

Quranic Orientation of Deobandi *Taṣawwuf* with Special Reference to Mawlānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī (R.A.)

Sumeera Nisar

Research Scholar, Shah-I-Hamadan Institute of Islamic Studies, University of Kashmir

Abstract

Islam has its way and system of redefining. It is identified by new study and examination executed taking into consideration the improvement in knowledge with the evolved comprehension of the Quran, Hadith, agreement of the recognized imams besides the principles of reason and intellection. This system of rethinking and redefining is spread across Tafsīr, theology, fiqh, taṣawwuf, philosophy, and socio-political thought. In this paper, we shall attempt to present below the understandings and assessments of Mawlānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī (رحمة الله) concerning Quran oriented or centric Taṣawwuf.

Keywords: Quran, Taṣawwuf, Thānvī, Understanding, and Deoband.

Article Publication

Published Online: 20-Feb-2022

*Author's Correspondence

Sumeera Nisar

Research Scholar

sumeera909@gmail.com

doi [10.31305/rrjm.2022.v07.i02.010](https://doi.org/10.31305/rrjm.2022.v07.i02.010)

© 2022 The Authors. Published by RESEARCH REVIEW International Journal of Multidisciplinary. This is an open access article under the CC BY-

NC-ND license 

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)

Introduction

Mawlānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī (رحمة الله) is renowned by his epithet all over the Muslim world namely *Hakīm al-Ummah* (the sage or physician of Muslim Ummah)¹. He is also called as “*Mulḥiq al-Aṣāghir bi al-Akābir* in Deoband.”² One of his biographers extolled him as “*the sage of the Muslim community and the spiritual guide of contemporary Indian Muslim Scholars.*”³ Mawlānā Thānvī (رحمة الله) was a leading theologian, jurist, orator, sūfī master, and social reformer of colonial India. His works run into hundreds and his influence upon the Indian Muslim society was enormous. Therefore, his life and works with iconoclastic training and *shuyūkh* and his associates as well as his thought need to be analyzed thoroughly.

Family Background and Birth

Mawlānā Thānvī (رحمة الله) was born on 5 Rabī‘al-Ākhir 1280 A.H. (19 September 1863C.E.) in a small sector, Khayl of the town Thāna Bhawan, district Muzaffar Nagar, state, U.P, India.⁴ Both his paternal and maternal families grew up in Thāna Bhawan from centuries before his birth. His father namely ‘Abdul-Ḥaqq was a prosperous man,

¹ Ghawrī, Khawajah ‘Aziz al-Ḥasan. (2009). *Ashraf al-Savāniḥ*. 4 vols. Maktabah Thānvī Deoband-247554. Saharanpur, UP, India. Vol 1, p.31.

² Bashir, Aamir. (2010, 2013). *Shari‘at and Tariqat: A Study of the Deobandi Understanding and Practice of Tasawwuf*, International Institute Of Islamic Thought And Civilization (ISTAC), Dissertation For M.A. Degree In Islamic And Other Civilization. Dār al-Sa‘adah publication, p. 99.

³ See Al-Nadawi, Muḥammad Rahmat Allah. (2008) *Ashraf ‘Alī al-Thānvī: Hakīm al-Umma wa Shaykh-u-Mashā‘iri al-‘Asrī’ l-Hind*. Damascus. Dar al-Qalam.

⁴ Ghawrī, op.cit. Vol 1. p.43.

in addition to being sound in Persian, was an excellent author, could recite the Glorious Qur'ān finely and he was able to understand people.⁵ His familial genealogy is traced back to Ḥaḍrat 'Umar (رضي الله عنه) on his father's side and with Ḥaḍrat 'Alī (رضي الله عنه), on his mother's side. He was born in an affluent, flourishing, knowledgeable, sophisticated, dignified, and reverential family.⁶

