

# **The Islamic Reform Movement in Eighteenth-Century South Asia; Focusing on Shāh Walī Allāh's Thought and Practice**

Year: 2009

Place of fieldwork: Republic of India, Islamic Republic of Pakistan

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Key Words: Psychology, History of Thought, Political Philosophy, Islamic Reform Movement, South Asia

## **Research background**

Shāh Walī Allāh was born in Delhi in 1703. Hindu customs were widespread among Muslims in India in his time. Walī Allāh criticized these customs and suggested going back to the Qur'ān. Walī Allāh is regarded as one of the earliest theorists of the Islamic reform movement.

In regard to this movement, previous studies have focused on Walī Allāh's contemporaries, such as Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb (1703–1791), who strictly denied Sufism (Islamic mysticism). In contrast to al-Wahhāb, Walī Allāh was a mystic.

In brief, the political philosophy of Walī Allāh is based on gradual development. He believed that society would progress through the spiritual development of the citizens. This idea may have come from the psychology of Sufism and ancient Greek philosophy.

## **Research purpose and aim**

The purpose of this research is to clarify the relationship of Walī Allāh's political and Sufi practice to his writings. In particular, *Alṭaf al-quds* and *Tafhīmāt ilāhīya* are important in order to understand his theory of psychology.

Unfortunately, no libraries in Japan have *Alṭaf al-quds* and *Tafhīmāt ilāhīya*. Therefore, this fieldwork aimed to collect his books. In addition, research documents pertaining to Walī Allāh were also collected. Places of fieldwork were Delhi and Aligarh in India and Lahore and Islamabad in Pakistan.

## **Fieldwork results and achievements**

- From 5 to 9 September 2011: Aligarh, India

Manuscript research was conducted in Maulana Azad Library of Aligarh Muslim University. This library has a published book of *Alṭaf al-quds* and they gave me a digital copy. I also found five manuscripts of *Tafhīmāt ilāhīya* and checked their compositions. Further comparative research is needed. This university published four books about Walī Allāh, which are available through the publishing division.



Picture No. 1: The director of the Manuscripts Division. He holds Aurangzeb's sword.

• From 9 to 14 September 2011: Delhi, India

Delhi is where Walī Allāh's tomb is located. When I visited there, I was fortunate enough to meet both the grave keeper and the manager of the affiliated school. Their small publishing house has three books related to Walī Allāh that are written in Urdu.



Picture No. 2: In the foreground is the tomb of Walī Allāh. One hundred people visit there each day.

I also visited Dār al-‘Ulūm Deobandī, which is approximately 130 km from Delhi. The founder said that this school teaches the beliefs of Walī Allāh. Dār al-‘Ulūm Deobandī consists of a mosque, a Qur’ān school, a dormitory, and so on.



Picture No. 3: The library of Dār al-‘Ulūm Deobandī has 184,000 books.

- From 14 to 18 September 2011: Lahore, Pakistan

Panjab University allowed me to copy the published book of *Tafhīmāt*.

- From 18 to 21 September 2011: Islamabad, Pakistan

International Islamic University has some research documents on Walī Allāh and some of them are available through their publishing division.

### **Implications and impacts on future research**

The primary purpose, collecting books related to Walī Allāh, was fully achieved. Bookshops in India and Pakistan, however, did not deal with the published original texts in Arabic or Persian. This may be a result of the current language situation in South Asia. Urdu is the dominant language employed for Islamic studies in this area. Learning Urdu would be necessary to conduct contemporary research.

Further research on manuscripts in the Maulana Azad Library will further the analysis of Walī Allāh’s psychology.