



DEHLAVĪ, ŠĀH WALĪ-ALLĀH QOṬB-AL-DĪN AḤMAD ABU'L- FAYYĀŽ

DEHLAVĪ, ŠĀH WALĪ-ALLĀH QOṬB-AL-DĪN AḤMAD ABU'L-FAYYĀŽ (1114-76/1703-62), leading Muslim intellectual of India and writer on a wide range of Islamic topics in Arabic and Persian; more than thirty-five of his works are extant (for an annotated list, see Baljon, pp. 8-14). He was educated by his father, the well-known scholar Šāh 'Abd-al-Raḥīm (1131/1719), founder and principal of the Raḥīmīya Madrasa in Delhi. At the age of fifteen years Šāh Walī-Allāh was initiated into the Naqšbandī Sufi order by his father and assigned to teach at the Raḥīmīya, of which he became principal in 1131/1719. In 1143/1731 he made the pilgrimage to Mecca. He remained fourteen months in Medina studying Hadith, Islamic law (*feqh*), and mysticism with such eminent scholars as Shaikh Abū Ṭāher Kordī Madanī; he was much influenced by the emerging cosmopolitan tendency in Hadith scholarship, a blend of North African, Ḥejāzī, and Indian traditions of study and verification (Voll, p. 266). He also developed a particular respect for the *Mowaṭṭa'* of Mālek b. Anas (d. 179/796) and later wrote two commentaries on it, in Arabic and Persian (respectively entitled *Mosawwā* and *Moṣaffā*; facs. ed., 2 vols., Karachi, 1980).

Šāh Walī-Allāh returned to India in 1145/1732 and devoted himself to teaching, writing, and leadership of his Sufi order. During the next decade he wrote his major work, *Ḥojjat-Allāh al-bālēga* in Arabic (ed. S. Sābeq, 2 vols., Cairo,



1952-53); in it he called for restoration of the Islamic sciences through the revival of Hadith studies within a proper framework. Other works range over the entire gamut of the Islamic religious sciences, from koranic and Hadith studies to law and mysticism. Many of his works are characterized by a systematic historical approach coupled with concern for explaining and reconciling divisive tendencies; in these writings his mystical outlook was kept in the background. He also formulated a unique set of terms and concepts (e.g., *erteḥāqāt*) to explain the mystical theophanies underlying historical development (*eqterābāt*). One group of Šāh Walī-Allāh's successors, best exemplified by his closest disciple and cousin, Moḥammad 'Āšeq (1187/1773), seems to have been influenced by his mystical inclinations; in fact, there is some evidence that he had envisioned establishing his own eclectic Sufi order (*Tafhīmāt* II, pp. 5-98).

Šāh Walī-Allāh's works in Persian include *Alṭāf al-qods fī ma'refa laṭā'ef al-naḥs* (ed. 'A. Sorātī, Gujranwala, India, 1964; tr. G. H. Jalbani, ed. D. Pendlebury as *The Sacred Knowledge of the Higher Functions of the Mind*, London, 1982), in which the psychospiritual journey of the Sufi is detailed (Hermansen, 1988b, pp. 12 ff.); *Entebāh fī salāsel awliā' Allāh*, on Sufi rituals, chains of authority (*esnād*), and hagiography (Baljon, p. 11; the sections on transmission of Hadith and *feqh*, ed. M. 'A. Ḥanīf as *Etteḥāf al-nabīh fī mā yoḥtaj elayh al-moḥaddet wa'l-faqīh*, Lahore, 1969); *Faṭḥ al-raḥmān fī tarjamat al-Qor'ān*, an annotated Persian translation of the Qur'ān (compl. 1151/1738; Karachi, n.d.), in which he tried to strike a balance between literal rendering and fidelity to the sense of the text; *al-Fawz al-kabīr fī-oṣūl al-tafsīr*, a study of the principles of koranic commentary in which he elaborated on stylistic and exegetical elements of five major themes (Karachi, 1964; tr. G. H. Jalbani as *The Principles of Quran Commentary*, Islamabad, 1985); *Hama'āt*, an early work focusing on the historical development of Sufism and the practices and relative orientations of major Sufi orders (Lahore, 1964; sections tr. Mir Valiuddin as *Contemplative Disciplines in Sufism*, ed. G. Khakee, London, 1980); *al-Moqaddama fī qawānīn al-tarjama*, a still-unpublished short treatise on the proper translation of the Qur'ān; *Saṭa'āt* (ed. Ġ. M. Qāsemī, Hyderabad, Sind, 1964; tr. G. H. Jalbani as *Sufism and the Islamic Tradition. The Lamahat and Sata'at of Shah Waliullah*, ed. D. B. Fry, London, 1980), a treatise on mystical philosophy reflecting the emanationist outlook of the school of [Ebn al-'Arabī](#); *Qorrat al-'aynayn fī tafzīl al-šayḳayn* (facs. ed., Lahore, 1976) and *Ezālat al-kaḥfā 'an kelāfat al-koḥlafā'* (facs. ed., Lahore, 1976), two works supporting the Sunni position on the succession of the early caliphate (Rizvi, pp. 249-56); and *al-Tafhīmāt al-elāhiya*



(ed. Ġ. M. Qāsemī, 2 vols., Hyderabad, Sind, 1969-70), which is partly in Arabic, a summation of Šāh Walī-Allāh's thoughts on various topics at a mature age.

Šāh Walī-Allāh also wrote a number of small literary and didactic treatises, including *Hawāmī* (Delhi, 1308/1890), a Persian commentary on the Shādelī Sufi litany *Hezb al-baḥr*. His Persian letters are preserved in several Indian libraries (Rizvi, pp. 224-28). Kāleq Aḥmad Neẓāmī edited and translated into Urdu selections from one set under the title *Šāh Walī-Allāh Dehlavī ke sīāsī maktūbāt* (Aligarh, 1950; repr. Delhi, 1969); this collection stimulated considerable debate over whether Šāh Walī-Allāh's role in history was primarily that of a scholar with mystical inclinations or that of a Muslim nationalist.

Dehlavī was married twice and had five sons and one daughter (Baljon, p. 4). His shrine is in a cemetery at Delhi. His teachings were carried on by his descendants, particularly his sons Šāh 'Abd-al-'Azīz (d. 1239/1823) and Šāh Rafī'-al-Dīn (d. 1234/1818) and his grandson Šāh Esmā'īl Šahīd (d. 1246/1831). The reforming and Muslim nationalist tendencies of this notable family have sometimes been designated the "Walī-Allāhī movement" (Sindhī; Ahmad, pp. 201-17). Today Šāh Walī-Allāh is invoked as an intellectual pregenitor of all major religious movements in Muslim South Asia. Groups with a more puritanical outlook hostile to Sufism find support for their own ideas in his emphasis on the fundamentals of the Islamic sciences and his rejection of certain local customs. Islamic modernists like [Muhammad Iqbal](#) (d. 1938) and Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988) have seen in him a thinker who responded to the intellectual crisis of his time by accommodating divergent legal and ideological factions, calling for a renewed *ejteḥād* (Peters; Baqā), and searching for the spirit behind the literal injunctions of tradition.

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