Early life and Education

Mawlānā Thānvī's mother passed away when he was only five years old and as such the entire accountability of nourishing, bringing up, and refining him as well as his younger brother, Akbar 'Alī fell on the shoulders of his father from the very start.⁷ His father looked after his sons with immense concern, discipline, friendliness, and love and always strived to keep them in worldly ease and comforts. Bearing in mind the faculties, natural capacities/ aptitudes and preferences of his two sons, 'Abd al-Ḥaqq very grippingly decided a "worldly" profession for his younger son, taming him in government schools where he learned English and the modern sciences (and became a lower-level bureaucrat in the colonial administration). The elder son, Ashraf 'Alī, was selected for a conventional and classic Islamic education⁸ (which led him to the madrasa of Deoband and become a religious scholar). He visualized for his son to be an expert of *al-'ulūm al-'arabiyya* (the sciences of Arabic), short for numerous religious subjects, like *'ulūm al-Tafsīr* (the science of exegesis), *'ulūm al-fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence), and *'ulūm al-ḥadīth* (ḥadīth sciences). He, as a result, approved for Mawlānā Thānvī (رحمة الله), to get hold of the fundamental acquaintance of Arabic and Persian language and literature in his native land of Thāna Bhawan, before registering him for meticulous and scrupulous reading at the Deoband.⁹ He initiated his normal academic line of business in Meerut under the supervision of Ḥāfiẓ Husain 'Alī, with whom he studied preliminary sciences and learned by heart the entire text of the Holy Qur'ān. Mawlānā Thānvī (رحمة الله) studied Persian works from his maternal uncle, Wājīd 'Alī, a specialist of Persian language and Mawlānā Fatih in Thāna Bhawan.¹⁰

Mawlānā Thānvī (رحمة الله) in his adolescence was zealous for the daily *ṣalāh* and even used to wake up for *Ṭabajjud* during the late hours of the night. As a young person, he trained himself with the skill of public speaking in the local maṣjid at whatever time it was vacant.¹¹ Mawlānā Thānvī (رحمة الله) took a position of direction when surrounded by his playground friends.

Islam has its way and system of redefining. It is identified by new study and examination executed taking into consideration the improvement in knowledge with the evolved comprehension of the Quran, Hadith, agreement of the recognized *imams* besides the principles of reason and intellection. This system of rethinking and redefining is spread across *Tafsīr*, theology, *fiqh*, *taṣawwuf*, philosophy, and socio-political thought. We shall attempt to present below the understandings and assessments of Mawlānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī (رحمة الله).

Mawlānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī (رحمة الله) on *Taṣawwuf*

While amplifying the real essence of *Tariqah*, he informed us concerning things that are not compulsory in *taṣawwuf*. Amongst these, he lists *kashf* (unveiling), *tawīẓ* (amulets), *karāmah* (miracle) for materialistic pursuits or worldly pursuits, absolute elimination of all vices, astonishing spiritual states, seeing lights while remembrance of Allāh (سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى), beatific visions, accurate inspirations (*ilbām*), and Shaykh's taking accountability for someone's exoneration on the Day of Judgment.¹² The core thrust of Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī's (رحمة الله) descriptions is

⁵ Ghawrī, op.cit. Vol 1. p.32 & 57.

⁶ Ghawrī, op.cit. Vol 1. p.32.

⁷ Ghawrī, op.cit. Vol 1. p.46.

⁸ Ghawrī. Vol 1. p.46.

⁹ Ghawrī. Vol 1. p.28.

¹⁰ Ghawrī. Vol 1. p.27.

¹¹ Ghawrī. Vol. 1. p. 24.

¹² Thānvī, Ashraf 'Alī. *Al-Takashshuf 'an Muḥimmāt al-Taṣawwuf*. Kutub Khāna Maẓharī. Karāchī. p.7.

the indispensable goals of *taṣawwuf*.¹³ Other things that are by and large allied with *taṣawwuf* but are not fundamental to *taṣawwuf* are negated so that the adherent can have honest intentions focusing only on the imperative goals of *taṣawwuf*.

