




FORUM ARTICLE

# Law and Sufism in modern South Asia: A changing relationship

Muhammad Qasim Zaman 

Departments of Near Eastern Studies and Religion, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, United States of America

Email: [mzaman@princeton.edu](mailto:mzaman@princeton.edu)

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## Abstract

This article studies some major shifts in the relationship between law and Sufism in South Asian Islam between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries. It does so by focusing on Shah Wali Allah of Delhi (d. 1762) to examine, first, how these two key facets of Islam interact with each other in his thought and, second, how some influential Muslim intellectuals of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries have understood and positioned themselves in relation to this aspect of his thought. Though one would be hard pressed to know this from the sanitized modern image of Wali Allah as a scholar of the Quran and hadith, and of a Sufi piety uncompromisingly anchored in them, his Sufism reveals a wide and, from many a modern Muslim perspective, unwieldy range of ideas and practices. Yet it was precisely in that unwieldy breadth and depth that it was generative of some of his key insights into matters of the law. Even as many people have continued to insist on the imbrication of law and Sufism, a sanitization of Wali Allah's Sufi image serves to highlight wider processes whereby an earlier era's generative relationship between the two has come to be increasingly attenuated since the late nineteenth century.

**Keywords:** Islamic law; Sufism; Shah Wali Allah

## Introduction

Few thinkers better illustrate the close bond, but also the complexity of the relationship, between law and Sufism in late medieval and early modern South Asia than Shah Wali Allah of Delhi (d. 1762), among the most significant scholars in any Muslim society of the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> His posthumous prominence, too, is hardly matched

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<sup>1</sup>Notable works on Wali Allah in English include: Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Shah Wali-Allah and his times* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2004; first published in 1980); J. M. S. Baljon, *Religion and thought of Shah Wali Allah Dihlawi 1703-1762* (Leiden: Brill, 1986); M. Ikram Chaghatai (ed.), *Shah Waliullah (1703-1762): His religious and political thought* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2005); and Ahmad Dallal, *Islam without Europe: Traditions of reform in eighteenth-century Islamic thought* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018). For the scholarship on him, see Marcia Hermansen, 'The current state of Shah Wali Allah studies',

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by any other figures in South Asian Islam. That his multifaceted legacy was appropriated differently by different Muslim circles is not surprising for a scholar and Sufi who left behind a vast corpus of writing, but such appropriation provides us nonetheless with a useful vantage point from which to observe certain key developments in the relationship between law and Sufism over the two centuries following his death.

Wali Allah's legal writings relate to the foundational sources of the law—the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (hadith)—as well as to the norms of the Hanafi, Shafi'i, and Maliki schools of Sunni law; the historical evolution of those schools; the derivation of new rulings in light of the foundational texts (*ijtihad*); and matters relating to human well-being (*maslaha*), as envisaged by the sacred law.<sup>2</sup> His Sufi writings, for their part, range over the distinctive practices of the major orders of his time, explications of key debates relating to Sufi thought, accounts of his own mystical experience, and matters concerning the training of those traversing the mystical path. The legal and the mystical are intertwined in his work, and part of my concern in this article is to briefly elucidate that relationship. This is not just a matter of affirming—as Wali Allah did, like many others before him—that Sufi thought and practice needed to be anchored in the dictates of the sacred law or, conversely, that Sufism brought a distinctive experiential dimension to the practice of the law. Rather, as will be seen, Wali Allah's Sufism had a generative role in shaping his legal thought. Though his received image since the latter half of the nineteenth century has been that of a middle-of-the-road reformer who devoted his life to giving Sufism, and the law itself, a firmer grounding in the Islamic foundational texts, Wali Allah's Sufi thought and practice do not always lend themselves well to that sanitized image. How does a seemingly unwieldy Sufism serve nonetheless to accompany his juridical concerns and to do so in what looks like a seamless manner? How have some influential Muslims of later times sought to handle his legacy as a Sufi? What can their handling of it tell us not only about their own understandings of the sacred law and of mysticism but also about evolving trends in the relationship between these two key facets of Islam in modern South Asia? These are among the questions I address in this article.

### Wali Allah as a legal thinker

For a scholar writing in northern India in the first half of the eighteenth century, the audacity of some of Wali Allah's legal views is extraordinary. At a time when most Sunni scholars insisted on the binding authority of the medieval schools of law and on the need to adhere strictly to established school doctrines (*taqlid*), Wali Allah argued for the unceasing necessity of *ijtihad*. This was less than two generations after the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb 'Alamgir (r. 1658–1707) had commissioned a massive compendium of Hanafi law—the Sunni school long dominant in India. This work, named *Fatawa-yi 'Alamgir Shahi* (or *Fatawa 'Alamgiriyya*) in honour of its imperial patron, remains the last great work of its kind and represented, already in its own time, an assertion of the school's overarching authority. Wali Allah reports the view, and not specifically with reference to the Hanafis, that *ijtihad* had become defunct, and therefore that one ought

in *Shah Waliullah*, (ed.) Chaghatai, pp. 683–693. See also M. Ikram Chaghatai, 'Shah Wali Allah: Select bibliography', in *ibid.*, pp. 695–714.

<sup>2</sup>Non-English terms are usually only italicized on their first occurrence.

not to base one's practice directly on the teachings of hadith, as distinguished from how those teachings had been refracted through the schools of law. He rejects that view on all counts,<sup>3</sup> and offers the assurance, notably in the *Necklace of Rulings relating to Ijtihad and Taqlid* (*'Iqd al-jid fi ahkam al-ijtihad wa'l-taqlid*), that one did not need to be a uniquely gifted scholar in order to be able to practise ijthihad.<sup>4</sup> Wali Allah also argues that one could move from one school of law to another on particular legal issues, without abandoning one's overall affiliation to a school. Ordinary believers were within their rights to do so, too, let alone scholars.<sup>5</sup> It would be no exaggeration to say that many—even among those who accepted the continuing possibility of ijthihad—would have balked at this latter idea, which represented a direct challenge to the exclusive, pre-emptive authority that jurists of a particular school had long tended to claim for it.

In two books, one in Arabic and the other in Persian, on the *Muwatta* of Malik b. Anas (d. 795), the foundational work of the Maliki school of law, Wali Allah provides extended illustrations of what it would look like to draw collectively upon several different schools of Sunni law. Besides the content of the *Muwatta* itself, which comprises, in a rearranged form, the bulk of his two books on it, he frequently lists the Shafi'i and the Hanafi positions on the matter under discussion. The book in Persian also provides a fairly extensive commentary on the relevant issues. The fact that the more expansive of the two books is in Persian, complete with translations of the Arabic text of the *Muwatta* itself, suggests that he may have wanted even relatively less well-educated people to have access to the views of the several competing Sunni schools of law.<sup>6</sup> The larger idea, which animates a good deal of his legal writing, is that God's law was easy to live by, that it had been tailored to the circumstances of its original recipients, but that generations of Muslim jurists had rendered it excessively demanding. Further, and in contrast with many other scholars—including his son, Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz (d. 1824), on whom I will say more later—Wali Allah did not think that there was anything wrong in opting for an easier legal option if one was available.<sup>7</sup>

Similar ideas are at the heart of what has come to be viewed as his most famous book, the *Conclusive Argument from God* (*Hujjat Allah al-baligha*). The key concern underlying that work is to demonstrate that the sacred law is meant to promote human well-being (*maslaha*; plural: *masalih*) and to elucidate how hadith reports illustrate that goal. Though a number of other jurists had also argued that *maslaha* was the guiding principle of the law, Wali Allah goes beyond most of them in showing that even the core

<sup>3</sup>Shah Wali Allah, *Izalat al-khafa'an khilafat al-khulafa*, (ed.) Muhammad Ahsan Siddiqi, 2 vols (Bareilly: al-Matba' al-Siddiqi, 1869–1872; reprinted Lahore: Suhayl Academy, 1976), vol. 1, p. 313.

<sup>4</sup>Shah Wali Allah, *'Iqd al-jid fi ahkam al-ijtihad wa'l-taqlid*, with parallel Urdu translation, *Silk marwarid*, by Muhammad Ahsan Siddiqi (Delhi: Matba'-i Mujtaba'i, 1891), pp. 6–11; Marcia Hermansen (trans.), *Shah Wali Allah's treatises on juristic disagreement and taqlid* (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2010) [hereafter *Treatises*], pp. 78–81.

<sup>5</sup>Wali Allah, *'Iqd*, pp. 67–69, 80–93; Hermansen, *Treatises*, pp. 119–120, 127–135.

<sup>6</sup>For the Arabic work, see Shah Wali Allah, *al-Musawwa sharh al-Muwatta*, 2 vols (Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 2002); for the Persian (with his Arabic glosses from the *Musawwa* printed in the margins), see Shah Wali Allah, *Musaffa* [and] *Musawwa* (Delhi: Matba'-i Faruqi [vol. 1] and Matba'-i Murtazawi [vol. 2], 1876).

<sup>7</sup>Wali Allah, *Izala*, vol. 1, p. 134; cf. Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz, *Fatawa-yi 'Azizi*, 2 vols (Delhi: Matba'-i Mujtaba'i, 1893–1896), vol. 1, p. 194.

Islamic rituals could be explained in terms of the human interest they served.<sup>8</sup> In this and in some of his other works, Wali Allah also makes a key distinction between two kinds of knowledge, one relating to matters of human well-being and their contraries (*al-masalih wa'l-mafasid*) and the other to shari'a rulings, including Quranic penal law (*hudud*) and ritual obligations. The lawgiver, by whom he means the Prophet in this context, had taught both kinds to people, but each is distinct from the other in what it comprises.<sup>9</sup> The first category has to do with the refinement of the self, the regulation of the household, the economy, and politics. The other category, relating to the shari'a, comes with fixed obligations, prescribed amounts, and clear specifications. Things that are binding are clearly demarcated in this second category from those that are only recommended. And unlike the *maslaha*-related matters, which can be deduced through reason, things that fall into this latter category are not rationally deducible. This does not mean that they are not rationally intelligible, only that one cannot arrive at them through unaided reason.

Positing a form of knowledge and practice that is closely related, yet not reducible, to the shari'a enables Wali Allah to broaden his treatment of *maslaha* beyond juristic boundaries. It also signals his deep engagement with the Persian ethical tradition, represented most influentially by the *Nasirean Ethics* (*Akhlaq-i Nasiri*) of Nasir al-din Tusi (d. 1274) and organized precisely in terms of the categories Wali Allah speaks of—the refinement of the self, the regulation of the household, and politics. Yet even this realm of knowledge and practice is anchored for Wali Allah, in marked contrast with the likes of Tusi, in a thoroughgoing engagement with hadith and the sacred law. And his study of hadith itself is rooted in his Sufi sensibilities.

### Wali Allah as a Sufi

Beyond routine affirmations that law and mysticism, properly understood, buttressed each other, Wali Allah presents many of his legal insights as themselves the product of his mystical experience.<sup>10</sup> That is so, for instance, with his distinction between the aforementioned *maslaha*-based and the shari'a-based forms of knowledge, which he attributes to a mystical unveiling (*kashf*).<sup>11</sup> Another example relates to his understanding of the differences among the schools of Sunni law, which he considers to have been overblown by school partisans. His view is that they could often be reconciled with one

<sup>8</sup>On the idea of *maslaha*, see Felicitas Opwis, *Maslaha and the purpose of the law: Islamic discourse on legal change from the 4th/10th to 8th/14th century* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

<sup>9</sup>Shah Wali Allah, *Hujjat Allah al-baligha*, (ed.) Sa'id Ahmad Palanpuri, 2 vols (Karachi: Zamzam Publishers, 2010), vol. 1, pp. 363–371; Marcia Hermansen (trans.), *The conclusive argument from God: Shah Wali Allah of Delhi's Hujjat Allah al-baligha* (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 2003), pp. 376–382. For other discussions relating to this distinction, see Shah Wali Allah, *Anfas al-'arifin*, (ed.) Muhammad 'Abd al-Ahad (Delhi: Matba'-'i Mujtaba'i, 1917), pp. 80–81; Wali Allah, *Musaffa*, vol. 1, pp. 37, 330; Shah Wali Allah, *al-Tafhimat al-ilahiyya*, (ed.) Ghulam Mustafa al-Qasimi, 2 vols (Hyderabad: Shah Wali Allah Academy, 1967–1970), vol. 1, p. 207.

<sup>10</sup>For a similar point, though developed with reference to Wali Allah's engagement with the 'occult sciences', see Daniel Jacobius Morgan, 'Spokesman for the unseen world: Shah Wali Allah (1703–62), Islamic reform and applied cosmology in late-Mughal Delhi', PhD thesis, Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago, 2021, pp. 63, 144, 182.

