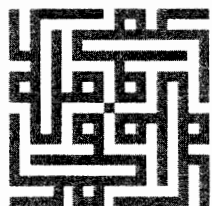


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**WALĪ ALLĀH, SHĀH** (1703–1762), the most prominent Muslim intellectual of eighteenth-century India and a prolific writer on a wide range of Islamic topics in Arabic and Persian. Shāh Walī Allāh's formal name was Quṭb al-Dīn Aḥmad Abū al-Fayyāḍ. Biographical material and anecdotes concerning his life and family may be found in his brief Persian autobiography, *Al-juz' al-laṭīf fī tarjamat al-'abd al-ḍa'if* and in his Persian work *Anfas al-'arīfīn*. Some additional material on his life appears in the hagiographic account *Al-qawl al-jalī*, written by his close disciple Muḥammad 'Āshiq (1773).

Shāh Walī Allāh's father and spiritual guide, Shāh 'Abd al-Raḥīm (d. 1719), was a well-known scholar in charge of his own *madrasah* in Delhi and also a practicing mystic. Shāh 'Abd al-Raḥīm devoted considerable attention to the education of his precocious son: besides religious subjects, his studies included astronomy, mathematics, Arabic and Persian language and grammar, and medical science (*ṭibb*), from which many concepts and theories influence his works.

He was married at fourteen to the daughter of his maternal uncle. When he was fifteen years old, his father accepted him as a disciple in the Naqshbandīyah order, and he began to perform its practices. He also com-

pleted his course in Islamic studies in that year and was permitted by his father to teach others. For twelve years after his father's death Shāh Walī Allāh taught and studied the religious sciences and continued in meditative discipline. Then, in 1731, he left India to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, where he stayed for some fourteen months.

This stay in the Hejaz was an important formative influence on his thought and subsequent life. There he studied *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, and Sufism with various eminent teachers, the most important influence being Shaykh Abū Ṭāhir al-Kurdī al-Madanī (d. 1733). These teachers in Mecca exposed Shāh Walī Allāh to the trend of increased cosmopolitanism in *ḥadīth* scholarship that began to emerge there in the eighteenth century from a blending of the North African, Hejazi, and Indian traditions of study and evaluation (Voll, 1980). While in the holy cities Shāh Walī Allāh developed a particular respect for Mālik's work, the *Muwatta'*, on which he later wrote two commentaries, *Musawwā* (Arabic) and *Muṣaffā* (Persian).

Shāh Walī Allāh's writing career began in earnest on his return from pilgrimage. His most important and influential work, *Hujjat Allāh al-bālighah* (in Arabic), in which he aimed to restore the Islamic sciences through *ḥadīth* studies, was composed sometime during the decade after his return. This is the most readily available and best-known of his works; even today it is considered important by the present generation of Islamic reformers, whether Islamists or modernists, and it is studied in the Arab Middle East and Southeast Asia as well as in Muslim South Asia.

Shāh Walī Allāh's activities after his return to India included teaching in his *madrasah*, acting as a guide in Sufism, and writing on a wide range of Islamic subjects. In 1744, having been widowed, he made a second marriage from which four sons and one daughter were born; he had a son and a daughter from his first marriage.

His works are often characterized by a historical, systematic approach coupled with an attempt to explain and mediate divisive tendencies. Among his other important writings are: *Al-budūr al-bāzighah*, an Arabic work outlining his theory of social and religious development in human history, closely parallel to some sections of *Hujjat Allāh al-bālighah*; *Faṭḥ al-Raḥmān fī tarjamat al-Qur'ān* (completed in 1738), a pioneering annotated Persian translation of the Qur'ān; *Al-fawz al-kabīr fī uṣūl al-tafsīr* (Persian), a study of the principles of Qur'ānic interpretation (*tafsīr*); and *Al-tafhīmāt al-*

*ilāhīyah*, a two-volume collection of shorter mystical reflections in Arabic and Persian. In addition, he wrote two works in Persian supporting the Sunnī position on the issue of succession to the caliphate, *Qurrat al-‘aynayn fī tafḍīl al-shaykhayn* and *Izālat al-khafa’ ‘an khilāfat al-khulafā’*.

After Shāh Walī Allāh’s death in 1762, his teachings were carried on by his descendants, in particular his sons, Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (d. 1824) and Shāh Rafī‘ al-Dīn (d. 1818), and his grandson Shāh Ismā‘īl Shahīd (d. 1831). The influence of this notable family was termed the “Walī Allāhī movement” by ‘Ubayd Allāh Sindhī (d. 1944), a South Asian activist who wrote extensively in Urdu interpreting Shāh Walī Allāh’s thought and emphasizing its reformist, progressive tendencies. With the creation of Pakistan, Shāh Walī Allāh began to be characterized by certain historians and by the popular imagination as an early nationalist hero and political activist, in much the same way as the role of the seventeenth-century mystic Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī had been reenvisioned. [See the biography of Sirhindī.]

Today all major religious movements in Muslim South Asia claim Shāh Walī Allāh as an intellectual progenitor. One such group, the Deobandīs, trace their inspiration through his son Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, a noted scholar and teacher with a wide circle of pupils, some of whom were directly associated with the establishment of the Deoband *madrasah*. This institution came to symbolize a particular mode of thought among South Asian Muslims that can be characterized as an acceptance of the mystical elements of the Islamic intellectual and practical tradition combined with a rejection of those practices more associated with local customs and the less-educated masses (Metcalf, 1984). [See Deobandīs and the biography of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz.]

Movements characterized by a more anti-Šūfī, puritan outlook, such as the Ahl-i Ḥadīth and even the followers of Mawlānā Mawdūdī, find in Shāh Walī Allāh’s return to the fundamentals of *sharī‘ah* and political rejection of alien influences a precursor of their own reformist beliefs. Walī Allāh’s grandson Shāh Ismā‘īl Shahīd, who advocated the elimination of local practices and a *jihād* against non-Muslim forces, would seem to be the closest intellectual link to such movements, if one overlooks the fact that he also composed works of theosophical mysticism in the style of Ibn al-‘Arābī. Yet another group of his successors, best exemplified by his closest disciple and cousin Muḥammad ‘Ashiq (1773), seems to have

practically pursued his mystical inclinations, for there is some indication that Walī Allāh attempted to establish his own eclectic Šūfī order and a theory and repertoire of mystical practices (see *Al-tafhīmāt al-ilāhīyah* 2, 5–98). Finally, South Asian Islamic modernists such as Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) and Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988) have seen in Shāh Walī Allāh a thinker who responded to the crisis of his time by accommodating diverse legal and ideological opinions, calling for a renewed *ijtihād* and searching for the spirit behind the tradition. [See the biographies of Iqbal and Rahman.]

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