Mawlānā Thānvī (رحمة الله) has emphatically affirmed that he in no way intellectually gave attention or priority to *'ulūm al-mukashafah* (sciences of unveilings); relatively he was apt to *'ulūm al-mu'āmala* (sciences of actions). He thinks that the former has no function to take part in achieving nearness to Allāh, while the latter is related to guidelines and prohibitions and has an unswerving part in serving one to achieve closeness to Allāh.¹⁴ Understandably, *taṣawwuf* is a multifarious phenomenon. Consequently, *taṣawwuf* as perceived by Mawlānā Thānvī (رحمة الله) comes to one thing: the quest for the pleasure of Allāh. ¹⁵ To achieve this, one must have *ta'alluq ma'a Allāh*, which means that one ought to attempt to be assiduously cognizant of Him which is *iḥsān*. To accomplish *iḥsān*, one must purify oneself of malice and beautify oneself with praiseworthy character. This is *tazkiyat al-nafs*. Furthermore, for one to uphold *ta'alluq ma'a Allāh* and be respected by Him one must close down all forbidden stuff by Him. This is obedience to the commandments of *Shari'ah* both on the exterior and on the inside. One must be persistently heedful of His orders and prohibitions. To sum up *taṣawwuf* pervades Islām and is the spirit of Islām.

Purpose of Taṣawwuf

The principle purpose of *taṣawwuf* is to search for the contentment of Allāh. Afterward, there are two points; understanding of the way and following that. So, the approach is only one, i.e., obeying the outer and inner commands of *Shari'ah*. Two points which assist on the path; (a) the quantity of *dhikr*, which one can do frequently; (b) staying in the companionship of those who are people of Allāh as much as possible. If one does not have the time for going through this profusely, then one can study the biographies (life histories) and sayings of the rightly guided ones as a replacement for this. Two things are hurdles on the path, bad deeds or sins, and being involved in ineffectual actions. One very vital thing that's meticulousness in informing the *Shaykh* of one's state. At this moment, depending on the aptitude of the person, he will attain the purpose sooner or later. This is the outline of the "path."¹⁶ Mawlānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī (رحمة الله) had also articulated in his masterpiece *al-Takashshuf* that the prime point of *taṣawwuf* is *iṣlah-e-a 'mal-e-batini* that means restructuring the acts of the heart or mending / perfecting the inner actions.¹⁷

Development of science of Sufism

Mawlānā Thānvī (رحمة الله) has also put some light on the progress of the discipline of *taṣawwuf*. He holds that during the epoch of the Prophet (ﷺ), the disciplines of *Tafsīr*, *ḥadīth* or *uṣūl al-fiqh*, etc., were not branched. Afterward, classification was done and several sciences originated from the *Qur'an* and *ḥadīth* and each was given a different name. Just as other derived sciences received a specific name such as the science of *fiqh* and science of *ḥadīth*; likewise, the given name of the "way" or the "path" formulated by shaykhs was known as Sufism. The one who studies *Sharh al-Wiqayah* or *al-Hidayah* is called the learner or student of *fiqh*. Similarly, a person who learns the science of *ḥadīth* or *Tafsīr*, it is not presumed that he is learning science of *fiqh*, even though *fiqh* had many *'ulūms* in it such as *'ulūm al-ḥadīth*, *'ulūmul*, *kalām*, etc. Likewise, if a person goes behind the path of the Sūfī teacher, we say he is studying Sufism or it is said that he is a ṣūfī. Someone who just offers salah or goes for fasting can't be called as a ṣūfī although Sufism in its comprehensive sense contains all of this. He further adds that the way *Kanz al-daqa'iq* and *al-Hidayah* are indispensable; in the same way, it is crucial to learn the work of Abū Talib Makkī namely

¹³ That's the two main pillars, *Tawḥīd* and following the *Sunnah*, gnosis of the Divine, love for Allāh and establishing a connection with Him. Other important dimensions of Deobandī *taṣawwuf* are *Ikhlāṣ*, *Imān*, *Ihsan*, *Taqwā* and *Tazkiyat al-Nafs*.