<sup>11</sup>Wali Allah, *al-Tafhimat*, vol. 1, p. 207.

another and, as noted, that the adherent of one school could opt for a different school's view. The core of the religion, he says, is the straight path (*al-jadda al-qawima*), which is grounded in the apparent (*zahir*) meaning of the foundational texts and which transcends the schools of law.<sup>12</sup> He quotes the Andalusian Sufi Ibn al-'Arabi (d. 1240) to the effect that,

the servant [of God], when he traverses the stations of the [juristic] community (*idha salaka maqamat al-qawm*) in strict conformity with a particular school of law ... necessarily arrives at the source (*al-'ayn*) from which his imam [that is, the school's founder] had taken his doctrines. There he finds that the doctrines of all the [other] imams are ladled from one sea, [a realization] that has the inevitable result of freeing him from strict conformity to his school...<sup>13</sup>

Ibn al-'Arabi had some affinity with the views of the Zahiris, who based their doctrines directly on the apparent meaning of the foundational texts rather than on the elaborate theories and methods through which the jurists of the other schools had arrived at their corpus of the law. Yet Wali Allah characterizes Ibn al-'Arabi, correctly, as not adhering to the views of any particular school, and the statement quoted here illustrates that position.<sup>14</sup>

Wali Allah was a proponent of the Unity of Being (*wahdat al-wujud* [hereafter often 'Wujudis']), the view that God is the only reality and that inasmuch as anything else could be said to exist (*mawjud*) at all, it did so as an expression, a 'self-disclosure' (*tajalli*), of that ultimate reality.<sup>15</sup> Though many of the Wujudi formulations were articulated later, their partisans saw Ibn al-'Arabi as the foundational figure in that regard. The sea to which one is led back, the 'stations'—a key Sufi metaphor relating to the mystic path—through which one passes, to find that the founders of all schools drew from it, exemplifies some of what the Unity of Being entails when seen from a legal vantage. From that perspective, though Wali Allah does not develop the point further in this instance, the different schools of law are varied manifestations of the one, ultimate truth, as represented by the straight path. His understanding of that path is again the result of a mystical unveiling (*kashf*), though one needs a God-given inner light (*nur batini*), he says, to comprehend it fully.<sup>16</sup> As this example suggests, it is not just that Wali Allah couches many of his legal insights in a Sufi idiom. His Sufi thought is generative of them. It is worth noting that this discussion itself occurs in a book titled *Divine Instructions (al-Tafhimat al-Ilahiyya)*, which evokes the idea that mystics like Wali Allah had been given a privileged understanding of things from on high, as, indeed, had prophets. The Quran speaks of God having given Solomon—the biblical king viewed as a prophet in Islam—the understanding whereby he was able to solve a legal case

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 202–212.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 206–207 (referring to Ibn al-'Arabi's *al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyya* and other, unspecified, works).

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 206. Another influence on him is 'Abd al-Wahhab Sha'rani (d. 1565), whom Wali Allah mentions in this context, along with some other scholars (ibid., p. 207). On Ibn al-'Arabi's relationship with the now defunct Zahirī school of law, see Michel Chodkiewicz, *An ocean without shore: Ibn 'Arabi, the book, and the law* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 54–57.

<sup>15</sup>On the idea of self-disclosure, see William C. Chittick, *The self-disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-'Arabi's cosmology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), esp. pp. 52–57.

<sup>16</sup>Wali Allah, *al-Tafhimat*, vol. 1, pp. 202–212; on the need for inner light, see ibid., p. 212.

(Q 21.78–9), which, presumably, is what suggested to Wali Allah the title of his own book.

Wali Allah's mystical horizons were not, however, limited by any narrow view of the law. Instead, his writings reveal an unflinching embrace of ideas and practices that would sit uncomfortably not only with his own later image but also with other understandings of Sufism itself. Some examples are worth considering here. The first relates to the manner in which he could speak about, and to, the sun—a body with a soul, with which one could communicate:

One day, I became united (*ittasaltu*) with the spirit of the sun. I saw it and I heard from it. I said: 'I marvel at you: You see people seeking your light and benefiting from you. [They see your] dominance and manifestation in different ways. And yet they reproach you and make false claims about you. But you do not avenge yourself against them or [even] get angry at them!' [The sun] responded: 'Is their pride and their self-satisfaction (*ibtihaj* ['happiness']) not a facet of my own happiness? In all such matters, I attend not to the outward form of [people's] pride, but rather to the reality of the happiness—all of which is my own self-satisfaction. Can anyone be angry at one's self-perfection, or seek vengeance against oneself!' When my reach (*ifda'i*) to the sun ended, I found it to be munificent (*fayyad*) by nature and disposition.<sup>17</sup>

This statement occurs in Wali Allah's *Effusions of the Two Sanctuaries* (*Fuyud al-haramayn*), an account of his mystical experiences during his time in the Hijaz (1730–1732). He completed that book upon his return from Medina to Mecca in early 1732, having spent a good part of the preceding six months studying hadith in Medina. Far from any dissonance between hadith and his Wujudi views—relating to the sun, for instance, a manifestation of the ultimate reality—hadith reports and the Quran could bolster that connection. The immediate context of his conversation with the sun was how the rational soul (*al-nafs al-natiqa*) had its own faculties for seeing, hearing, and knowing, just as the body does. Through such faculties, one could be united with other beings and see or hear them, converse with the celestial bodies and with those in the heavenly High Council (*al-mala al-a'la*) that served as an intermediary of sorts between God and the highest angels, on the one hand, and the world lower down, on the other. Such faculties could also allow one to see and speak with God.<sup>18</sup> It is worth noting that, though a late nineteenth-century translation of this book renders the passage under discussion faithfully into Urdu, a more recent reprint of that same translation obscures the line about Wali Allah being united with the spirit of the sun.<sup>19</sup> I will return to this point later.

<sup>17</sup>Shah Wali Allah, *Fuyud al-Haramayn ma'a tarjama-yi Urdu Sa'adat-i kawmayn* (Delhi: Matba'-i Ahmadi, n. d.), p. 7. This edition used, unless noted otherwise.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 6–7. The idea of the High Council has Quranic roots (Q 37.8–9, Q 38.69), though many mystics have tended to develop it in a quite different direction from that which those Quranic passages would seem to suggest.

<sup>19</sup>The original Urdu translation reads: '... *main ruh-i aftar se muttasil huwa...*' ('... I became united with the spirit of the sun...'): Wali Allah, *Fuyud*, p. 7. (The Urdu translation, given in parallel columns with the Arabic text, is by Sayyid Zahir al-din, the proprietor of the Matba'-i Ahmadi and a descendant of Wali Allah.) The recent edition, though based on that same translation, alters—at the cost of syntax—the

In his *Great Blessing (al-Khayr al-kathir)*, too, Wali Allah observes that the celestial bodies ‘have souls/spirits (*arwah*) as well as knowledge [associated with them] and that the sun prostrates beneath the throne [that is, the seat of God’s great self-disclosure] in a manner that is appropriate to it’.<sup>20</sup> Incidentally, several modern editions of that book note an ellipsis after the words quoted here, which suggests the intriguing possibility that Wali Allah had said more about the sun than the modern editors saw fit to print.<sup>21</sup> He did say more in a letter to his cousin and biographer, Muhammad ‘Ashiq Phulati (d. 1773). Quoting Q 40.15–16 (‘He is exalted in rank, the Lord of the Throne. He sends revelations with His teachings to whichever of His servants He will, in order to warn of the Day of Meeting, the Day when they will come out and nothing about them will be concealed from God. “Who has control today?” “God, the One, the All Powerful”’), Wali Allah writes:

It appears that these verses are in full accord with the reality of the sun. It is possible, in common parlance (*lisan-i ‘urf*), to say that this is the sun’s praising of God (*tasbih-i shams*). It could also be said that these verses are inscribed in sacred light on the sun’s forehead. Likewise, every star has a sign/verse (*ayat*) [specific to it]. This is among the subtle matters relating to the science of the Quran’s wonders.

He goes on to note that some hadith reports spoke of the names of Abu Bakr and ‘Umar—the first two caliphs—being inscribed on the sun’s forehead, on the divine throne, on a door of paradise, or on a branch of the *tuba* tree in paradise. He acknowledges that the authenticity of such reports was questioned by hadith scholars, but says that he deemed them nonetheless to be credible.<sup>22</sup>

Another example of ideas that would be at odds with later sensibilities, perhaps more strikingly so, comes from an exchange with Shah Nur Allah of Budhana (d. circa 1773), one of his closest disciples. Nur Allah would later serve as one of Shah ‘Abd al-‘Aziz’s teachers, to whom he also gave his daughter in marriage.<sup>23</sup> The disciple had

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words in question such that they no longer refer to Wali Allah’s own, direct experience: ‘... *main ne ruh-i Aftab se muttasil hote us-ē dekha...*’ (‘... I saw it/him become united with the spirit of the sun...’). Shah Wali Allah, *Fuyud al-Haramayn ma’a Urdu tarjama Sa’adat-i kawwān* (Hyderabad: Shah Wali Allah Academy, 2007), pp. 10–11. A different, earlier, translation into Urdu did, however, accurately convey the sense of the original: Muhammad Sarwar (trans.), *Mushahadat wa ma’arif, tarjama-yi Fuyud al-Haramayn* (Lahore: Sindh Sagar Academy, 1947), pp. 63–64.

<sup>20</sup>Shah Wali Allah, *al-Khayr al-kathir* (Dabhel: al-Majlis al-‘ilmi, 1933), p. 44.

<sup>21</sup>Besides the Dabhel edition on which I rely here, see Wali Allah al-Dihlawi, *al-Khayr al-kathir* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qahira, 1974), p. 45 (showing ellipses); and Isma‘il Muhammadi (ed.), *al-Khayr al-kathir* (Qum: Intisharat ayat ishra‘, 2017), p. 161 (where the ellipses have disappeared even though that edition is based on the Dabhel edition). See also the Urdu translation of this work, as dictated by ‘Ubayd Allah Sindhi: *Urdu tarjama-yi al-Khayr al-kathir*, (transcriber and ed.) Ghulam Mustafa Qasimi (Hyderabad: Shah Wali Allah Academy, 1977), p. 62 (the translation, too, indicates no ellipses).

<sup>22</sup>Nasim Ahmad Faridi (ed.), *Makatib-i Hazrat Shah Wali Allah Muhaddith Dihlawi*, 2 vols (Rampur: Kitab khana-yi Rampur, 2004) [hereafter *Makatib*], vol. 1, part ii, pp. 347–348 (#98); quotation at p. 348. Why this Quranic passage is to be construed as the sun’s praising of God remains unclear. My translations of the Quran follow M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Quran: A new translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>23</sup>On Nur Allah, see ‘Abd al-Hayy al-Hasani, *Nuzhat al-khawātir wa bahjat al-masami’ wa’l-nawāzir*, 8 vols (Hyderabad: Majlis Da’irat al-ma’arif al-‘Uthmaniyya, 1947–1970), vol. 6, pp. 394–395.

once written to the master to tell him about a dream in which he had seen God in the guise of a woman. Wali Allah reassured the startled disciple that, unless one were hallucinating because of illness, such dreams were a sign of one's attaining the level of 'subsistence' (*baqa*) in God, after having been 'extinguished' (*fana*) in Him. By way of context, it should be noted that *fana* and *baqa* are, in the Sufi tradition, among the most extensively discussed topics. The acme of a mystical experience is to lose oneself entirely in the divine. The mystic's return from *fana*, the state in which she or he 'subsists' afterwards, is what the Sufis characterize as *baqa*, a time of painful separation from the divine beloved, but one during which the knowledge gained from that transformative experience is put to use in continuing along the mystical path and in authoritatively guiding others to it.

Extinction and subsistence could have markedly varied expressions, however, and so it was in Nur Allah's case. As the master informed him, 'Subsistence is not properly attained until the servant sees in some of his dreams the Truth, be He exalted, in the form of women, [with God] engaged like them in sex.'<sup>24</sup> He explained that what one sees in a dream is pure perception (*idrak-i mujarrad*), 'in whose color the soul of that servant is dyed, wherein it is extinguished, and with which it subsists'.<sup>25</sup> One's perceptive faculty (*darrāka*) explicates that experience through images, relating, as appropriate, to the irascible, appetitive, and rational souls. The perceptive faculty tends to represent the appetitive soul in the form of women, which is why Nur Allah had seen God in that manner. Wali Allah went on to say that early in his career, in Cambay en route to what had turned out to be an abortive attempt to travel to the Hijaz, he, too, had seen God (*hazrat-i mabda*) in the guise of a handsome youth engaged in dalliance (*muda'aba*) with His wife (*ba zan-i khwud*). They were playing with a small ball of thread (*qazza*), with Wali Allah passing that ball from one to the other. It soon turned out, Wali Allah said, that *he* was that handsome youth, 'by virtue of the persistence of my appetitive faculty in relation to the Truth. As for that thread-ball, it represented the worldly belongings given as offerings to God but restored to me: whatever the mystic gives away for the sake of a distinctive closeness to God is offered back to him.'<sup>26</sup> This is a passage that the modern Urdu translator of Wali Allah's collected letters decided to omit.<sup>27</sup>

That such experiences could be startling is not in dispute in this vignette. Nor is it a matter of being so overcome by one's mystical state as to involuntarily overstep shari'a norms. Wali Allah cautions elsewhere that the example to be followed was not that of 'helpless lovers [of God]' (*al-maghlubin min al-'ushshaq*), but rather of the Prophet

<sup>24</sup>*Makātib*, vol. 1, part i, pp. 141–142 (#81, letter to Shah Nur Allah); quotation at p. 141 (*dar surat-i nisa ke dar mubasharat karha-yi niswan mikunad*).

