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SHARIAT AND TARIQAT IN THE THOUGHT OF MAULANA ASHRAF ALI THANVI

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Introduction

Maulana Ashraf ali Thanvi, was an exponent of Islamic Moral Philosophy and Tasawwuf, conditions high among the Muslim intellectuals of his time and conquers a different position between them. He was basically left no field of Islamic knowledge and its diverse features in their various glooms of thought. Which he has not discovered and clarified. He is a comprehensive author who had a profound perception into Islamic views and as such has allocated with them in aspect touching virtually every feature, i.e., Social, Economical, political, mental, moral and spiritual and has allocated to its suitable place, value and weight from the view point of directions of The Qur'an and Sunnah of Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and the sayings of great saints and sages who had a deep insight into Islamic teachings.

Shariat and Tariqat march together. They are inter-related and inter-connected. The one represents Imam's outward aspect. There must be unity, uniformity, coherence and co-ordination between the two sides. One's outward conduct must be motivated by pure and sincere intention from within to achieve the universal ends and thus to attain nearness to God. Inner purity, self-surrender to His will and towards one's attitude towards life in consonance with it is Tasawwuf in the real sense of the term. Thus, Maulana Thanvi deals with the varied phases of Tasawwuf, their intricacies and subtleties separately and independently, analyses their essentials and assigns to each stage and state its particular position and then on synthesis gives a comprehensive view about Tasawwuf which in other words he calls meaningful jurisprudence constituting integral part of Shariah.

Shariah and Tariqah

The literally meaning of Shariah is the method to the basis of water from where water is fetched. However, as a term it means the religious guidelines carried by Allah through the Prophet (S.A.W.) to his people, by his words or actions, to properly regulate and manage their affairs in this world and the Hereafter. Since the Shariah is the manifestation of Allah's compassion, which is common to all, God Almighty has benefited the entire humanity by sending His messengers to all of them.¹

Sufi orders signify one of the most essential systems of private devoutness and societal association in the Islamic world. In most areas, an order is called a Tariqah, which is the Arabic word for "path" or "way". The term Tariqah is used for both the societal association and the exceptional prayerful exercises that are the basis of the order's ritual and structure. As a result, the Sufi orders or Tariqahs include a broad field of events in Muslim history and culture.²

The Shariah has three parts: Knowledge, action and sincerity of motive (Ikhlas); unless you fulfil the demands of all their parts, you do not follow the Shariah. By following the Shariah one obtains the pleasure of God, which is the most supreme good in this world and the Hereafter. The Qur'an says: the pleasure of God is the highest good. Hence, the Shariah comprehends all the good of this world and the next, and nothing is left out for which one has to go beyond the Shariah.³

The Tariqah and the Haqiqah for which the Sufis are known, are obedient to the Shariah, as they help to recognize its third part, namely, seriousness. Hence, they are required in order to accomplish the Shariah, not to complete something beyond the Shariah. The raptures and trances which the Sufis experience, and the ideas and truths which come to them in the course of their journey, are not the good of Sufism are fed. One has to pass over them all and reach the stage of satisfaction (Rida) which is the final goal of suluk. The resolve of crossing the stages of Tariqah and Haqiqah is nothing other than the realization of Ikhlas which involves the attainment of Rida, only one out of a thousand Sufis is graced with the three decorations and gnostic ideas, given Ikhlas and an important to the stage of Rida.⁴

¹Dr. Hyder Reza Zabet, *An Introduction to Islamic Mysticism*, Publisher WelayatFoundation, New Delhi, India, 2016, p. 42.

²John. L. Espito, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, Oxford University Press, 2009, V. 5, p. 216.

³Dr. Muhammed Abdul Haq Ansari, *Sufism and Shari'ah: A Study of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi's Effort to Reform Sufism*, M. M.I. Publishers, New Delhi, India, 1997, p. 221.

⁴Ibid., p. 222.



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Biographical Sketch

Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi, referred by many Muslims as **Hakim al Ummah** [Spiritual physician of the Muslim Ummah], and the **Mujaddid e Millet** [Reform of the Nation], was a towering figure of Islamic revival and re-awakening of the twentieth century. Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi became the most eminent religious personality of his time, a prolific writer and the greatest Sufi of Modern India. He was at once a Mujaddid, Muhadith, Faqih, Imam of Tasawwuf and an outstanding writer. He laid a very active life teaching, preaching, writing, lecturing and making occasional journey. He belonged to a period when Muslims were physically intellectually under attack by the western colonial powers and the Ary-e-samaj Hinduism.⁵

