

## INTRODUCTIONNNN

The first of the great reformers, Sheikh Ahmad Sarhindi al-Farooqi an-Naqshbandi, was born in Sarhind on June 26, 1564. He belonged to a devout Muslim family that claimed descent from Hazrat Umar Farooq (RA). His father Sheikh Abdul Ahad was a well-known sufi of his times. Sheikh Ahmad received his basic education at home. His initial instructions in the Holy Quran, Hadith and theology were rendered in Sarhind and Sialkot. Later, he devoted most of his time to the study of Hadith, Tafseer and philosophy. He worked for some time in Lahore as well. But the greater part of his life was spent in Sarhind, where he was to become the champion of Islamic values. It was not until he was 36 years old that he went to Delhi and joined the Naqshbandiya Silsilah under the discipleship of Khawaja Baqi Billah.

During this period the Muslims in India had become so deficient in the knowledge of true Islam that they had more belief in Karamat or miracles of the saints than Islamic teachings. The Ulema and theologians of the time had ceased to refer to the Quran and Hadith in their commentaries, and considered jurisprudence the only religious knowledge. Akbar, the Mughal king had started a series of experiments with Islam, propagating his own religion Din-i-Ilahi, an amalgamation of Hindu and Muslim beliefs. In these circumstances, Sheikh Ahmad set upon himself the task of purifying the Muslim society. His aim was to rid Islam of the accretions of Hindu Pantheism. He was highly critical of the philosophy of Wahdat-ul Wujud, against which he gave his philosophy of Wahdat-ush-Shuhud.

He entered into correspondence with Muslim scholars and clerics and laid stress on following the true contours of Islam. To him, mysticism without Shariah was misleading. He stressed the importance of Namaz and fasting. Through preaching, discussions and his maktubat addressed to important nobles and leaders of religious thought, he spread his message amongst the elite in particular. As he and his followers also worked in the imperial camp and army, he was soon noticed by Jehangir. Jehangir, unlike his father, was a more orthodox Muslim. But he still insisted on full prostration by all his subjects. Sheikh Ahmad refused to prostrate before him, as result of which he was imprisoned at Gwalior Fort for two years until the Emperor realized his mistake. Jehangir then not only released Sheikh Ahmad, but also recalled him to Agra. Jehangir thereafter retracted all un-Islamic laws implemented by Akbar.

Sheikh Ahmad's greatest contribution was undoubtedly the task of countering unorthodox Sufism and mystic beliefs. He organized the

Naqshbandiya order to reform the society and spread the Shariah among the people. He wrote many books, including his famous works, *Isbat-ul-Nabat* and *Risal-i-Nabuwat*. His greatest work on Islamic philosophy was the *Tauheed-i-Shuhudi*. Sheikh Ahmad continued preaching Islam till the end of his days. He urged people to adhere to the accepted and clearly laid down path of Islam. He passed away in 1624.

## Movement for Revival of Islam

Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi's preaching and revival was a reaction to the secular policies of Mughal emperor Akbar. He denounced Akbar's policy of *sull-i kull* (mixing of religions), and Akbar's reign as one where "the sun of guidance was hidden behind the veil of error." Sirhindi believed that "what is outside the path shown by the prophet (Sharia) is forbidden." He wrote, "Cow-sacrifice in India is the noblest of Islamic practices. The kafirs (i.e. the Hindus) may probably agree to pay *jiziya* but they shall never concede to cow-sacrifice."

However, Yohanan Friedmann has argued that there is no evidence that Sirhindi or his disciples spread "anti-Hindu sentiments wherever they went."

## Importance of Sharia vs. Sufism

According to Simon Digby, "modern hagiographical literature emphasizes [Sirhindi's] reiterated profession of strict Islamic orthodoxy, his exaltation of the sharia and exhortations towards its observance." On the other hand, Yohanan Friedmann questions how committed Sirhindi was to sharia, commenting: "it is noteworthy that while Sirhindi never wearies of describing the minutest details of Sufi experience, his exhortations to comply with the shariah remain general to an extreme." Friedmann also claims "Sirhindi was primarily a Sufi interested first and foremost in questions of mysticism."

## Oneness of being (*wahdat al-wujūd*)

Sirhindi strongly opposed the mystical doctrine known as *wahdat al-wujūd* ('unity of being') or *tawhīd-i wujūdi*, a concept which emphasizes that in reality all things exist within God. Nonetheless, he did not hold a particularly unfavorable view of the sufi mystic and theoretician Muhyī 'l-Dīn ibn Arabī, who is often presented as the originator and most complete propounder of this philosophy. Sirhindi writes:

"I wonder that Shaykh Muhyī 'l-Dīn appears in vision to be one of those with whom God is pleased, while most his ideas which differ from the doctrines of the People of truth appear to be wrong and mistaken. It seems that since they are due to error in *kashf*, he has been forgiven... I consider him as one of those with whom God is well-pleased; on the other hand, I believe that all his ideas in which he opposes (the people of truth) are wrong and harmful." In refuting the monistic position of *wahdat al-wujūd*, he instead advanced the notion of *wahdat ash-shuhūd* (oneness of appearance). According to this doctrine, the experience of unity between God and creation is purely subjective and occurs only in the mind of the Sufi who has reached the state of "*fana' fillāh*" (extinction in God).

### Rejection of innovation (*bid'ah*)

Sirhindi opposed innovation, or *bid'ah*, in religion, and even rejected the concept of *bid'ah hasanah* or 'good innovation,' as stated in his epistles, the *Maktūbāt*. Notably, he prohibited his followers from celebrating the *Mawlid*, a standard Sufi practice. Syed Abū 'l-Hasan Nadwī writes:

"When he was asked whether there was any objection to such gatherings (*Milad*) if they were not attended by any ritual against the approved religious practices, he answered: "This poorling is of the opinion that unless this practice is completely given up, the interested persons would not cease taking advantage of it. If the practise is declared lawful, it would gradually lead to finding justification for other innovations also. Even a small mistake becomes a prelude to grave errors.""

### Works

Most famous of his works are a collection of 536 letters, collectively entitled *Collected Letters* or *Maktūbāt*, to the Mughal rulers and other contemporaries. It consists of three volumes. An elaborate printing of the

book was accomplished in 1973 in Nazimabad, Karachi, Pakistan. It was reproduced by offset process in Istanbul, Turkey. A copy of the Persian version exists in the library of the Columbia University. Maktubat was rendered into the Arabic language by Muhammad Murad Qazani, and the Arabic version was printed in two volumes in the printhouse called Miriyya and located in the city of Mekka. A copy of the Arabic version occupies number 53 in the municipality library in Bayezid, Istanbul. It was reproduced by offset process in 1963, in Istanbul. A number of the books written by Ahmad Sirhindi were reprinted in Karachi. Of those books, Ithbāt-un-nubuwwa was reproduced by offset process in Istanbul in 1974. The marginal notes on the book, which is in Arabic, provide a biography of Ahmad Sirhindi.