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 141–142. Wali Allah had made his first attempt to travel to the Hijaz in 1722–1773, but he had been unable to go further than the port city of Cambay on that occasion. Depictions of God as a handsome youth were not uncommon in early Islam. See Josef van Ess, 'The youthful God: Anthropomorphism in early Islam', in his *Kleine Schriften*, (ed.) Hinrich Biesterfeldt, 3 vols (Leiden: Brill, 2018), vol. 2, pp. 606–630, esp. pp. 622–624.

<sup>27</sup>See Nasim Ahmad Faridi (trans.), *Nadir maktubat-i Shah Wali Allah Dihlawi* (Lahore: Idara-yi saqafat-i Islamiyya, 1999), p. 247. The full text of the letter does appear, however, in the original Persian edition of the letters, of which Faridi was the editor. This obviously suggests his view, or that of the publishers, that few people would read the text in the original Persian in contemporary South Asia.



and his companions.<sup>28</sup> He gives no indication, however, that his own experiences, or those of Nur Allah, were of that kind. What we have here instead is an illustration that his understanding of both the sacred law and the mystic path was expansive enough to seamlessly accommodate apparently troubling experiences, even to make them intelligible—as he did, in this instance, to his disciple—in more or less rational terms.

### A constricted legacy

How facets of Wali Allah's legacy have fared in some influential Muslim circles since the late nineteenth century can tell us much about the changing relationship between law and Sufism in that era and in our own. Before we turn to this question, however, it would be helpful to broaden the scope of our discussion in two respects: by bringing Wali Allah's son, the distinguished jurist and hadith scholar Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz, into it; and by extending it to devotional practices in Wali Allah's family—practices that relate both to Sufi-inflected piety and to law.

One of the most notable days in a traditional Muslim calendar was—and for many, still is—the day of the Prophet's birth, commemorated on the twelfth of Rabi' al-awwal, the third month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Wali Allah marked that day with recitations from the Quran and votive offerings (*niyaz*) in the Prophet's honour. He had a strand of the Prophet's hair in his possession and he would display it on that day, as his father had once done. Such devotional acts could bring forth mystical experiences of their own; on at least one occasion, the spirit of the Prophet made an appearance alongside others from the heavenly High Council.<sup>29</sup> He commemorated 'Ashura, too, the tenth day of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar, whose significance lies primarily in its being the day on which Husayn, the Prophet's grandson and the third Shi'i imam, had been martyred at the hands of the Umayyad forces in 680. We are told that some Shi'i imams themselves had once expressed the wish to Wali Allah to have the 'Ashura commemorated in their honour. He did so, with sweets and a recitation of the entire Quran, concluding the occasion with '*fatiha*', much to the satisfaction of the imams.<sup>30</sup> *Fatiha* ('the opening') refers to the first chapter of the Quran, typically recited not just as a core part of the ritual prayers (*salat*), but also for the benefit of the dead. However, 'in Delhi's customary practice' (*dar 'urf-i Shahjahanabad*), it was shorthand for a more elaborate set of rituals, which included reciting Chapters 112–114 of the Quran, sending blessings upon the Prophet (*durud*), and praying for the dead.<sup>31</sup> Incidentally, such devotional practices were not unrelated to Wali Allah's intellectual pursuits. In the preface to his *Conclusive Argument*, he notes that, while in Mecca, he had seen Hasan and Husayn—the second and third imams of the Shi'a—in a

<sup>28</sup>Wali Allah, *al-Tafhimat*, vol. 1, p. 284 (# 69).

<sup>29</sup>Muhammad 'Ashiq Phulati, *al-Qawl al-jali fi zikr athar al-Wali* (Delhi: Hazrat Shah Abu'l-Khayr Academy, 1989), p. 74.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 80–81.

<sup>31</sup>Muhammad Karim Allah, *Ithbat isal al-thawab fi radd abna 'Abd al-Wahhab*, British Library, Delhi Persian 208/b, f. 42a. The treatise was composed in 1849 (see *ibid.*). On Karim Allah (d. 1874), see al-Hasani, *Nuzha*, vol. 7, pp. 398–399. See also Shah Wali Allah, *Hama'at*, (ed.) Isma'il Muhammadi (Qum: Ayat-i ishq, 2017), p. 190 (#21), where he notes that visiting the grave of a particular saint, *fatiha*, and giving alms in his or her name was one way of establishing a spiritual relationship, a *nisba*, with that saint.

dream and they had given him what they said was the pen of the Prophet. This was one of several signs that he had been divinely chosen to undertake that project.<sup>32</sup> Wali Allah's associates are likely to have seen some reciprocity in the imams' gift to him and his fatiha for them.

How did the sacred law view the question of making or receiving votive offerings with reference to holy personages? Sayyid Ahmad Kabir and Shaykh Saddu were household names in Wali Allah's India, for instance, and it was common to sacrifice a cow or a goat in relation (*nisbat*) to them to fulfil a vow.<sup>33</sup> The question was what it meant to associate an offering with anyone other than God. The Quran prohibits consuming the flesh of 'animals over which any name other than God's has been invoked' (Q 2.173; cf. Q 5.3 and Q 16.115). Many scholars took the position, however, that such sacrifices were legitimate so long as it was the name of God, rather than of the saint, that was invoked at the actual moment an animal was sacrificed in fulfilment of a vow. Mulla Jiwan (d. 1718), a distinguished jurist and Quranic exegete who was a contemporary of Wali Allah's father, was among those scholars.<sup>34</sup> For their part, Wali Allah and his sons stopped well short of that position. They deemed offerings for the benefit of the dead and in the name of holy personages to be permissible, as their own practice shows, but they drew a line at sacrificial offerings consecrated to a saint. As 'Abd al-'Aziz's younger brother, Shah Rafi' al-din (d. 1818), had put it in responding to a juridical query about it, 'we do not eat such things and do not permit them [to others]'.<sup>35</sup>

Needless, perhaps, to say, this position made some people quite unhappy. 'Abd al-'Aziz once received a question that had already been answered by another mufti, one 'Abd al-Hakim Purabi. That earlier response was included with the question to 'Abd al-'Aziz.<sup>36</sup> 'Abd al-Hakim had offered a robust and erudite defence of the sacrificial offerings in question, but he had also taken a swipe at some of 'Abd al-'Aziz's other views, as well as at his family's practices. The views of such people carried no weight, he had said in reference to the family's scruples about sacrificial offerings in the name of saints, for their words did not match their actions. They considered the Shi'a to be 'absolute unbelievers, by the authority of consensus', yet they were not averse to giving their women in marriage to them; they considered India to be the land of war

<sup>32</sup>Wali Allah, *Hujjat Allah*, vol. 1, p. 33; Hermansen, *Conclusive argument*, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup>See 'Abd al-'Aziz, *Fatawa*, vol. 1, pp. 47–53. On Shaykh Saddu, a mythical figure of ill repute in religious circles, see D. C. Baillie, *The Census of India, 1891. Vol. 16: The North-Western Provinces and Oudh* (Allahabad: The North-Western Provinces and Oudh Press, 1894), p. 216.

<sup>34</sup>'Abd al-'Aziz, *Fatawa*, vol. 1, p. 48. On him, see al-Hasani, *Nuzha*, vol. 6, pp. 19–21 (#37).

<sup>35</sup>Shah Rafi' al-din, *Fatawa-yi Mawlana Shah Rafi' al-din Muhaddith Dihlawi* (Delhi: Matba'-i Mujtaba'i, 1904), pp. 7–10, at p. 8. Rafi' al-din counted Shaykh Saddu among the 'devils' (*shayatin*): *ibid.*, p. 7. For various other questions and answers in this regard, see 'Abd al-'Aziz, *Fatawa*, vol. 1, pp. 34–36, 47–53, 128; *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 103.

<sup>36</sup>'Abd al-'Aziz, *Fatawa*, vol. 1, pp. 47–49 (for the original question and 'Abd al-Hakim Purabi's response to it); *ibid.*, pp. 49–53 (for 'Abd al-'Aziz's response). 'Abd al-Hakim is not named in the published version of the exchange. For the identification, see *Fatwa az 'Abd al-Hakim Purabi mutazammin bar i'tirizat wa tanz wa ta'n bar Mawlana Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz Dihlawi ... [wa] jawab-i i'tirizat-i mazkura az Mawlana Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz Dihlawi...*, Ganj Bakhsh Library, Iran-Pakistan Institute of Persian Studies, Rawalpindi, Ganj Bakhsh 837, pp. 583–596, at p. 583. The original question, to which 'Abd al-Hakim had given his answer, is not included in the manuscript (see *ibid.*, p. 583). Note that the manuscript carries page rather than folio numbers, and that is how I refer to it here.

(*dar al-harb*)—a famous view of ‘Abd al-‘Aziz—yet they had continued to reside there; and ‘viewing the ‘urs [the death anniversary] of their elders to be like a religious obligation, they gathered each year at their tombs, distributed food and sweets there, and they worshipped those tombs like a veritable idol’.<sup>37</sup>

We can leave aside ‘Abd al-‘Aziz’s point by point refutation of ‘Abd al-Hakim’s contentions, but the key disagreement between the two, as well as part of his response to the ad hominem attack, deserve to be noted. The main issue had to do with the intent behind the act in question, which, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz said, is what distinguished seemingly similar acts from one another. For instance, the foundational texts forbade the mistreatment of orphans, but disciplining an orphan as part of his education does not fall under those strictures, even if it had some similarities with what was otherwise forbidden.<sup>38</sup> The implication for the matter at hand was, of course, that even if the name of God was invoked at the critical moment, the validity of an animal’s sacrifice was suspect if the sacrifice had been intended for anyone other than God; the intention needed to have been focused on God all along. As for the ‘urs, the mufti, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz said, was ignorant of the situation:

No one believed that anything other than matters stipulated by the shari‘a was obligatory (*fard*). However, visiting the graves of the righteous, seeking their blessings, helping them (*imdad*) by adding to their recompense (*thawab*), reciting the Quran and praying for their benefit, and giving away food and sweets are all excellent matters, by the consensus of scholars. The specification of a particular day for the ‘urs is to have that day serve as a reminder of their relocation (*intiqal* [that is, of the person in question]) from the place of action to the place of recompense; other than that, such practices, whenever they happen, are a cause of [the deceased’s] good state and deliverance.<sup>39</sup>

The ‘consensus of scholars’, which ‘Abd al-‘Aziz invokes frequently in his fatwas, merits a comment here, for it, too, reveals something about the relationship between law and Sufism. In a fatwa, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz makes the acute observation that though the jurists of an earlier era had reached their consensus in light of textual proofs, later scholars could not presume to reach similar results on the basis of those same proofs.

<sup>37</sup>‘Abd al-‘Aziz, *Fatawa*, vol. 1, pp. 48–49. For ‘Abd al-‘Aziz’s fatwa regarding India as the ‘land of war’, see *ibid.*, pp. 17–18. It is unclear what ‘Abd al-Hakim had been referring to in regard to marriage with the Shi‘a. It might be an oblique reference to Qamar al-din Minnat (d. 1793 or 1794), a member of the Wali Allah family and sometime student of ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, who had converted to Shi‘ism. Minnat would become well-known as a Persian poet. See Shaykh Muhammad Ikram, *Rud-i Kawthar*, 3rd edn (Lahore: Firoz Sons, 1958), p. 572; Shu‘ayb Ahmad, *Sharh-i ahwal wa asar-i Mir Qamar al-din Minnat Dihlawi wa tashih-i diwan-i Farsi-yi wai* (Lahore: University of the Punjab, 2005), pp. 44–45. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz’s response (that if one is not directly responsible, as a legal guardian, for authorizing a kinswoman’s marriage, then the decision in question is not to be ascribed to him: ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, *Fatawa*, vol. 1, pp. 51–52) suggests that Minnat or someone else in the family had done so, that it had attracted public attention, and that those unfriendly to the family were keen to embarrass it on that account.

<sup>38</sup>‘Abd al-‘Aziz, *Fatawa*, vol. 1, p. 53; *ibid.*, pp. 48–49 (for ‘Abd al-Hakim’s denial that a bad intention had an effect on the quality of the act itself: a marriage is not rendered void if the person entering into it has the intention of fornication, nor is fornication made legitimate if the intention is to have an upright child through it).

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 51–52; quotation at p. 52.

