

## Islamic Thought in the South Asian Subcontinent: The Eighteenth Century

The International Institute of Islamic Thought—Islamabad, the Islamic Research Institute, and the International Islamic University, Islamabad, are conducting ongoing seminars on the history of Islamic thought in eighteenth-century South Asia. What follows is a report of some activities and decisions taken to date.

Recent studies of Islamic thought have generally attributed the rise of Muslim reform and revival movements, as well as the intellectual activities undertaken during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to the impact of Europe and the influence of its academic, social, political, and technological advancement. This raises the following question: If the Muslim world had not come into contact with Europe, would it have remained a totally unchanged and unchanging society? In order to answer this question, it is essential to:

1. Study and examine how Muslim thinkers analyzed their society in the precolonial period;
2. Explore whether there was any dissatisfaction with the status quo among Muslims;
3. Determine whether there were any trends of reform, revival, *ijtihād* or whether there was any significant interest in philosophy and rational sciences. Was there any interest in reinterpreting Islamic teachings in order to meet the challenges of modernity in general and of the western intellectual experience in particular;
4. Study whether the foundations of the political movements, religious organizations, and sects that arose in the subcontinent (i.e., Ahl-i Ḥadīth, Deobandī, and Barēlawī) were laid on the emergent attitudes of opposition and resistance to British rule or whether their origins can be traced in the pre-British period; and
5. Investigate principles and concepts (i.e., *bid'ah*, *taqlid*, *ijtihād*, *dār al ḥarb*, *jihad*, and *hijrah*) used by Muslim thinkers for total acceptance, rejection, or adaptation of political, social, and religious ideas and practices and of modern science and technology. How were these developed, refined, restated, or reconstructed?

A study of the twelfth century A.H. / eighteenth century C.E. might just hold a key to answer a great many of these questions. Despite its significance, such a study has not yet been conducted seriously.

The eighteenth century is a very significant period in the history of Islamic thought. Though it witnessed the decline of the Mughal empire, it was also an era of very creative intellectual, cultural, and practical efforts. Historically speaking, this was a period of stocktaking, a time when Muslim thinkers sat down to analyze, sift, refine, and assimilate the various intellectual and cultural currents in Islamic thought of the previous centuries.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Islamic thought and culture in the subcontinent had been influenced by local religious ideas and movements emerging in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. The Bhakti movement, the Hindi influence on Persian language and literature, the introduction of music in *samā'*, as well as the arrival of Sufi orders from abroad are a few examples. Along with Sufi orders came such doctrines as *waḥdat al wujūd* (the unity of being). The developments in Ḥanafī fatwa literature in Central Asia weakened the rigidity of legal thought, and Shi'i theological and educational literature from Iran encouraged interest in the rational sciences. This rapid traffic in ideas and the ensuing tensions and conflicts generated a dialectical process in the Islamic thought of the subcontinent.

The seventeenth century witnessed an open conflict between such mutually conflicting ideas and groups as *waḥdat al wujūd* / *waḥdat al shuhūd*, Shi'i / Sunni, Qādirī / Naqshbandī, all of which constituted the main lines of division in the area's Muslim society. These intellectual movements struggled continuously to gain the support of the court and, when successful, used it to suppress their opponents. When political power declined during the eighteenth century and these movements were deprived of any possibility of political patronage, they tended to explore a middle path between the extremes.

The eighteenth century is, therefore, presumably characterized by a search for synthesis and reconciliation. It is also significant as a period of enlightenment, a fact that has been stressed in some recent studies, for this was a time when human thought was waking from its slumber of tradition and stagnation and endeavoring to discover a new world. Instead of authority, reliance was now placed on reason and observation. The French Revolution, the American Declaration of Independence, and the enactment of a republican constitution in the United States are considered milestones of this century.

In the Muslim world, the three great Muslim empires—Safavid Iran, Ottoman Turkey, and Mughal India—that dominated the old world were now in a period of rapid decline due to mutual feuding and external threats from Russia, France, and Britain. The political power of the three empires was undergoing rapid disintegration, and local and provincial governors were rising in rebellion against the center. However, political decline did not entail necessarily an intellectual and cultural collapse. The

Islamic world showed signs of new energy and was also rising against taqlid and stagnation.

Several Muslim thinkers have underscored the significance of the eighteenth century in the history of Islamic thought. As they have assessed it from their respective viewpoints, their assessments are different from one another. One such person is Sayyid Abū al A'lā al Mawdūdī, who views the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a time of such rapid scientific and technological growth in Europe that it virtually changed the whole world. The Indian subcontinent, however, stood still. He feels that a similar awakening could not take place in the Muslim world because they were largely ignorant of these European advancements. He writes:

The Sayyid and Shah Ismā'īl Shahīd, who had practically intended to launch an Islamic revolution, made all possible arrangements. But they did not perform the small task of sending a delegation of perceptive scholars to Europe to investigate the principles of the European civilization which were making it possible for that nation to go about dominating the world like a storm, and to identify on the other hand the things that we lacked. (*Tajdīd wa Ihya'-'i Dīn*, p. 142)