A great traditionalist and moralist Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi was born in Thana Bhawan a village in the Muzaffarnagar District of the U.P., province of India, in 19th August 1863. His family was well respected and held an eminent position in Thana Bhawan. His early education started in Meerut. He studied Arabic, Persian as well as the memorized the Holy Qur'an. Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi entered in Deoband and studied there for five years. His literary life began at Dar ul Uloom Deoband and that he wrote a Mathnavi titled as "Zeero – bam", in Persian language at the age of eighteenth. For fourteenth years he was a teacher in Madrasa "Faiz e Aam, in Kanpur", taught, wrote, and gave sermons and issued Fatwa. From the early days of his educational life, he was very much impressed by Maulana Rasheed Ahmed Gangohi. Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi was a prolific writer. His library contribution ranges from 800 to 1000 works,⁶ in the shape of sermons discussion discourses treaties and books. His works on Tasawwuf, Fiqha, Hadith, Tafseer, Mantiq etc. are of outstanding nature. Most of his books are in Urdu, Arabic and Persian.⁷

Maulana Thanvi's sermons were written, while they were delivered from city to city and shown to Maulana and published, Muslims benefitted from them. These contained Islamic rules and regulations, stoppage of innovations, facts and figures interesting topics etc. Normally, lectures discussed were about Islamic worship, but Maulana also talked about morals, dealings, practical daily life in his sermons. He kept this in mind in his training of Sulook and Tariqah as well, which was forgotten for centuries.⁸

Maulana Thanvi passed away in his home town of Thana Bhawan, in July 19th and 20th 1943 A.D.⁹

Thanvi's Thought to Shariah and Tariqah

According to Ashraf Ali Thanvi, Shariat is a very wide term which extends and includes the intact field of human actions in all their transformed stages and systems. It defines, recognizes and conditions of decent, venerable and praiseworthy ethical conduct and physical, mental, moral and spiritual plains and combines in itself three main different but closely linked aspects. He explains the afore-said occurrence on the equivalence of a tourist who expects to assume a trip. First is the tourist himself, second is the equipage and decorations essential for the path and third is the purpose – the final goal, the objective which he wants to attain and reach. Shariat therefore, is the combination of these three basics to smooth the Salik or the seeker of the path to reach the purpose of his pursuit. Shariat, being the Divine Law, is un-alterable and un-changeable; no human activity can change it or make any flourishes or variation in it.¹⁰

There are five fundamentals of Islamic Shariat. The first of them is the belief in God Almighty and in His unity called Tauhid and in the Prophet (S.A.W.) not by vocal occupation only but by heart that whatever God and the last Prophet (S.A.W) has said is certainly correct. The second ingredient is that of Ibadat i.e., offering of prayers, observance of fasts, giving the poor Zakat and performance and pilgrimage (Hajj). The third ingredient is that of Muamilat i.e., mutual dealings in different aspects of life, viz, that of marriage and divorce, purchase and sale, lease and contract, cultivation, etc. The fourth ingredient deals with social problems as to how to conduct oneself in society in its different fields. The fifth is Tasawwuf which denotes self-reformation (tazaki-a-Nafs).¹¹

On the other hand, it should not come down to the level that one may begin to restrain one's self from one's lawful wedded wife and may abandon things made lawful for him for one's up keep and necessary maintenance. In between these two states is the third state of reasonableness and balanced conduct. In other words, the balanced conduct is that conduct which is in accordance with

⁵ Muhammad Abdullah, Life and Works of Maulana Mujaddid Ashraf Ali Thanvi Rah. Adam Publishers, New Delhi, 1997, p. 05.

⁶ Ibid., p. 08.

⁷ Ibid., p. 60.

⁸ Ibid., p. 69.

⁹ Ahmed Ali Khawaja, Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi: His views on Religious and Moral Philosophy, and Tasawwuf. National Hijra council Islamabad, Islamabad, 1988, p. 08.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 09.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 10.



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the laws of Shariat and as such as normal and accepted in its import. Therefore, every power and potentiality in human personality involves of three characteristics that of concentration, of decrease and diminution and of moderation and normality.¹²

“You have become ascetic and a mystic and at the same time a venerable saintly guide. You have become all that but alas you have not become a man (Insan) in the real sense of its term”.¹³

Maulana Thanvi states his views in above phrase, in plain terms that the real spirit of Islamic instructions, as laid down in the Qur’an and the traditions of the Prophet of Islam (S.A.W), is to convert a human-being into a (real) man in its true sense, This can only be done when a man approves a moderate and reasonable arrogance in daily activities of one’s practical life in conformity with the laws of Shariat – its tenets and teachings are the criteria for every man to act, up to it for establishing a sound social order and proper, normal, natural and rational lines. Shariat being self-contained embraces all the different aspects of life and directs one to the goal of peace, affluence and success in every sphere of life and affords its followers real pleasure physical, mental and spiritual.

Shariat, as defined above, is the sum of all the rules and regulations and embraces all the activities on the part of an agent, and prescribes the method and criteria of such activities to be followed to achieve the desired goal. Tareeqat reflects and represents its inward aspect. In other words, it suggests the means and methods to be adopted free from outward show and display, for the cleanliness and refinement of the self and its inward development.¹⁴

In fact, the very purpose and significance of following Islamic tenets seemingly in its outward from is to transform one’s very being to higher levels and bring about complete modification of one’s inner-self. Thus, Shariat, in its outward manifestation, must lead to the inward change and that can only be achieved and attained when every act on the part of the agent is associated with pure intention and good motive. from the above discussion it is clear that Shariat and Tareeqat must go together and as such neither of them can be dispensed with at any stage of human activity. The principles of Tasawwuf are clearly laid down in the Qur’an and the Traditions of the Prophet of Islam (S.A.W).