'The proofs and sources relating to the matter in question arrive (*warid*) at the hearts of the people of an age in a way that leads to certainty or to a strong presumption [of the result's correctness]. However, if those not present at the time look at every such source and every proof separately, they do not reach a similar presumption or certainty.<sup>40</sup> His point was that later Muslims were therefore best served if they simply submitted to the authority of that earlier consensus, rather than re-evaluate it in terms of its putative grounds. But it is significant that he made that point by speaking, as a Sufi, about unique understandings arriving at the hearts of people. There is an echo of Ibn al-'Arabi here, which would not have been lost on anyone steeped, as many were in that milieu, in his writings. As the latter had put it in a discussion of the 'true knowledge of the arriver (*al-warid*)', by which he meant the Sufi states that a wayfarer experiences with reference to particular names of God: 'The benefit that pervades every arriver is the knowledge gained from its arrival by the person upon whom it arrives. There is no stipulation here as to whether it yields happiness or hurt, since this does not pertain to the property of the arriver. The property of the arriver is only the knowledge that is gained by means of it.'<sup>41</sup> Wali Allah, too, had said something to similar effect in explaining why consensus was treated as an independent source of law if its results were themselves based on proofs from the foundational texts—but the point, and its mystical inflection, come out more clearly in 'Abd al-'Aziz's formulation.<sup>42</sup>

With this extended context in view, we can now return to the question of how the legacy of Wali Allah and his family has fared in modern discussions of Sufism and law. I examine that question here with reference, first, to two colonial-era stalwarts of the Deobandi orientation, Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi (d. 1943) and 'Ubayd Allah Sindhi (d. 1944), and then, more briefly, to three Muslim 'modernists'—Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898), the founder of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College in Aligarh and a tireless proponent of the need for Muslims to acquire modern, Western education; the poet and philosopher Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938); and the intellectual historian Aziz Ahmad (d. 1978).<sup>43</sup>

The Deobandi orientation takes its name from a madrasa, an institution of advanced Islamic learning, established in the town of Deoband in North India in 1866. This was less than a decade after the formal establishment of British colonial rule in India following the abortive Mutiny of 1857–1858. In the following decades, numerous madrasas patterned on the one at Deoband would come to be established throughout India, all characterized by a shared commitment to the study of Hanafi law and the Islamic foundational texts and accompanied by a kind of Sufi practice that the Deobandis thought could be credibly supported by both. Wali Allah and his sons figured prominently in the intellectual genealogy of Deoband, not only because of a shared

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 127 (... *az turuq-i shatta wa masalik-i muta'addida bar qulub-i ahl-i 'asr warid mishawad...*).

<sup>41</sup>Ibn al-'Arabi, *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya*, 4 vols (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1968), vol. 2, p. 566 (Chapter 265); translation as in Chittick, *Self-disclosure*, p. 148 (with stylistic modification).

<sup>42</sup>Shah Wali Allah, *Qur'rat al-'aynayn fi tafdil al-shaykhayn* (Lahore: al-Maktaba al-salafiyya, 1976; reprint of the Delhi: Matba'-i Mujtaba'i, 1892 edition), p. 240; quoted and discussed in Muhammad Mazhar Baqa, *Usul-i fiqh awr Shah Wali Allah*, 2nd edn (Karachi: Baqa Publications, 1986), pp. 412–413.

<sup>43</sup>'Modernists' refers here to Muslim intellectuals who sought to reinterpret the teachings of the Islamic foundational texts and to adapt particular religious norms and institutions to what they took to be challenges and opportunities of a modern life.

interest in the study of hadith and law, but also because it was through them that the early Deobandis had received their vaunted authorizations for the teaching and onward transmission of hadith.<sup>44</sup>

Among the products of Deoband, no one has been more influential as a Sufi or as a mufti than Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi. Based during the last several decades of his life at his Sufi lodge in Thana Bhawan, in today's Uttar Pradesh, Thanawi wrote incessantly while also guiding the work of several prolific associates. His writings ranged over the entire spectrum of Sufi thought and practice, from structured guidance to those seeking the mystical path to books on Ibn al-'Arabi and Hafiz (d. 1389), lectures on the *Mathnawi* of Rumi (d. 1273), conversations on sundry topics as recorded by associates, and an extensive correspondence with disciples. The legal writings include thousands of fatwas, which, in case of one major initiative, had a direct role in law-making in the Imperial Legislative Council.<sup>45</sup>

Thanawi's sensibilities were similar to Wali Allah's in many respects, above all, in the desire to guard against the perceived excesses of Sufi thought and practice by keeping them close to the sacred law. The similarity extends as well to some tensions and ambiguities in how Thanawi had conceived of the relationship between the two traditions. Even as he insisted on an overall accord between Sufism and the shari'a, he allowed that Sufis, overcome by their mystical states, could act in ways that seemed problematic from the perspective of the law. He held that they were not to be blamed for such involuntary acts, but they were not to be emulated in them either. Further, he thought that efforts to find justifications for all Sufi behaviour in the foundational texts did more harm than good, for it did not recognize that mysticism had its own logic, which was not always amenable to the rules of the law.<sup>46</sup> Making a similar point, Wali Allah had observed that while the shari'a had explained things relating to the path of mystical wayfaring (*suluk*), it had not concerned itself with those moments when one found oneself 'absorbed' in God (*jadhb*). To try to force the divine Lawgiver's words into discussions of such states made about as much sense, he had said, as to interpret a work on grammar by the principles of Sufism.<sup>47</sup> To Thanawi, as to Wali Allah, the sacred law was nonetheless the overall framework to which all good Sufis aspired to conform. And there was a confluence between the two streams.

Even so, and though Thanawi's attitude towards Wali Allah and his successors was deferential, he showed considerably less fondness for them than one might have expected. They are not among people he engages with much in his fatwas or other writings, and this even when some of those seeking a juridical opinion from him invoked them explicitly.<sup>48</sup> This clearly has to do with the fact that the kind of religious belief

<sup>44</sup>See Muhammad Siddiq Najibabadi, *Anwar al-mahmud 'ala sunan Abi Dawud*, 2 vols (Karachi: Idarat al-Quran wa'l-'ulum al-Islamiyya, 1986; first published in 1937), vol. 1, pp. xxxv–xxxvi, 1.

<sup>45</sup>For an overview of his life and career, see Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi: Islam in modern South Asia* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008).

<sup>46</sup>See *ibid.*, pp. 84–90.

<sup>47</sup>Wali Allah, *Hama'at*, pp. 100–101 (#9).

<sup>48</sup>See, for example, Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi, *Imdad al-fatawa*, (ed.) Mufti Muhammad Shafi', 6 vols (Karachi: Maktaba-i Dar al-'Uloom, 2004), vol. 1, pp. 371–379 (with 'Abd al-'Aziz featuring in the questions—*ibid.*, pp. 371, 374—but not in the answer); *ibid.*, pp. 391–392. Also see Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi, *Imdad al-fatawa, ma'ruf ba-Fatawa Ashrafiyya*, 4 vols (Delhi: Matba'-i Mujtaba'i, 1911), vol. 4, pp. 97–99. (This is an earlier edition of Thanawi's collected fatwas. I was not able to locate that fatwa in Shafi's later edition.)

and practice that leading members of that family had represented was quite different from standard Deobandi norms. One illustrative example would have to suffice here. A query Thanawi received in 1917 asked him about the legitimacy of attending the ceremonies of 'urs. The questioner noted in this context what he saw as a broad difference of approach between the jurists and the Sufis: if something reprehensible became attached to a non-obligatory practice, the jurists tended to jettison the practice altogether, whereas the Sufis continued that practice while seeking to stay clear of the reprehensible attachment. Was one to judge an 'urs, then, by the juristic standard or by that used by the Sufis? The questioner also quoted what Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz had said in defence of 'urs while responding, as seen earlier, to the scholar who had criticized his family's double standards. Thanawi's first tack was to cast doubt on the authenticity of 'Abd al-'Aziz's reported statement. Drawing upon the methodology of hadith scholars, he said that the statement in question lacked a sound chain of transmission, let alone a dissemination so widespread (*tawatur*) as to rule out fabrication. Even if the report were sound, and this was his second tack, it would be an instance of 'Shah sahib's *ijtihad*', which could hardly overrule the *ijtihad* of others. Nor was Thanawi convinced that the putative Sufi approach was quite what the questioner had asserted it to be, namely, to continue a practice while avoiding its reprehensible aspects; but even if it were so, it was the jurists, not the Sufis, who were to be followed in matters of observable (*zahir*) conduct, which is to say, in everything other than esoteric things.<sup>49</sup> Elsewhere, in a perhaps unguarded moment, Thanawi was candid about how to impugn inconvenient reports. A questioner had expressed concern about indications that Wali Allah and 'Abd al-'Aziz had engaged in the practice of *fatiha* and that this had 'greatly strengthened' those who—in contrast to the Deobandis—did such things. Given that such practices were opposed to the Prophet's normative example, Thanawi responded, they had to be explained away in the instances in which an otherwise trustworthy person—here Wali Allah and 'Abd al-'Aziz—had been associated with them. One way to do so, he said, was to cast doubt on the authenticity of the said reports. Another was to question whether they did, in fact, lead to the conclusions for which they had been adduced. If even that approach was not effective, then one could argue that such practices were only allowable absent their deleterious effects—a criterion that would rule them out in the present.<sup>50</sup>

In the end, Thanawi's Sufism had considerably less space than one finds in Wali Allah's thought and practice for the sheer variety of religious experience. Certain things had been pushed to the fringes of acceptable behaviour by Thanawi's time: speaking of God as a handsome man and then seeing oneself, as did Wali Allah, as that man; conversing with the sun; and so forth. Increasingly influential Deobandi

<sup>49</sup>Thanawi, *Imdad*, vol. 4, pp. 452–456, esp. pp. 454–456. Thanawi's fatwa is dated 15 August 1917. For 'Abd al-'Aziz's statement, see above, n. 39. Significantly, 'Abd al-'Aziz's name is omitted in Shafi's edition of Thanawi's fatwas, used here—he is referred to simply as 'Shah sahib'. The fatwa had first appeared in Thanawi's *Tatimma-yi khamisa* ('the fifth supplement') to his collection of fatwas, which was not available to me. It is therefore unclear to me whether 'Abd al-'Aziz's name was already omitted from that 'supplement' or if Shafi', who edited and reorganized the entire corpus of Thanawi's fatwas, decided to leave it out. In any case, one would not know that 'Shah sahib' was 'Abd al-'Aziz (it could have been any member of Wali Allah's family or someone different altogether), unless one had seen the discussion in 'Abd al-'Aziz's own fatwa collection.

<sup>50</sup>Thanawi, *Imdad*, vol. 5, pp. 305–306 (#274). The question and answer date from June 1931.

efforts to authenticate all belief and practice with reference to the Quran and hadith and to align legal and other norms with them allowed little room for such ideas. Other emergent doctrinal orientations lent further support to such marginalization in colonial India. Siddiq Hasan Khan (d. 1890), a major early figure among the Ahl-i hadith, claimed that the Naqshbandi Wali Allah had rejected even the key Naqshbandi practice of establishing a connection (*rabt*) with the spirit of a dead saint.<sup>51</sup> Unlike the Ahl-i hadith, many Deobandis were not just Sufis but Wujudis, Thanawi among them.<sup>52</sup> But it would have taken a particularly provocative Wujudi to say some of the things that Wali Allah had as a matter of course in his own day. Then there were practices that the Deobandis rejected—practices relating to particular ways of venerating the Prophet and the saints, rituals associated with ‘urs, devotional offerings—but they had continued to have a respectable home in other doctrinal orientations, notably that of the Barelawis. It took little effort for Ahmad Riza Khan (d. 1921), the pivotal figure in the articulation of the Barelawi identity, to demonstrate that Wali Allah and his sons had engaged in the kinds of practice that the Deobandis disdained. One of his examples was precisely the aforementioned exchange between ‘Abd al-‘Aziz and ‘Abd al-Hakim Purabi, who had accused him of double standards.<sup>53</sup> The Barelawis tended not to follow Wali Allah in the risqué ideas mentioned earlier. But, for Thanawi, to find space even for the devotional practices they did endorse would have undermined the boundaries that he and his associates were keen to guard in colonial India between good and bad ways of being Muslim.

It was not just that reverence for Wali Allah and his sons now sat uncomfortably with a clear rejection of some of their religious practices. Mystical experience itself had come to provide a less fertile ground for legal insight. This had to do with increasing sensitivities about what counted as an authentic Sufism that could be defended against critics both within and outside the community of believers. The legacy of Ibn al-‘Arabi can serve as a useful mirror in which to glimpse some of what was changing. No mystic looms larger in the history of Sufism than Ibn al-‘Arabi. His ideas, and those of numerous others that were in conversation with them, shaped not only Sufism but varied other areas, including legal thought. Wali Allah’s writings testify to that influence, and he notes it in the context of law, too, as has been seen.<sup>54</sup> Whether or not one agreed with Wali Allah’s formulations, or Ibn al-‘Arabi’s for that matter, they

<sup>51</sup>See Siddiq Hasan Khan, *al-Taj al-mukallal min jawahir ma’athir al-tiraz al-akhir wa’l-awwal* (Bombay: al-Matba’at al-Hindiyya al-‘Arabiyya, 1963), pp. 515–516. On Siddiq Hasan Khan and the early Ahl-i hadith—who rejected the authority of the schools of law in favour of a direct recourse to the foundational texts and the practices of Islam’s first generations (the *salaf*)—see Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 268–296; Claudia Preckel, ‘Screening Siddiq Hasan Khan’s library: The use of Hanbali literature in 19th-century Bhopal’, in *Islamic theology, philosophy and law: Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya*, (eds) Birgit Krawietz and Georges Tamer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), pp. 162–219.