Mawdūdī compares Islamic thought in the subcontinent with that of Europe. He particularly studied the writings and movements led by Shāh Waḥīdullāh and his family. He recognizes their contribution, and yet he considers the eighteenth century to be, on the whole, a period of Muslim decline. On the contrary, Abū al Ḥasan 'Alī Nadwī disagrees with the thesis that political decline necessarily means intellectual decline. He observes that while it may be true of non-Muslims,

Muslim history is contrary to that. More often, geniuses were born during the periods of political decline and internal disruptions. The contributions made by these persons are not at all the products of decline..” (*Tārīkh-i Da'wat wa 'Azīmat*, vol. 5, p. 31)

Nadwī argues that although the eighteenth century was, on the whole, an era of political decline in which great Muslim empires, even the Ottoman, began to dwindle, the educational activities in the schools and the spiritual purification at the Sufī centers did not decline. Rather “some of them distinguished themselves to such a perfection that we do not see the likes of them in the recent past.” He explains the reason for this by emphasizing that in Islam, the dedication to knowledge and its spread has its source in personal zeal and commitment and does not depend on such external means as support from the government.

Khalīq Aḥmad Niẓāmī, a well-known historian of the Muslim history of the subcontinent, also considers the eighteenth century to be distinct from other periods. The seventeenth century, in his view, was marked by a polarization in Islamic thought between supporters and opponents of

Ibn al 'Arabī and Shaykh Aḥmad Sarhindī. The eighteenth century is a time of attempting to reconcile these extremes. Shāh Wafīullāh, Mir Dard, and Shāh Kalīmullāh Dihlawī's contributions in this regard and Sayyid Aḥmad Barēlawī's movement are hallmarks of this century ("Hind," *El 2*).

Qāḍī Jāwēd calls the seventeenth century a period of rising humanism and freedom of thought in the evolution of the subcontinent's Islamic thought, but reminds us that sectarian trends arose at the end. The eighteenth century was a period of searching for the middle path between these two extremes. Shāh Wafīullāh's contribution, which has a synthetic and reconciliatory attitude, is an outstanding event in this period (*Barr-i Ṣaghūr mēn Muslim Fikr kā Irṭiqā'*).

In the light of the above remarks, one may almost describe the eighteenth century as a connecting link between the Muslim awakening's medieval and modern periods. In view of this significance of Islamic thought in the eighteenth-century Indian subcontinent, the International Institute of Islamic Thought—Islamabad and the Islamic Research Institute have jointly started a year-long seminar on this theme. The papers contributed to this seminar will be edited and jointly published by the two institutes. The particular details of the proposal are presented below.

## Themes and Topics

The main proposed theme is: "Islamic Thought in the Subcontinent: The Eighteenth Century." Under the umbrella of this general theme, the following expressions of intellectual contribution will be studied: writings, movements, institutions, organizations, and biographical literature.

The theme will be explored biographically. The focal point of each paper will be one Muslim thinker of this period, his immediate environment, education and training, works, ideas, disciples, and influence with reference to the following questions: How was Islamic society conceived in terms of its ideals? Was there a feeling of imminent decline and, if so, was there any contemplation on its causes? How was this decline defined: politically, socially, economically, or religiously? Were there any solutions or remedies offered? What other avenues of self-criticism, if any, were available?

The contributors shall also explore the linkages of these persons and institutions with other persons and institutions at the local level as well as within the Indian subcontinent and the Islamic world. Data will be collected from their biographical accounts. Any continuity of relationships with persons, institutions, and movements in the subsequent centuries will also be explored. This survey will not be limited to any one particular branch of learning, trend, movement, or group. It will include historians, jurists, *muḥaddithūn*, poets, Sufis, philosophers, and physicians, as well as the popular literature in the regional languages.

## A List of Muslim Thinkers

1. Shaykh Aḥmad Mullā Jīwan (d. 1130). Writings: *Tafsīr-i Aḥmadī*; *Nūr al Anwār*; *al Sawāniḥ*; *Manāqib al Awliyā'*; *Adab-i Aḥmadī*.

2. Abū al Ḥasan Nūr al Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al Ḥādī al Sindī al Kabīr (d. 1138). Writings: *al Hawāshī al Siṭṭah 'alā al Siḥāḥ al Siṭṭah*; Commentary on *Fath al Qadīr*; *al Āyāt al Bayyināt*.

3. Shaykh 'Ināyatullāh Qādirī Lāhōrī (d. 1141). Writings: *Ghayāt al Hawāshī*; *Multaqat al Ḥaqā'iq*; *Tanqīḥ al Murām*.

4. Shaykh Kalīmullāh Jahānābādī (d. 1141). Writings: *Kashkōl*; *al Muraqqā'*; *Sawā' al Sabīl*; *'Ashrah-i Kāmilah*; *Risālah dar Radd-i Rawāfiḍ*; *Sharḥ al Qānūn li Ibn Sīnā*; *Tafsīr-i Qur'ān Majīd*; *Maktūbāt Kalīm*.