¹⁴ Thānvī, Ashraf 'Alī. (1346 AH). *Al-Tanbih al-Tarabi fi Tanziḥ Ibn al-'Arabi*. Thana Bhavan. Matba'ah Ashraf al-Matabi. p.1. Cf., Bashir, Aamir. (2013). *Shari'at and Tariqat: A Study of the Deobandī Understanding and Practice of Taṣawwuf*. ISTAC. p.155.

¹⁵ Thānvī, Ashraf 'Alī. (n.d.). *Tarbiyyat al-Sālik*. Karāchī. Dār-ul-Isha 'at. n.d. Vol 1. p.7. [Urdu].

¹⁶ Thānvī, Ashraf 'Alī. (n.d.). *Malfūzāt Kamālāt-e-Ashrafia*. Karāchī. Maktaba Thānvī. p. 23. [Urd]

¹⁷ Thānvī, Ashraf 'Alī. (n.d.). *Al-Takashshuf 'an Mubimmāt al-Taṣawwuf*. Karāchī. kutub Khāna Mazharī. p.256, (Urdu).

Qūt al-qulūb, Imām al Ghazālī's (رحمة الله) book called as *al-Arba'ūn* along with Shaykh Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi's (رحمة الله) work termed as '*Amārif al-ma'arif*'.¹⁸

Significance of Classical Shaykhs

Mawlānā Thānvī (رحمة الله) makes the following of a classical shaykh prerequisite for anyone who wants to understand *Sufism*. The initiators of the above-mentioned traditional sciences of Islam were accredited as Imams by all. Bearing in mind Imām Abū Ḥanīfā's (رحمة الله) knowledge of the science of *fiqh*, Imām al-Shāfi'ī (رحمة الله) was strained to declare that Muslims require Imam Abū Ḥanāfi (رحمة الله) in the field of *fiqh*. Imam al-Bukhārī was recognized as an Imam; furthermore, even today his scholarship in science of *ḥadīth* is renowned. In the same way, there have been such pious people who have been approved as the leading figures in the discipline of *taṣawwuf* like Junayd Baghdādī, Shaykh Abd al-Qadir Jilani (رحمة الله) known as the shaykh of shaykhs, Khawajah Baha' al-Din Naqshband (رحمة الله) —founder of Naqshbandī order, Khawajah Mu'īn al-Din Chishtī (رحمة الله) —founder of Chishti order in south Asia also known as Khwaja Ghareeb Nawaz (رحمة الله) and Shaykh Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi (رحمة الله) —author of '*Amārif ul-Ma'arif*', so on. The afterward generations cannot do anything in affairs of *Shari'ah* exclusive of following the preceding ones; equally, in *Sufism*, there is not a single method above and beyond following the traditional masters of the way even though, the lowest rank of purification of self which shows the way to *Najat* can be achieved without following the shaykhs of the path. Nevertheless, that which is preferred and is the flawlessness and excellence of *taẓkiyat al-nafs* cannot be attained except with the companionship of the *shuyukhs* or masters.¹⁹

Conclusion

Deobandī movement was essentially a reform (*Islah*) and renewal movement. Amongst the Deobandī elders Rashid Ahmad Gangohi was the most important figure with respect to *taṣawwuf*. His work was further expanded by Mawlānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī (رحمة الله), who has the best claim to be a *Mujaddid* amongst all Deobandīs. This Deobandī movement sought to clarify the misconceptions and sought to in the minds of many about *Shariah* and *Taṣawwuf*; and sought to re-establish the clear and simple teachings of Islam. The works of Thānvī's display the clear understanding of the various aspects of *Shariah*. Deobandī focus on the original sources of *Shariah* to justify the goals of *taṣawwuf* had in it the potential to bridge the divide between the externalist and the sufis.

¹⁸ Din, Muḥammad. (1981). *Shari'at-o-Tariqat*. Lahore. Idāra-e-Islamiyat. pp.41-42.

¹⁹ Ibid.