<sup>52</sup>Cf. Ashraf ‘Ali Thanawi, *Kilid-i mathnawi*, 24 volumes in 10 (Multan: Idara-yi ta’lif-i ashrafiyya, first published 1924–1933), vol. 1, pp. 46–48.

<sup>53</sup>Ahmad Riza Khan, *Fatawa Rizwiyya*, 30 vols (Lahore: Riza Foundation, n.d.), vol. 9, pp. 575–577, 583–584, 588–591. For the exchange between ‘Abd al-‘Aziz and ‘Abd al-Hakim as quoted here, see *ibid.*, pp. 589–590. See also SherAli Tareen, *Defending Muhammad in modernity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), pp. 278–282.

<sup>54</sup>See n. 13, earlier.

helped make God, the cosmos, and the human being in relation to them intelligible. Ibn al-'Arabi and others had also pointed to a distinctive way of arriving at authoritative knowledge. This was the way of *tahqiq* ('verification', 'realization'), which served to make accessible and to validate particular forms of knowledge and understanding, and which stood in contrast with *taqlid*, namely, accepting things second hand, on the authority of others. Although *taqlid* has tended, in studies of Islamic law, to be contrasted to *ijtihad*, the more meaningful contrast for many premodern Sufis, theologians, and jurists was with *tahqiq*.<sup>55</sup> *Tahqiq* complemented what a Sufi was able to arrive at through mystical unveiling, but it could work in tandem with a jurist's *ijtihad*, too. In his writings, Wali Allah uses a variety of terms to refer to the kind of authoritative knowledge he had access to, among them *tahqiq*.<sup>56</sup> Some of that knowledge came from his being privy to discussions in the heavenly High Council (*al-mala al-a'la*); it could also take the form of his hearing the Prophet's words directly from the latter; and it could enable him, as has been seen, to authenticate traditions that hadith specialists considered to be less than credible.<sup>57</sup>

One still had to reckon with Ibn al-'Arabi in late nineteenth-century South Asia, but one could do so from a greater distance than might have been possible before. Thanawi wrote two books on him, the first a commentary on Ibn al-'Arabi's *Fusus al-hikam* and the second an explication and defence of some of the latter's controversial views through his own writings.<sup>58</sup> In both works, he acknowledged a certain 'horror' (*wahshat*) at some of those views; indeed so much so that he had left the first of the two books incomplete.<sup>59</sup> Yet he was aware that his 'elders', as well as other Sufis, had been devoted to those teachings.<sup>60</sup> This meant that there was good authority on which to defend Ibn al-'Arabi; it also meant, though Thanawi did not say so, that particular ideas, even of those elders, would need to be taken with a grain of salt.

<sup>55</sup>On the idea of *tahqiq* and its opposition to that of *taqlid*, see Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Islamic intellectual history in the seventeenth century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 32–33, 173–203, 235–238, 321; Christian Blake Pye, 'The Sufi method behind the Mughal "peace with all religions": A study of Ibn 'Arabi's "tahqiq" in Abu al-Fazl's preface to the *Razmnama*', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 56, no. 3, 2022, pp. 902–923. For the rendering of *tahqiq* as 'realization', see Chittick, *Self-disclosure*, p. 96. For one sustained illustration of Ibn al-'Arabi's discussion of *tahqiq*, see Ibn al-'Arabi, *al-Futuhāt*, vol. 2, pp. 267–269 (Chapter 165); Chittick, *Self-disclosure*, pp. 96–98. I am grateful to Azfar Moin for his illuminating comments on this point.

<sup>56</sup>See Wali Allah, *al-Tafhimat*, vol. 1, pp. 40–55 (#15), where he uses several terms to somewhat similar effect, among them: *taswir* ('portrayal' [vol. 1, pp. 40–41]); *tawkid* ('confirmation' [vol. 1, pp. 41–44]); *ihata* ('comprehension' [vol. 1, pp. 45–48]); *iktinah* ('penetration' [vol. 1, pp. 48–49]); *hidaya* ('guidance' [vol. 1, pp. 50–51]); *tahqiq* ('realization' [vol. 1, pp. 51–52]); and *ta'lim* ('instruction' [vol. 1, pp. 52–53]). In this instance, these terms occur within the framework of a *tafhim* ('divine instruction').

<sup>57</sup>Following a well-worn genre of making collections of 40 hadith reports, Wali Allah brought together things that he had heard directly from the Prophet, in a dream or by way of 'witnessing his noble spirit'; some of these 40 reports also included what he had heard from others, including his father, uncle, and teachers in the Hijaz, at one, two, or more removes from the Prophet. See Shah Wali Allah, *al-Durr al-thamin fi mubashshirat al-nabi al-amin* (Arrah: Matba't Nur al-anwar, 1875). On the *mala al-a'la* and on the authentication of otherwise unreliable hadith reports, see nn. 18, 22, earlier.

<sup>58</sup>Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi, *Khusus al-kalim fi hall Fusus al-hikam* (Thana Bhawan: Ashraf al-matabi', n.d. [circa 1920]; reprinted Lahore: Nazir Sons, 1978); Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi, *al-Tanbih al-tarabi fi tanzih Ibn al-'Arabi* (Thana Bhawan: Ashraf al-matabi', 1927).

<sup>59</sup>Thanawi, *al-Tanbih*, p. 2; Thanawi, *Khusus al-kalim*, pp. 59, 64–65.

<sup>60</sup>Thanawi, *al-Tanbih*, p. 2.



Thanawi inhabited a world in which increasing numbers of his Muslim readers would have wanted religious assertions and arguments to be anchored not just in the foundational texts, but also for those texts to be adduced in straightforward ways rather than, say, by way of a mystic's privileged knowledge. Wali Allah's own grandson Shah Muhammad Isma'il (d. 1831) had moved decisively in that direction over the course of his career. Though some of his early writings show a deep influence of Ibn al-'Arabi, the most influential of his later books, *Strengthening the Faith (Taqwiyat al-iman)*, drew almost exclusively on the Quran and on hadith as the basis of what were to count as legitimate beliefs and practices.<sup>61</sup> English Protestantism may have had a role, too, in helping foreground scripture even in Muslim circles. William Fraser (d. 1835), an official of the East India Company who had befriended Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz, had once asked him to answer several legal questions and to do so in accordance with the Quran (*muwafiq-i Quran-i sharif*).<sup>62</sup> It is not clear whether 'Abd al-'Aziz understood what role Fraser's Protestantism had had in his placing this condition upon the request, but he obliged him nonetheless with scripturally anchored responses. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, Isma'il and Fraser were on the winning side, so to speak; arguments did need to be bolstered more explicitly than before by the Quran and hadith if they were to carry the requisite weight. The Wali Allah family's extensive investment in the foundational texts would serve it very well in the eyes of posterity. Between Wali Allah and his sons, three complete translations of the Quran had been produced—by Wali Allah in Persian and by Shah Rafi' al-din and Shah 'Abd al-Qadir (d. 1813) in Urdu; Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz, for his part, had authored a substantial, if incomplete, commentary on the Quran in Persian.<sup>63</sup> This was in addition to Wali Allah's extensive engagement, and that of 'Abd al-'Aziz, with the study of hadith. Such studies were of a piece, however, with the sort of Sufi thought and practice we have seen in the foregoing; that is the link that was under pressure by the late nineteenth century.

None of this is to say that there was any lack of scholars in Wali Allah's age who would have wanted to limit what mystical inspiration could do or mean for the law. The aforementioned Mulla Jiwan was one such scholar. An uncompromising guardian of school boundaries, he was firmly opposed to the idea that a Sufi could justify opting for legal doctrines that lay beyond his school of law on grounds of mystical inspiration (*ilham*). If that inspiration resulted in his adopting a doctrine that was not supported by any of the four schools of Sunni law, Mulla Jiwan said, then it was a satanic inspiration. But even if the doctrine in question fell within the purview of one of those schools, following it in preference to the stipulations of one's own school still led to corruption (*al-fasad*), for 'anyone could then assert that he had been inspired to do

<sup>61</sup> Shah Muhammad Isma'il, *Taqwiyat al-iman* (Lucknow: Naval Kishore, 1876).

<sup>62</sup> 'Abd al-'Aziz, *Fatawa*, vol. 1, p. 148. For the various questions and 'Abd al-'Aziz's responses, see *ibid.*, pp. 148–154. On Fraser, see, most recently, Gail Minault, 'East Indian misfortunes: The Fraser brothers and the early Raj', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, series 3, vol. 33, no. 4, 2023, pp. 1113–1125.

<sup>63</sup> For all three translations published as a single volume, see *Quran-i majid mutarjam bi'l-tarajim al-thalath* (Delhi: al-Matba' al-Mujtaba'i, 1872). For the commentary, see Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz, *Tafsir-i 'Azizi* (Bombay: Matba'-i Fath al-Karim, 1886 [comprising exegesis of Q 1 and Q 2, to Q 2. 184]); Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz, *Fath al-'Aziz* (Calcutta: Dar al-Imarat, 1833 [comprising the commentary on Chapters 67–77 of the Quran]); Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz, *Tafsir-i 'Azizi, para-yi 'Ammā* (N.p.: al-Matba' al-Muhammadi, 1891 [comprising the commentary on Q 78–114]).

such and so'.<sup>64</sup> For all his Wujudi sympathies, Wali Allah himself was keenly aware of their danger when in the wrong hands.<sup>65</sup> Conversely, in the early twentieth century, Thanawi drew on Sufi ideas in his fatwas: he could still suggest, for instance, that a child born to a woman whose husband had been away for the entire gestation period could be deemed legitimate, for a Sufi master may well have brought husband and wife together through his mystical prowess (*tasarruf*).<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, as a Sufi and a jurist, he had no doubt that a proper understanding of the law required a 'taste' (*dhawq*) that came from mystical insight.<sup>67</sup> Nonetheless, as he had observed in his comment on 'Abd al-'Aziz's defence of the 'urs ceremonies, it was the jurists, not the Sufis, that one followed in matters of the sacred law. That law itself had come to be reimagined to possess something like a code-like precision. It needed to rest on a clearly identifiable body of authoritative textual sources, and to be anything but the indeterminate and arbitrary complex of doctrine and practice that not a few colonial officials had alleged it to be.<sup>68</sup> A Sufism generative of legal insights, let alone scriptural unveilings, as mystics had experienced them from long before Ibn al-'Arabi's *Meccan Revelations* (*al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya*) would not have been conducive to this cause.

On occasion, Thanawi could appear to open doors in unexpected directions, only to shut them the more firmly. He quotes Ibn al-'Arabi to the effect that,

God has given to [the Prophet Muhammad's] successors [namely, the scholars] the standing of the prophets and the messengers. He has permitted ijthihad to them in [their] legal rulings, which signifies legislation on the basis of what the divine Lawgiver has said (*tashri'* 'an *khabar al-shari'*). Every mujtahid is correct [in his conclusions], just as every prophet is protected from error. Their ijthihad is their worship of God. It allows the community to have a share in the [continuing] legislation, it gives them [the mujtahids] a firm footing [in that legislation], and no one but the Prophet ... precedes them in this. The scholars of this community will be resurrected, as the protectors of the Prophet Muhammad's law, in the ranks of prophets, not in those of the communities of [more ordinary] people.<sup>69</sup>

Thanawi also quotes Ibn al-'Arabi to say that a mujtahid's ijthihad is his revelation (*wahy*); that God has forbidden him to go against the conclusions of his ijthihad, just as He has prohibited a prophet to act contrary to the revelation he has received; and that 'ijthihad is a breath from among the breaths of [divine] legislation, though it is not legislation as such' (*al-ijthihad nafha min nafahat al-tashri' ma huwa 'ayn al-tashri'*).<sup>70</sup>

<sup>64</sup>Mulla Jiwan, *al-Tafsirat al-Ahmadiyya fi bayan al-ayat al-shar'iyya* (Bombay: al-Matba' al-Karimiyya, 1909), p. 526. Yet Mulla Jiwan was himself a Sufi, with affiliations to the Qadiri and the Chishti orders and with several Sufi works to his credit. See al-Hasani, *Nuzha*, vol. 6, p. 21.

<sup>65</sup>For instance, Wali Allah, *Hama'at*, p. 141 (#14).

<sup>66</sup>Thanawi, *Imdad*, vol. 2, pp. 516–520.

<sup>67</sup>Zaman, *Ashraf'Ali Thanawi*, p. 87.

<sup>68</sup>See *ibid.*, pp. 57–78; Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The ulama in contemporary Islam: Custodians of change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 21–31.

<sup>69</sup>Ibn al-'Arabi, *al-Futuhat*, vol. 3, p. 400 (Chapter 369). The text as quoted in Thanawi, *Imdad*, vol. 6, pp. 15–16, shows some discrepancies with the original; I have translated directly from the *Futuhat*.