Those who struggle this view are incorrect and deceived. It is quite clear from the text of the Qur’an that where there are restrictions for performance of prayers has been mentioned that it keeps one away from acts of indecency and such other activities which are prohibited and disapproved by the Islamic Shariah. The purpose of observing fasts has been clearly indicated in the words “so that you may become pious”. Similarly, so many other directions of the Qur’an are accompanied with their spirit in view.¹⁵

Analysis

Imam of Tasawwuf and Mujaddid of Tariqah, as he was introduced and engaged in wide program, of teaching and exercise for self-purification and self-reformation of his disciples. He conducted training and teaching program for every class of peoples. These programs were quite easy to follow. He qualified his followers in such way as than principles and manners are automatically improved. Allah gave him keen vision into the problems of Sulook. He approved easy management and knowledge for sickness, which were there because of ignorance of Islamic teaching among the peoples.¹⁶

If we analyse the human nature, we find that man has been created with three different powers. His disposition consists of the instincts, the emotions and the intellect. With the dominance and guidance of the faculty of intellect in him over the first two his activities are normalized. Shariat requires man to follow moderate and natural course of conduct and that is the way to salvation.¹⁷

He paid great attention to correction of morality. He used to say that Zikr (remembrance of Allah) is useful and great and poorness of morality and deeds are such a curtain which prevents the spreading of their influences in the soul therefore, unless morality and deeds are set right, remembrance of Allah has little effect. He said if someone remembers Allah, and appreciates him, when his morality and deeds are right, remembrance of Allah brings pleasure but good deeds bring pain on you that such fulfill the right and duties of others. Prof Muhammad. Abdullah has quoted him saying “I used to give more attention to morality and

¹² Ibid., p. 11.

¹³ Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁶ Mohammad Abdullah, Islamic Tasawwuf: Shariah and Tariqah Mysticism (Sufism) from Qur’an and Hadith according to Mujaddid Thanvi, Adam Publishers and Distributers New Delhi, India, 2003, p.7.

¹⁷ Op. cit., Ahmed Ali Khawaja, p. 11.



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religiousness than teaching. I do not look much if somebody prayed with congregation, maybe he has an excuse but anything immoral or improper or source of trouble bothers me very much.”¹⁸

During training he would tell in detail and clearly what were the limits of the Murred and what was beyond limits of the Salik. When someone would present his weakness as he would ask whether it is within limits of the person or beyond limits. If the reply was within limits, then he would say leave it, use your foundations and power. If the answer was beyond limits, then he advised to forget it. He used to say these things within limits and beyond limits is half sulook or really full sulook. This understanding made it easy to follow the difficulties of Shariah and Tariqah.¹⁹

Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi advised his trainees to examine his daily life and to keep an eye oneself as to how his desire works with people and how in his relationship with Allah his good and bad deeds work. He said every Muslim daily life deal with three things.

1. Rights and duties, which are rules of Shariah,
2. Limits, which are following the Sunnah.
3. Safeguards of the limits, which are all as Tariqah.²⁰

The job of a Shaikh in Tariqah is to purify the self of the seeker. For this, he suggests the seeker should tell his condition and follow him. Maulana Thanvi examined the minor weakness of seekers and corrected them. He did not ignore them. He looked also at their good points. He used to meet every one very politely and simply.

Conclusion

“Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi explained the objectives very clearly. He wanted to create the companions’ spirit and did create to some extent. For the attainment of nobility and humanity he pointed towards hidden progress and for worldly life, he pointed also towards Sharia and Tariqah. In his training includes Sharia's rule for fulfilling the Sunnah of the holy Prophet (SAW). He said Allah told us the secret of servitudes in daily life.

Islam had been introduced into India, especially North India, by the Sufis who accomplished the Muslims conquerors. Almost all these conquerors came from Central Asia and Central Asia had predominantly Sufi Islam. The Indian culture of the time was also based on certain customs and traditions. Therefore, Sufism was bound to influence the Indian people in a big way. The local people began to attend the Sufi gathering and many of them started to convert to Islam under the influence of the Sufis. Thus, we can see that Sufism and its development played a big role in the conversion of the local population. It was also this ground which was largely subjugated by the make beliefs Sufi who were mainly responsible for the introduction of un-Islamic customs and traditions amongst the Indian Muslims. The false Sufis compromised religion for gaining popularity and achieving their goals little realizing that the true religion had been left far behind.”

¹⁸ Op. cit., Mohammad Abdullah, Islamic Shariah and Tariqah, p. 07.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 09.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

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