5. Nizām al Dīn Sihālāwī (d. 1181). Writings: *Risālah fī Wuḍū al Rasūl*; *Sharḥ al Tahfīr fī Uṣūl al Dīn*; *Sharḥ Musallam al Thubūt*; *al Ṣubḥ al Ṣādiq*; *Sharḥ Manār al Anwār*; *Hāshīyah Sharḥ 'Aqā'id-i Dawwānī*; *Sharḥ Rasā'il-i Mubārizīyah*; *Hāshīyah al Shams al Bāzighah*; *Hāshīyah Sharḥ Hidāyat al Hikmah*; *Manāqib-i Razzāqīyah*.

6. Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥayāt Sindī (d. 1163). Writings: *al Īqāf 'alā Sabab al Ikhtilāf*; *Tuḥfat al Anām fī al 'Amal bi Ḥadīth al Nabī 'alayh al Ṣalāt wa al Salām*; *Fath al Ghafūr fī Waḍ' al Ayḍī fī al Ṣalāt 'alā al Ṣudūr*; *Tuḥfat al Muḥibbīn fī Sharḥ al Arba'in al Nawawīyah*; *Sharḥ al Targhīb wa al Tarḥīb li al Mundhirī*; *Mukhtaṣar al Zawājir 'an Iqtirāf al Kabā'ir*; *Sharḥ al Hikam al 'Aṭā'iyah*; *Muqaddimah fī al 'Aqā'id*; *Irshād al Naqqād ilā Taysīr al Ijtihād*; *Sharḥ Hikam al Ḥaddādiyah*; *Risālah fī Radd-i Bid'at al Ta'zīyah*; *Risālah fī al Nahy 'an 'Ishq al Mard wa al Niswān*; *Iḥfā' al Liyah*.

7. Khawja Muḥammad Naṣīr 'Andalīb (d. 1172). Writings: *Nalah-i 'Andalīb Risālah-i Hōsh Afzā*; *Dīwān-i 'Andalīb*.

8. Shāh Waḥīullāh Dihlawī (d. 1176). Writings: *Fath al Raḥmān*; *al Fawz al Kabīr*; *Fath al Kabīr*; *Muṣaffā*; *Musawwā*; *Ḥujjat Allāh al Bālighah*; *al Budūr al Bāzighah*; *Izālat al Khafā*; *Qurrat al 'Aynayn*; *al Inṣāf fī Sabab al Ikhtilāf*; *'Iqd al Jid*; *Tafhīmāt-i Ilāhīyah*; *al Khayr al Kathīr*; *Fuyūd al Ḥaramayn*; *Anfās al 'Ārifīn*, *al Qawl al Jamīl*; *Alṭāf-i Quds*; *Ṣaṭa'āt*; *Lama'āt*; *Sūrūr al Maḥzūn*; *al Juz' al Laḥīf*; *Tāwīl al Aḥādīth*.

9. Qāḍī Muḥibullāh Bihārī (d. 1119). Writings: *Sullam al 'Ulūm*; *Musallam al Thubūt*; *al Jawhar al Fard*; *Mughālaṭah-i 'Āmmat al Wurūd*.

10. Mirzā Maẓhar Jānjānān (d. 1195). Writings: *Āthār; Letters; Dīwān*.

11. Khawājah Mīr Dard Dihlawī (d. 1199). Writings: *'Ilm al Kitāb; Asrār al Ṣalāt; Wāridāt; Nalah-'i Dard; Āh-i Sard; Sham-'i Maḥfil; Dard-i Dil; Ḥurmat-i Ghinā; Wāqī'at Dard; Sōz-i Dil; Dīwān-i Fārsī; Dīwān-i Urdū*.

12. Muḥammad A'lā Thanawī. Writings: *Risālah-'i Malguzārī-'i Zamīn; Kashshāf Iṣṭilahāt al Funūn*.

In addition to the above, the following personalities are also included, some of whom survived into the nineteenth century but whose writings had appeared already in the eighteenth century: Abū Ṭālib; Mīr 'Alī Shēr Qānī; Ghulām Āzād Bilgīrāmī; Sayyid 'Abd al Ḥayy Ḥasānī; Ḥaydar 'Alī; Tīpū Sulṭān; Murtaḍā Zabīdī; Ṣaghānī; Ghulām Ḥusayn Jawnpūrī; 'Abd al Qādir Bēdil; Makhdūm Hāshim Thattawī; Ḥakīm Sharīf Khān; Bulleh Shāh, Wārith Shāh; Shāh 'Abd al Laṭīf Bhitā'ī; Ḥājī Sharī'at Allāh; Sachal Sarmast; Ḥakīm 'Alwī Khān; Ḥakīm Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn; Shāh 'Abd al 'Azīz Dihlawī; Shāh Rafī' al Dīn; Nawwāb 'Alī Ibrāhīm Khān 'Azīmābādī; Mawlānā Dildār 'Alī; 'Allāmah Ṭafaḍḍul Ḥusayn.

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