<sup>70</sup>Ibn al-'Arabi, *al-Futuhat*, vol. 1, pp. 545–546; quoted in Thanawi, *Imdad*, vol. 6, pp. 16–17.

Thanawi quotes these remarkable statements in the context of his discussion of whether Ibn al-'Arabi had held prophethood to continue after the death of the Prophet Muhammad; what such views might mean for the claims of the Ahmadiis, who believed that the founder of their community, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (d. 1908), had been a prophet; and whether Ibn al-'Arabi held the saints to be superior to prophets. As might be expected, Thanawi argues that Ibn al-'Arabi had been misunderstood and that the possibility of a saint's greater knowledge than a prophet's on some particular issue did not make him superior overall to prophets. He goes on to make the point that a master jurist, a mujtahid, was in fact superior to a saint in that his *ijtihad* was akin to a prophet's revelation.

Yet Thanawi's interest in this deeply mystical understanding of *ijtihad* serves only a rhetorical purpose, namely, to dispute the Ahmadi claims to a continuing prophethood (and, for good measure, to cut saints down to size); it is *not* to highlight possibilities of *ijtihad* itself, or even to expatiate on its scope.<sup>71</sup> Elsewhere, Thanawi makes it clear that, for all practical purposes, no one had been capable of *ijtihad* in any but the most limited sense since the fourth century of Islam (the tenth century CE), and that the best course of action was to adhere strictly to the norms of one's school of law, which meant the Hanafi school in case of the Muslims of India.<sup>72</sup> This disingenuous highlighting of the extraordinary rank of the mujtahid and its mystical inflection, all while closing the door to *ijtihad*, is very different from anything one finds in Wali Allah. That door clearly remained open for Wali Allah, as has been seen, and he would have agreed with Ibn al-'Arabi's formulation about *ijtihad* as animated by the breath of divine legislation. As Wali Allah had put it on one occasion, the 'legislative breath of the Merciful' (*al-nafas al-Rahmani al-tashri'i*) found different expressions in accordance with the capacities of its recipients, with people's customs and considerations of their general well-being giving to divine revelation the form appropriate to their circumstances.<sup>73</sup>

Thanawi's ambivalence towards Wali Allah and his descendants contrasts sharply with the views of 'Ubayd Allah Sindhi, a contemporary who had begun life as a Sikh, converted to Islam in his youth, had studied at the Deoband madrasa, and was a protégé of Mahmud Hasan (d. 1920), one of the most revered of Deoband's scholars. During the First World War, Sindhi and Mahmud Hasan became involved in an anti-colonial conspiracy, which took the former to Kabul and the latter to the Hijaz. The conspiracy was discovered, Mahmud Hasan was arrested in the Hijaz and interred in Malta for the remainder of the war, and Sindhi spent the next 22 years in exile, in the Soviet Union, Turkey, and then the Hijaz, before being allowed back to India on the eve of the Second World War.<sup>74</sup> Having been introduced by Mahmud Hasan to Wali Allah's work,

<sup>71</sup>See Thanawi, 'Iqamat al-tamma 'ala za'im ibqa al-nubuwwa al-haqiqiyya al-'amma', in Thanawi, *Imdad*, vol. 6, pp. 5–20.

<sup>72</sup>See Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi, *al-Iqtisad fi'l-taqlid wa'l-ijtihad* (Lahore: Idara-yi Islamiyyat, 1985).

<sup>73</sup>Wali Allah, *al-Khayr al-kathir*, pp. 104, 108. *Nafha* and *nafas* are both resonant mystical terms. Oddly, Thanawi (or, perhaps, Shafi', the editor) translates *nafha*, as it occurs in the foregoing passage from Ibn al-'Arabi, as branch or section ('... *ijtihad* is one of the branches [*shu'ba*; plural: *shu'ab*] of legislation...'), which serves to divest it of its mystical connotations.

<sup>74</sup>On Sindhi's life and thought, see Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Modern Islamic thought in a radical age: Religious authority and internal criticism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Sindhi found his thinking transformed by it.<sup>75</sup> It would be his lifelong companion; he wrote about it, taught it to his students, translated some of it into Urdu, and strove to disseminate it widely. His pupils would continue that effort long after his death.<sup>76</sup>

As Sindhi understood it, Wali Allah's thought could help solve several key problems facing the Muslims of colonial India. It had the depth and the breadth to serve as an authentically Islamic, yet homegrown, *Indian* source of guidance for people; looking to it, rather than only to authoritative voices elsewhere, could mitigate the lack of confidence that afflicted Muslim scholars in India.<sup>77</sup> Wali Allah was no mere symbol, however, in terms of which to forge an Indian Islamic identity. His writings spoke to the needs of Muslims, and not just in India. Sindhi found Wali Allah's understanding of the Quran, for instance, to be significantly more persuasive than that of the medieval exegetes in general, and Wali Allah's reflections on the exploitation of the poor offered, he believed, a path to action in the present.<sup>78</sup> Further, in identifying the core values as those that transcended any particular religion, but were shared rather by all humans, Wali Allah had provided a foundation for a new and genuine universalism; in the context of colonial India, that could help transcend religious divides among communities that often found themselves on the precipice of violence.<sup>79</sup> Finally, and contrary to many Sufis, no gulf separated the worldly and the religious or the mystical in Wali Allah's thought, and thus there was no warrant for the chronic escapism that had long enervated large swathes of Islamic thought. Instead, Sufism, as Wali Allah had explicated it, was the anchor of a robust worldly orientation.<sup>80</sup> It is on this last point, and what it meant for the relationship between the sacred law and Sufism, that I focus here.

Taking his inspiration from his father and uncle, who were both committed to the Unity of Being, Wali Allah had sought, according to Sindhi, to put that idea to use in reconciling the views of the philosophers, the Sufis, and the jurists with one another.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>75</sup>See 'Ubayd Allah Sindhi, 'Imam Wali Allah ki hikmat ka ijmalī ta'arūf', *al-Furqan* (Bareilly), vol. 7, 1941, pp. 235–320, at pp. 247–248. This article is part of a special issue on Wali Allah, with many Indian luminaries of the time contributing to it. An expanded version of this article was produced, in consultation with Sindhi, by his associate Muhammad Sarwar, *Shah Wali Allah awr unka falsafa* (Lahore: Sindh Sagar Academy, 1944).

<sup>76</sup>For Sindhi's Urdu translation of one of Wali Allah's works, *al-Khayr al-kathir*, see n. 22, earlier. He also produced a commentary on a portion of the *Hujjat Allah al-baligha*: 'Ubayd Allah Sindhi, *Hujjat Allah al-baligha: Urdu Sharh-i Hujjat Allah al-baligha*, (ed.) Shaykh Bashir Ahmad (Lahore: Bayt al-hikma, 1950). He was instrumental as well in the publication of the *Musawwa*, Wali Allah's Arabic commentary on the *Muwatta*.

<sup>77</sup>Sindhi, 'Imam Wali Allah', pp. 318–320.

<sup>78</sup>For the point about the Quran, see *ibid.*, pp. 243–263. On Wali Allah's economic thought, as Sindhi understood it, see Zaman, *Modern Islamic thought*, pp. 223–230.

<sup>79</sup>Cf. 'Ubayd Allah Sindhi, *Hizb-i imam Wali Allah Dihlawi ki ijmalī ta'rikh ka muqaddima* (Lahore: Kitab khana-yi Punjab, 1942), p. 212. A fuller version of this book was compiled by Muhammad Sarwar, *Shah Wali Allah awr unki siyasi tahrir* (Lahore: Sindh Sagar Academy, 1944).

<sup>80</sup>Sindhi, 'Imam Wali Allah', pp. 314–315. As a key example of how the worldly and the religious come together in Wali Allah's work, Sindhi draws attention to how the discussion of civilizational evolution (*irtifaqat*) is organized in his *Conclusive argument* in terms of categories drawn from practical philosophy (*hikmat-i 'amali*), with relevant hadith reports explicated in that context. Sindhi, 'Imam Wali Allah', pp. 241–242.

<sup>81</sup>Sindhi, 'Imam Wali Allah', p. 237.

His desire to bring the Hanafi and the Shafi'i schools of law closer to each other was itself inspired by it: the fact that his father and uncle were Wujudis while being Hanafis, and his teacher in the Hijaz, Abu Tahir Muhammad (d. 1733), and the latter's father, Ibrahim al-Kurani (d. 1690), were Shafi'is but also Wujudis, meant that, from the vantage of the ultimate reality, there was no great difference between those schools of law.<sup>82</sup> More fundamentally, the heart, the spirit, and the intellect—what the Sufis called the 'three salient subtleties' (*lata'if-i thalatha-yi bariza*)—are all simultaneously oriented towards the body itself, which is the dimension that the sacred law regulates and seeks to cultivate, and towards the hereafter, the dimension with which philosophy and mysticism assist. As Wali Allah had put it memorably, with Sindhi reprising it, this is akin to a dying camel whose heart, spirit, and mind have all but given way, yet it keeps walking in a line of camels until the very moment that it falls dead. Though the law is concerned primarily with the outward and the external (*zahir*)—in this case, the actions of the camel's limbs—those other faculties are inseparable from the body until its last moment.<sup>83</sup> Further, moral perfection itself depends upon suitable material conditions, a realization that had eluded many Sufis and ethicists, but one that Wali Allah had highlighted in his writings.<sup>84</sup>

Sindhi's elucidation of Wali Allah's work is guided throughout by his conviction that, for the latter, law and Sufism are 'two colors of the same thing, two fruits of the same tree'.<sup>85</sup> Of all the interpreters of Wali Allah, he is perhaps the most evocative in this regard. He was cognizant, however, that other influential voices were resistant to the implications of this idea. 'Revivalists' that he had met in the Hijaz tended, he tells us, to have a high regard for Wali Allah's work in the areas of Quranic studies, hadith, and law, but not for his Sufism, for they felt that it would draw them to 'Iranianism and Indianism' (*iraniyyat awr hindiyyat*). They believed, he says, without naming them, that a continuing conflict between the 'Semitic' and the 'Aryan' peoples was necessary for their own claims to leadership. 'Sufism (*tasawwuf*) was altogether ignored in their propaganda [sic, using the English word] among Indian Muslims, with the result that those among the latter who were influenced by such propaganda were not able to benefit from the work of their own religious leaders (*a'imma*).'<sup>86</sup>

Yet Sindhi, too, appears to have found some aspects of Wali Allah's Sufism to be unpalatable. The kind of devotional practices—*fatiha*, seeking the help of dead saints (*istimdad*), discerning the future through particular prayers and practices, 'urs—that Wali Allah and his sons had endorsed and often engaged in are passed over in what is clearly a studied silence in Sindhi's writings.<sup>87</sup> Late in life, and remarkably for a

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 238.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., pp. 314–315. For the passage that he is referring to, see Shah Wali Allah, *Altaf al-quds*, with parallel Urdu translation (Delhi: Matba'-i Ahmadi, n. d. [1894]), p. 30.

<sup>84</sup>Sindhi, 'Imam Wali Allah', p. 320.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 315.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 318. Sindhi may be referring here to the Cairo-based Syrian journalist and scholar Muhammad Rashid Rida (d. 1935) and his associates. He had met Rida on the occasion of the latter's visit to India in 1912 and his associate Shakib Arslan in Switzerland in 1926. See Zaman, *Modern Islamic thought*, pp. 11, 16.

<sup>87</sup>Following Wali Allah, Sindhi did acknowledge the role of custom in social life, but he was not thinking in that context of the kinds of custom-based devotional practices that were anathema to the Deobandis. See Muhammad Sarwar, *Mawlana 'Ubayd Allah Sindhi: Halat-i zindagi, ta'limat awr siyasi afkar* (Lahore: Sindh Sagar Academy, 1943), pp. 45–47.

man who had dedicated much of it to popularizing Wali Allah's thought, Sindhi had acknowledged to Dr Zakir Husain (d. 1969)—then the vice chancellor of the Jamia Millia of Delhi and subsequently the president of India—that there were many things in Wali Allah's writings that were incorrect.<sup>88</sup>

In equal parts scholar and activist, Sindhi was keen to find an audience among college-educated Muslims. He believed that, with Wali Allah's help, he could bring to them a new, dynamic, and compelling understanding of Islam.<sup>89</sup> His critics accused him of misinterpreting Wali Allah in the process. There is little doubt that he had an axe to grind, though he may have been truer to many of Wali Allah's ideas than those critics wished to acknowledge.<sup>90</sup> Even so, his search for new audiences—a hurried quest, following his return from a long exile—had put him on the path to an excessive simplification of some highly complex ideas. *Wahdat al-wujud*, for instance, was not only scrubbed clean of what some in his time would have seen as its outlandish expressions, it also became the basis of the unity of all religions. Wali Allah's thought, in turn, showed how to reconcile rival positions: the Unity of Being and Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi's (d. 1624) Unity of Witnessing (*wahdat al-shuhud*); even the religious universalism of the Mughal emperor Akbar, putatively based on the Unity of Being, and the exclusionary, Muslim-focused, policies of the emperor Aurangzeb, guided by Sirhindi's views.<sup>91</sup> Sindhi was hardly alone in such simplifications, but for a scholar of his depth of learning to engage in them made him an easy target for his opponents. One result was that the generative relationship between Sufism and law that he had sought to highlight on the basis of his reading of Wali Allah would come to have a significantly smaller purchase than it might have otherwise.

