes and their hearts are stricken with awe.” Perhaps it was Aḥmad’s total absorption in devotional surrender to God that caused him to display his wrath toward those who crossed him. Once he was so offended that his family could not pay the musicians after a performance of *samā’* that he left home for six months (*Anwār al-‘oyūn*, pp. 64-65). On another occasion one of his sons is said to have become too raucous in his play,



disturbing Aḥmad's meditation. The saint angrily stalked into the forest and selected a place for the boy's grave; he died three days later (ibid., pp. 49-50).

Aḥmad's charisma, according to 'Abd-al-Qoddūs, derived from his acceptance of the prophetic dictum, often quoted by Sufis: "Die before you die." In search of an appropriate place to cultivate his own group of disciples (he had already visited Bhakkar, Sind; Sannam, Panjab; Pandua, Bengal; and Bihar), the Shaikh is alleged to have stopped en route from Bihar to Oudh at a clearing, where he was commanded by God to dig a grave. He dug it and then lay in it for the next six months, continually communicating with the Almighty. As a result of this experience, he was given the honorific name *'abd-al-Ḥaqq zendagānī-e abad* "the slave of God, alive forever" (ibid., pp. 27-28, 114). Aḥmad returned to Rudawli and went to the tomb of Shaikh Ṣalāḥ Darviš, where he asked the saint's permission to settle within his *welāyat* or spiritual domain. Only when the Prophet himself had spoken to Aḥmad and materialized a prayer mat and water jug from the tomb of Ṣalāḥ Darviš did the itinerant saint deem it proper to claim the *qaṣaba* of Rudawli as his own spiritual realm (ibid., pp. 39-40). He remained there and was probably beyond eighty when he expired on 15 Jomādā II 837/28 January 1434. The most distinctive aspect of Aḥmad's devotional practices was his use of the name "Ḥaqq." The word has been prominent in Sufism from the time of the mystic martyr Ḥallāj (d. 298/910), who was executed for having proclaimed *ana'l-Ḥaqq* "I am the Truth," and it is one of God's ninety-nine names (*al-asmā' al-ḥosnā*), but according to Aḥmad's Ṣāberī Češtī followers, their patron saint concentrated on this name alone with total, unbending force after his dramatic sepulchral initiation. One tradition avers that the saint did not even know where the congregational mosque was located in Rudawli. At prayer time, his servant would precede him to the mosque, and then call out the words "Ḥaqq! Ḥaqq! Ḥaqq!" as a signal to the transfixed saint, who would walk in the direction of these words till he came to the mosque. If the servant remained silent, Aḥmad would stand in place awestruck (ibid., pp. 115-16). Even today members of his *kānaqāh* greet each other and begin their meals with a threefold repetition of this divine name; not surprisingly, various attempts have been made to explain its threefold nature (e.g., ibid., p. 115).

Beyond the mystical subtleties and severities of Aḥmad 'Abd-al-Ḥaqq, it has been suggested that his modest success was assisted by his connection with the ruling Ṣarqī dynasty of Jawnpur (S. Digby, "Abd-al-Quddus," pp. 5-6). Sultan Ebrāhīm Ṣarqī, whom the saint once met, offered him a grant of four villages



and approximately 300 acres (1,000 *bīghas*) of land near Rudawli, and according to ‘Abd-al-Qoddūs (*Anwār al-‘oyūn*, p. 35), even though Shaikh Aḥmad refused the royal grant, a substantial flow of charitable day-to-day offerings (*fotūḥāt*) came to his *kānaqāh* because of the prestige attached to his refusal. Shaikh Aḥmad’s successors continued to refuse royal grants. They and their dependents live today in meager circumstances near the esteemed ancestor’s grave, appropriately located within a modest shaded enclosure; over the entrance three words are inscribed: “Ḥaqq! Ḥaqq! Ḥaqq!”

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