How did the college-educated Muslims, and other modernists committed to rethinking Islamic scriptural and legal norms in conditions of Western political and intellectual domination, view Wali Allah? Sindhi, too, despite his Deobandi credentials, shared that commitment and thus exemplifies some of the fluidity of boundaries between the 'ulama and the early modernists. Three other figures are briefly worth considering, however, for what they illustrate of the increasingly fraught relationship between Sufism and other facets of Islam—including, but, for this part of our discussion, not limited to law—in colonial and post-colonial South Asia.

Wali Allah and 'Abd al-'Aziz feature prominently in the writings of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the pioneering modernist of colonial India. He spoke of them reverently and

<sup>88</sup>Muhammad Sarwar (ed.), *Ifadat wa malfuzat-i hazrat mawlana 'Ubayd Allah Sindhi* (Lahore: Sindh Sagar Academy, 1972), p. 207.

<sup>89</sup>See, for instance, Sindhi, 'Imam Wali Allah', pp. 246–250, esp. p. 250.

<sup>90</sup>See Zaman, *Modern Islamic thought*, pp. 62–65; see also *ibid.*, pp. 236–238.

<sup>91</sup>For his thoughts in this regard, see Sindhi's inaugural address to the District Congress Committee conference, Thatta, 12 July 1940, in Muhammad Sarwar (ed.), *Khutbat wa maqalat-i Mawlana 'Ubayd Allah Sindhi* (Lahore: Sindh Sagar Academy, 1970), p. 111; *ibid.*, p. 97 (presidential address to Jam'iyyat 'Ulama-i Hind, Bengal, Calcutta, 3 June 1939); Sarwar, *Mawlana 'Ubayd Allah Sindhi*, pp. 359–367. For a critic's denial that Wujudi ideas were central to Wali Allah's thought, see Mas'ud 'Alam Nadwi, *Mawlana Sindhi awr unke afkar wa khayalat par aik nazar* (Patna, n.p., n.d. [1944]), pp. 119–122. When this wide-ranging critique first appeared, Sindhi wrote back to say that the author 'needed prolonged study in order to understand the question of wahdat al-wujud'. Letter to Mas'ud 'Alam Nadwi, 14 August 1943, in Abu Salman Shahjahanpuri (ed.), *Makatib-i Mawlana 'Ubayd Allah Sindhi* (Karachi: Mawlana 'Ubayd Allah Sindhi Academy, 1997), p. 48.

he mustered their authority to his own views where he could. For instance, he cited 'Abd al-'Aziz extensively in arguing that it was permissible to eat with the People of the Book, here referring primarily to the English.<sup>92</sup> He quoted Wali Allah for the view that no age ought to be without its mujtahid.<sup>93</sup> More germane to the present discussion, he invoked him in support of his own rejection of prophetic miracles.<sup>94</sup> Yet, inasmuch as Sayyid Ahmad wanted to make a theologically consistent case for a reading of scripture that discounted the supernatural, he was all too aware that Wali Allah was an unreliable ally. Wali Allah could cast doubt on the occurrence of Muhammad's famous miracle of splitting the moon: 'It is not necessary that the "splitting" be decidedly the splitting of the moon itself. Rather, it is possible that it might have been like smoke, a shooting star (*inqidad al-kawkab*), and solar and lunar eclipse, which people see in the atmosphere.'<sup>95</sup> Even so, as Sayyid Ahmad observed, this did not lead Wali Allah to dispute the idea of prophetic miracle as such.<sup>96</sup> In the final analysis, Wali Allah had sought 'to fit the discussion [of miracles] into Sufism's imaginary mold (*sancha-yi mawhum*)' but, in Sayyid Ahmad's judgement, 'such discourses do not persuade people of this age'.<sup>97</sup>

Though Sayyid Ahmad does not say so, the question of miracles is a useful illustration of Wali Allah's broader approach, in which mystical and rationalistic explanations can go hand in hand. Wali Allah observes, for instance, that when God breaks with the natural order of things, He tends to do so within the framework of nature itself, howsoever tenuous the causal connection might appear to be. He draws an analogy to a physician who might deem a patient's ailment too minor to require treatment, but when the patient dies, that ailment becomes the proximate cause of what is ultimately God's decree.<sup>98</sup> God works through nature, yet His ways cannot be reduced to it. Wali Allah leaves his readers in little doubt that just as reason is a guide to understanding the ways of God, so is mystical unveiling. For his part, Sayyid Ahmad sought precisely to untether from Sufism his own understanding of Islam as a religion in perfect accord with nature and reason, finding himself in the unhappy position of simultaneously invoking Wali Allah and dissociating himself from him.

<sup>92</sup>For the references to him on this and other scores, see Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Ahkam-i ta'am-i ahl-i kitab* (Aligarh: Matba'at al-'ulum, 1899), pp. 22–24, 29, 37–38, 43, 51, 65–66. The reverence for 'Abd al-'Aziz comes across clearly in Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Asar al-sanadid*, (ed.) Khaliq Anjum, 3 vols (Delhi: Urdu Academy, 1990), vol. 2, pp. 55–60.

<sup>93</sup>Sayyid Ahmad Khan, 'Ahl-i sunnat wa'l-jama'at ke liye mujtahid ki zarurat', in *Maqalat-i Sir Sayyid*, (ed.), Muhammad Isma'il Panipati, 16 vols (Lahore: Majlis-i taraqqi-yi adab, 1984), vol. 1, pp. 290–291, quoting the second part of Wali Allah's *Intibah fi salasil awliya Allah*. This part has been published separately under the title *Ithaf al-nabih fima yahtaj ilayhi al-muhaddith wa'l-faqih*, (ed.) Muhammad 'Ata Allah Hanif Bhojiani (Lahore: al-Maktaba al-salafiyya, 1969); for the passage Sayyid Ahmad quotes, see *ibid.*, pp. 104–105.

<sup>94</sup>Sayyid Ahmad Khan, 'An-hazrat awr sudur-i mu'jizat', in *Maqalat*, (ed.) Panipati, vol. 13, pp. 106–132. See also Sayyid Ahmad Khan, 'Mu'jize ki haqiqat', in *ibid.*, pp. 78–91.

<sup>95</sup>Shah Wali Allah, *Ta'wil al-ahadith* (Delhi: Matba'-i Ahmadi, n.d.), pp. 81–82.

<sup>96</sup>Sayyid Ahmad Khan, 'An-hazrat awr sudur-i mu'jizat', in *Maqalat*, (ed.) Panipati, vol. 13, pp. 108–109. He quotes Wali Allah's *Tafhimat* in noting the latter's view that the splitting of the moon was no miracle. I have not been able to locate that passage in the *Tafhimat*, and Sayyid Ahmad does not refer to the passage from Wali Allah's *Ta'wil* that I have quoted here.

<sup>97</sup>Sayyid Ahmad Khan, 'An-hazrat awr sudur-i mu'jizat', in *Maqalat*, (ed.) Panipati, vol. 13, p. 109.

<sup>98</sup>Wali Allah, *Ta'wil*, pp. 8–9.

Ironically, Sayyid Ahmad was deeply uncomfortable even with Wali Allah's view that a prophet's mission could have worldly and political dimensions. This is ironic because Sayyid Ahmad had sought an understanding of Islam that facilitated Muslims' material success in the colonial economy, an understanding that did not hold them back from it, as he feared the 'ulama's pronouncements did. He commended Wali Allah for the view that a prophet's message—Muhammad's being his case in point—was tailored to the specific cultural norms of his audience, that this was so even in the rituals he had instituted. 'This discussion of Shah Wali Allah comes close to what people of this age think, whom the 'ulama and the sacred personages of our age call infidel, atheist, apostate, and unbeliever ... I do not know what they call Shah Wali Allah...' <sup>99</sup> Even so, he rejected Wali Allah's view that there could be varied goals for which God might depute a prophet, including—as in the case of Muhammad—bringing an end to existing empires and creating a new empire to buttress the prophet's religion: 'We seek protection in God [from it]! This is not my belief,' Sayyid Ahmad said, using a phrase in Arabic. The *only* purpose towards which a prophet worked, he said, was 'the refinement of the human soul (*tahdhib-i nafs-i insani*)—nothing else'. <sup>100</sup> His worry was that if worldly matters (*dunyawi mu'amalat*) were brought within the ambit of the sacred law, they too, like the fundamental principles of religion, would be rendered immune from change. Even if the rulings governing those worldly matters purported only to have been derived from the core principles themselves, the 'ulama would be prone to error in such deductions, just as Jewish and Christian authorities of old had been. If prophets had been deputed to remedy the ill effects of those earlier errors, he asked, why should there be no new prophet to do so in case of the 'ulama's mistakes? <sup>101</sup> The Ahmadis would have answered this rhetorical question in their own way. Sayyid Ahmad's implied answer to it was that since there were to be no further prophets after Muhammad, there was no way of definitively correcting the 'ulama's inevitable errors except to exclude worldly matters from their purview to begin with. Wali Allah, too, had been critical of his contemporary 'ulama, blaming them for making the practice of Islam onerous, and he, too, saw this as the result of the 'ulama's and the Sufis' rendering many more things binding upon people than God and the Prophet had intended. <sup>102</sup> His solution to the problem was not, however, to limit the purview of religion as a way of restricting the range of things on which the jurists and the Sufis could speak authoritatively. Instead, it was to show how the sacred law furthered human well-being (*maslaha*), not just in the hereafter but in *this* world, with the implication that things that were contrary to such well-being were not part of God's design in the first place. This 'worldliness' of the law, as we might characterize it, was anchored, like much else in Wali Allah's legal and social thought, in his mysticism. For it was through a deeply mystical reading of hadith that he had been able to see, and to demonstrate at great length in his *Conclusive Argument*, how the sacred law consistently furthered human well-being. <sup>103</sup> Sayyid Ahmad, on the other hand, had reservations about hadith as a reliable source of

<sup>99</sup>Sayyid Ahmad Khan, 'An-hazrat awr sudur-i mu'jizat', in *Maqalat*, (ed.) Panipati, vol. 13, p. 127.

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 120–121.

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>102</sup>Wali Allah, *al-Tafhimat*, vol. 1, pp. 276–284.

<sup>103</sup>See Wali Allah, *Hujjat Allah*, vol. 1, pp. 27–56, and especially vol. 2 of this work; Hermansen, *Conclusive argument*, pp. 3–29.



normative authority, let alone about any effort to anchor a this-worldly understanding of human well-being in it; as for Sufism, he seldom referred to it in his prolific writings in the decades following 1857, and even less in a positive vein.<sup>104</sup>

Writing a generation later, the modernist philosopher Muhammad Iqbal did not share Sayyid Ahmad's misgivings about the implications of Wali Allah's legal thought. 'The task before the modern Muslim is ... immense,' he wrote in his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. 'He has to rethink the whole system of Islam without completely breaking with the past. Perhaps the first Muslim who felt the urge of the new spirit in him was Shah Wali Allah of Delhi.'<sup>105</sup> Iqbal specifically invoked Wali Allah for the idea that the rulings of the sacred law that a prophet instituted in his immediate milieu were meant only to illustrate universal principles, which was to say that 'the Shari'at values (Ahkam) resulting from this application (e.g. rules relating to penalties for crimes) are in a sense specific to that people; and since their observance is not an end in itself they cannot be strictly enforced in the case of future generations'.<sup>106</sup>

When it came to Wali Allah's Sufism, however, Iqbal had a decidedly mixed view. Writing to an associate in 1916, he had observed that doctrines like the Unity of Being and the Unity of Witnessing resulted from a misconstruing of religion, which was meant to be practised rather than to serve merely as an intellectual pursuit. 'Even if its [i.e. religion's] goal were the fulfilment of intellectual demands—as supposed by Hindu rishis and philosophers—that [goal] should be ignored in view of present conditions. In this age, the only nation that would survive is the one that holds on to its practical traditions.' In this context, he had vaguely praised Wali Allah for countering the atheists (*malahida*) of his time and for setting them straight.<sup>107</sup> Yet, on perusing Wali Allah's *Tafhimat al-Ilahiyya*, first published in 1936, he wrote to Sayyid Sulayman Nadwi (d. 1953) that he was 'deeply disappointed' by it.<sup>108</sup> This book, an anthology of Wali Allah's writings and statements put together by his disciple and biographer Muhammad 'Ashiq Phulati, is in fact one of our most important sources on his thought. Iqbal did not say what had disappointed him about it, but it is a good guess that he did not warm to its Sufi themes, let alone to how Wali Allah recounts his mystical experiences in it. Wali Allah's aforementioned letter, which speaks of one's seeing God in the guise, *inter alia*, of a handsome youth is part of the *Tafhimat*, too.<sup>109</sup> The Unity of Being informs his perspective throughout, and it does so even when he strives to reconcile it with Sirhindi's Unity of Witnessing.<sup>110</sup> On numerous occasions

<sup>104</sup>On his sparse references to Sufism, see Christian W. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A reinterpretation of Islamic theology* (Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1978), pp. 220–221, n. 125. For his views on hadith, see *ibid.*, pp. 131–143.

<sup>105</sup>Mohammad Iqbal, *The reconstruction of religious thought in Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 92.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 163. Cf. Wali Allah, *Hujjat Allah*, vol. 1, pp. 237–238; Hermansen, *Conclusive argument*, pp. 341–342.

<sup>107</sup>Iqbal to Niyaz al-din Khan, 11 September 1916, in *Maktab-i Iqbal ba-nam Khan Niyaz al-din Khan* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1986), pp. 24–25, at p. 24.

<sup>108</sup>Iqbal to Sayyid Sulayman Nadwi, 19 May 1937, in Muhammad 'Abdallah Qurayshi, *Ruh-i maktab-i Iqbal* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1977), p. 699. The book was published by al-Majlis al-'ilmi of Dabhel, Gujarat.

<sup>109</sup>Wali Allah, *al-Tafhimat*, vol. 1, pp. 38–40 (#14). The name of the addressee, Shah Nur Allah, is omitted in this version.

<sup>110</sup>For such efforts at reconciliation, see *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 261–284.

in the book, some examples of which have been seen earlier, Wali Allah lays claims to a privileged understanding of the sacred law by way of a mystical unveiling (*kashf*).<sup>111</sup> Iqbal acknowledged that Sufism had much to offer on ethics and religious practice, but 'it was only through the writings of the master jurists (*a'imma*) and the 'ulama', he wrote in 1916, 'that one could access the true reality of religion... The Sufis themselves say that the shari'a is the "external" (*zahir*) and Sufism the "internal". However, in this tumultuous age, the very external, of which the internal is Sufism, is in peril.' Muslims, he said, could only survive through strict adherence to their sacred law, much like Hindus had, through 'blind adherence to the laws of Manu', in the aftermath of the Muslim conquest of India.<sup>112</sup> He would drastically modify this commendation of blind adherence to the law in his famous lecture on *ijtihad*, published as part of the *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, in which he invoked Wali Allah's view that later generations of Muslims ought to be spared the stringency of the law's first articulation. Yet any acknowledgement that there was, or ought to be, a mutually constitutive relationship between Sufism and law would have been counterproductive to how Iqbal thought Muslims needed to live their lives in the present.

To turn to our final example, Aziz Ahmad, the distinguished intellectual historian of Muslim South Asia, does not tell us in his academic writing what he thought of Wali Allah's mysticism, but we catch a tantalizing glimpse of it in his personal library.<sup>113</sup> In annotations on the margins of an Urdu translation of Wali Allah's *Effusions of the Two Sanctuaries* (*Fuyud al-haramayn*), he scribbled with some frequency the words 'spiritual paranoia', in English, when he came across Wali Allah's descriptions of his mystical experiences in the Hijaz.<sup>114</sup> Some of those experiences had to do with Wali Allah's encounters, during his stay in Medina, with the spirit of the Prophet Muhammad. Significantly, they were not without relevance to legal matters. In one such encounter, Wali Allah had wanted to know if the Prophet preferred a particular school of law over the others; the answer was that he did not. The only thing that displeased the Prophet in this regard, he was told, was conflict among votaries of the different schools.<sup>115</sup> Here mystical experience is the basis of Wali Allah's signature concern with reconciling disagreements among the Sunni schools of law and with drawing upon their collective resources to make the practice of the faith less cumbersome for people. In an Indian context marked by strict fidelity to the Hanafi school of law, this was hardly a trivial move, not least for the challenge it posed to the structures of scholarly authority anchored in school tradition. What Aziz Ahmad saw in his private reading as spiritual paranoia did not affect his overall understanding of Wali Allah's project, which, he tells us, was to 'rehabilitate the theory and practice of orthodox Sunni belief' at a

<sup>111</sup>For instance, see *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 202–212; and see nn. 11, 16, earlier.

<sup>112</sup>Iqbal to Niyaz al-din Khan, 13 February 1916, in *Makatib-i Iqbal ba-nam Khan Niyaz al-din Khan*, p. 20.

<sup>113</sup>Notable among Ahmad's writings are Aziz Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic culture in the Indian environment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964); A. Ahmad, *Islamic modernism in India and Pakistan, 1857–1964* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967); and A. Ahmad, *An intellectual history of Islam in India* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1969).

<sup>114</sup>The words appear on the margins of Sarwar, *Mushahadat wa ma'arif*, at pp. 57, 119, 127, 150, 156, 160, 229, 233 and 297. This was Aziz Ahmad's personal copy of the book (signed and dated: 'Montreal, March 1963), and it is now part of the University of Toronto's library collections.

<sup>115</sup>Wali Allah, *Fuyud*, pp. 28–34, at pp. 30–31; Sarwar, *Mushahadat wa ma'arif*, pp. 119–131, at pp. 123–125.

time of 'the religio-ethical disintegration of Islam'.<sup>116</sup> He does not neglect Wali Allah's Sufi writings. But it is precisely the bracketing of mystical experience from that project that is striking. Equally remarkable is Ahmad's view of the Hijaz in the age of Wali Allah as 'unmystical'.<sup>117</sup> Yet that is where Wali Allah had had some of his most intense mystical experiences, memorialized soon afterward in his *Effusions of the Two Sanctuaries*. Years later, Wali Allah's *Conclusive Argument*—among the most important of his legal works—was itself inspired by a mystical experience:

While I was sitting one day after the afternoon prayer with my concentration turned to God, the spirit of the Prophet ... made a sudden appearance, covering me from above with something, as though a robe had been thrown over me. In that state, it was blown into my heart (*nufitha fi ru'i*) that this was a sign [for me] to expound the religion in some fashion. At the time, I felt a light in my breast that has continued to grow. Subsequently, God inspired me that what He had decreed for me with the exalted pen was that one day I would embark upon this manifest task.<sup>118</sup>

There is no compelling reason to doubt that such experiences were deeply meaningful to Wali Allah, or to discount the role they may have had in his thinking about issues beyond the mystical.

There were significant intellectual differences between Thanawi and Sindhi and between Sindhi and Iqbal, let alone between Thanawi and Sayyid Ahmad Khan. They also differed from one another in how they viewed Wali Allah. What they shared, however, was a suspicion of the kind of Sufism that Wali Allah had represented, and a recognition of the need to insulate other aspects of his legacy from it. This remained the case even when, as Barbara Metcalf puts it, 'the characteristic religious specialist of the nineteenth century, whether based in khanaqah [Sufi hospice] or madrasah, was at once 'alim and shaikh'.<sup>119</sup> Sindhi would have concurred, insisting that law and Sufism were 'fruits of the same tree'; so would Thanawi, among the most influential Sufis and traditionalist jurists in twentieth-century South Asia. The point is, however, that what that 'alim and shaykh represented to Sindhi and Thanawi was not what they had meant to Wali Allah.<sup>120</sup>

In modern South Asia, the burden of continuing the kind of devotional Sufi practices common in Wali Allah's household has tended to be carried disproportionately by the Barelawis. As one scholar of that orientation put it, referring to Wali Allah's *Beautiful Statement Regarding the Straight Path (al-Qawl al-jamil fi bayan sawa al-sabil)*,

<sup>116</sup>Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic culture*, p. 201.

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>118</sup>Wali Allah, *Hujjat Allah*, vol. 1, p. 33; translation based, in part, on Hermansen, *Conclusive argument*, p. 7.

<sup>119</sup>Metcalf, *Islamic revival*, p. 351.

<sup>120</sup>See also Morgan, 'Spokesman', esp. pp. 29, 144–151, 330, for the argument that readings of Wali Allah as a progenitor of later reformist trends are anachronistic in misrepresenting some of his key interests.

it is a book whose entire content and the [Sufi] practices [detailed in it] are what our 'monotheists' view as the Barelawis' contrived path, one that they see as opposed to the Prophet's normative example. Those associated with the Sufi hospices in the subcontinent, as well as ordinary believers, are subjected to [adverse] fatwas on the basis of such practices. But if one is to really speak the truth, irrespective of what opposition it might provoke, then why give a free pass to Shah Wali Allah? If these practices are what constitute the Barelawi orientation, then the subcontinent has never seen a Barelawi like Shah Wali Allah!<sup>121</sup>

Yet even the Barelawis have made little effort to develop a framework in which law and Sufism would reinforce each other in anything like the manner they did in Wali Allah's thought. Instead, they have sometimes quietly omitted material from Urdu translations of Wali Allah's writings that would have seemed to strengthen appropriations of his legacy in a different—more legalistic, even Ahl-i hadith or Salafi—direction. A notable example is Wali Allah's testament (*wasiyya*), which is part of Muhammad 'Ashiq Phulati's biography, but is omitted in the Urdu translation of it.<sup>122</sup> In this testament, Wali Allah had exhorted his audience to hold firmly to the Quran and the normative example of the Prophet, adhere to the beliefs of the early Sunnis (*qudama-yi ahl-i sunnat*), desist from the kind of theological discussion that the pious forbears (*salaf*) had avoided, and follow the ways of the hadith scholars in evaluating the specifics of the law in terms of the foundational texts. He had also urged them to shun those who engaged in bad innovations; not be deluded by their supernatural acts, which was mere magic (*tilismat wa niranjat*), for the most part; and to not think, as many did, that extinguishing oneself (*fana*) into God and the like were the real goal, and shari'a rulings relating to worship and worldly life were meant only for those who could not aspire to better things. One might be tempted to think that Wali Allah had become more 'scripturalist' in his last years, but similar ideas are found in his earlier writings, too.<sup>123</sup> And Muhammad 'Ashiq, whose biography includes the full range of materials relating to the master's thought and activities, clearly did not believe that there was anything anomalous about the testament or, for that matter, about any of Wali Allah's other ideas and practices.

Wali Allah is a household name in modern Muslim South Asia, enjoying, perhaps, greater name recognition since the late nineteenth century than he had in the

<sup>121</sup>Muhamad Faruq al-Qadiri, 'Preface', in *Rasa'il-i Shah Wali Allah Dihlawi* (Lahore: Tasawwuf Foundation, 1999), pp. 9–31, at pp. 18–19. This volume contains al-Qadiri's Urdu translation of three works by Wali Allah: *al-Qawl al-jamil*, *Intibah*, and *al-Durr al-thamin*. The translator was then based at a Qadiri Sufi convent, the Khanqah-i 'Aliyya Qadiriyya in Shahabad, Rahim Yar Khan, in the Pakistani Punjab.

<sup>122</sup>For the text of the testament in the original biography, see Phulati, *al-Qawl al-jali*, pp. 349–357. For its absence in the Urdu translation, see the translation into Urdu by Muhammad Taqi Anwar 'Alawi, *al-Qawl al-jali fi manaqib al-wali* (Lahore: Shakir Publications, 1999), p. 463 (where the text of the testament would have been expected).

<sup>123</sup>See, for instance, Shah Wali Allah, *al-Qawl al-jamil ma'a sharhih Shifa al-'alil*, Arabic text with Urdu translation by Khurram 'Ali (Kanpur: Matba'-i Ahmadi, 1895), pp. 138–139. Shaykh Abu Tahir Muhammad, from whom Wali Allah had acquired some highly prized authorizations to narrate hadith while in Medina between September 1731 and February 1732, had in turn read *al-Qawl al-jamil* with Wali Allah. See Phulati, *al-Qawl al-jali*, p. 47. This suggests that Wali Allah had already written that work prior to his arrival in the Hijaz.

decades following his death.<sup>124</sup> Those helping to curate his image have often worked at cross-purposes, but a result of their labours has been, paradoxically, to both cement his legacy and to fragment it. For all the celebrations of how law and Sufism enrich each other, a distinctive feature of this legacy is an understanding of Islam in which the two stand warily at a carefully demarcated distance from each other.

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<sup>124</sup>Muhammad Karim Allah, the copyist of Wali Allah's ode in praise of the Prophet Muhammad, refers to him in a manuscript dated 1820 as 'my master Wali Allah, *the father of* Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz'. Shah Wali Allah, 'al-Qasida al-ba'iyya', British Library, Delhi Arabic 1273b, f. 57b (emphasis mine). The copyist's name and the date are mentioned elsewhere in the manuscript (f. 45a). An early edition of Wali Allah's book on the principles of exegesis likewise introduces him, on its title page, as 'Abd al-'Aziz's father: Shah Wali Allah, *al-Fawz al-kabir fi usul al-tafsir*, (ed.) 'Abdallah b. Bahadur 'Ali (Hooghly: Matba'-i Ahmadi, 1833). That Wali Allah may have been rather less widely known in his own age than he is today does not necessarily say anything, however, about the intrinsic interest or significance of his work.

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