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Confessions: Abd al-Majid Daryabadi's Autobiographical Account of his Spiritual Journey

Abd al-Majid Daryabadi (1892–1977) was an Indian Muslim scholar who was active in political, academic, literary, and religious circles during a career that spanned more than six decades. He published his first article at the age of nine and had a book published in English shortly after he graduated from college. (The book—titled *The Psychology of Leadership*—was published in 1915 by T. Fisher Unwin, a well-known British academic publisher.) In addition to publishing in both Urdu and English newspapers, periodicals, and journals on a regular basis, Daryabadi penned one of the best-known Urdu tafāsīr of the 20th century—*Tafsīr-i Mājidi*. Around 1928, he developed a deep personal relationship with Shaykh Ashraf Ali Thanavi, a celebrated Muslim scholar and leader. Taking Shaykh Thanavi as mentor was the culminating point of Daryabadi's two-decade long spiritual journey. The milestones on this journey are described in detail in his autobiography—*آپ کی زندگی*. The relevant excerpt is translated below.¹

Chapter 29

The Beginnings of Atheism

I was born in a religious family and was brought up in a religious environment. My mother and elder sister were regular in their *tahajjud* prayers.² My respected father was regular in fulfilling his ritual obligations and was a very devoted believer in general; my elder brother was neither irreligious nor one to

abandon his daily prayers. In addition to the practice of religion, religious learning was also quite prominent in my extended family. My paternal grandfather was a *muftī* and a *faqīh*, qualified to issue religious rulings, and I had been hearing of the scholarly and religious exploits of my maternal grandfather since the very beginning. Under the influence of my paternal uncle, I had adopted the attire of a typical clergyman even when I was still a child—complete with an ankle-length robe, a colorful *tasbīh*, and a tan turban. My reading interests too were focused largely on religious books. I had a *maulvī ṣāhib* as my private tutor at home and a *ḥājī ṣāhib* as my Arabic teacher in school, and it was the company of these two individuals that significantly shaped my early life. By the time I reached the 7th or 8th class, at the age of 12–13 years, I had pretty much become a full-fledged *mullā*. By reading everything that I could get my hands on, and often borrowing other writers' ideas, I even started composing entire essays of my own in response to Hindu, Christian, and Deist polemicists. I also recall that, during those years, I used to revere Maulana Abd al-Hayy Farangi-Mahalli as India's foremost Islamic scholar, and even as the *mujaddid*, though it had already been quarter of a century since his death.³ I was also influenced by the polemical writings of Maulana Muhammad Ali Mungeri and Maulana Sanā'ullah Amritsari⁴ that were aimed at refuting the arguments favoured by Christian missionaries and Arya Samaj preachers.⁵

My interest in religious debates and polemics became even more pronounced after I reached 9th class. As I became acquainted with the writings Maulana Shibli Nu'mani—such as *Al-Kalām* and *Risā'il*—my interests shifted towards philosophy and theology.⁶ Instead of refuting the Arya Samaj or the Christians, I now became more interested in refuting atheists and materialists. At that time, I was still diligent in performing my ritual obligations, including congregational prayers and fasting.

It was in this very state of strong faith and religious

fervour that I passed my 10th class exams from Sitapur High School at the age of 16 and moved to Lucknow where I enrolled in Canning College in July 1908. Before college started, I chanced upon a book in English at the home of one of my relatives. The book was quite bulky. Being the proverbial bookworm from the very beginning, I had this irresistible urge to read everything that I came across. Once I got my hands on this book I began to read it voraciously. What happened next is hard to put into words. As I read the book, a new world of rational thought progressively opened up in front of my eyes. The universe of my previous beliefs and norms was turned upside down. The book was not about religion, nor did it seem to repudiate Islam or attack religion in any overt fashion. It was titled *The Elements of Social Science* and dealt with social norms and customs. The author's name was missing from this edition and in the place of a name only the professional qualification of the author was noted, indicating that he was a medical doctor. In later editions, the name of Dr. Drysdale appeared and it also became known that he was a fanatical atheist in his day.⁷ This was not so much a book as a mine-filled tunnel. It was an attack on those moral restrictions and prohibitions that religion considers to be self-evident truths and upon which it bases its various injunctions—i.e., modesty and chastity. The book undermined these very fundamental moral values. It claimed that the sexual urge is a physiological demand of the body, and that to repress this demand and postpone its fulfillment until one is married is not only pointless but also exceedingly harmful to one's health and detrimental to the process of natural, physical growth. Consequently, one should disregard all such restrictions and prohibitions and trample underfoot all the artificially concocted rules of religion and ethics.

That was just one of the many topics discussed in this book. Along the same lines, the book hammered away at every moral value that has always been held in high esteem by religion and ethics. I came across Malthus' notions of

population control and contraception for the first time in this book. The tone of the writing was without a doubt forceful and convincing. How could a naïve adolescent, 16 years of age, keep his fragile little boat of faith and morality afloat in this raging tempest, especially when the claims and arguments of the book were in complete accord with libidinal urges?

All the strength that I had gathered for the defence and propagation of Islam could not withstand such a massive assault. Seeds of doubt and suspicion were sown in my heart against religion and morality. I said to myself: What sort of mirage have I been chasing up till now? Those beliefs that I had accepted as part and parcel of my faith based solely on blind following [of tradition]—how weak, feeble, and hollow they turned out to be in the light of rationality and critical analysis! This was the reaction in my heart and mind after completing the book. The beauty of propaganda is that it doesn't have to carry out a frontal attack; rather, what destabilizes the fortress is relentless shelling around the perimeters—causing so much confusion among its defenders that they become inclined to willingly surrender.

Around the same time that the seeds of this suspicion and doubt were being sown, I came across a multi-volume collection (each volume a book in itself) titled *International Library of Famous Literature* in the Library of Lucknow. This book was also not about religion but rather about literature and rhetoric; the best pieces of literature from across the world had been compiled in this collection.⁸ Islam and the Qur'ān are mentioned in one of the volumes—even if it is not in positive terms, the presentation is not in especially degrading or negative terms either. But in this same volume there was a full-page image of “the founder of Islam.” Under the image there was an apparently authoritative reference claiming that this was a picture of a certain painting. In other words, the picture was presented as being accurate and authentic in every respect. The picture depicts an Arab, wearing a cloak and a turban, with a bow in his hand, a quiver full of arrows across his chest, and a

sword slung across his back. Instead of showing gentleness, the face was contorted by rage. Taken together—*I seek refuge in Allah*—the picture was that of some savage and fearsome chief of a Bedouin tribe. If, God forbid, I were to come across such an image today, my instinctive response would be:

I seek God's forgiveness—this figment of someone's imagination lacks even the flimsiest of connection with reality; the ḥadīṣ literature contains a detailed description of the Prophet's blessed face and everyday dress, while this caricature concocted by some devil bears no resemblance with the person it claims to depict.

But when I originally saw the picture I did not have that awareness. As a result, a heavy blow came down hard on both my heart and my mind. Upon seeing the picture an inner voice said:

Good heavens! I have been the victim of a massive fraud; all the tales of mercy and forgiveness, charity and leniency have turned out to be false—the reality of the matter has only now dawned upon me.

A mind that was already in awe of all things Western wasn't capable of entertaining the possibility that the picture itself was fictitious. From my viewpoint, it wasn't even conceivable that anything said by a Westerner could be wrong. I was convinced that reality had to be exactly what was depicted in that picture.

There you have it—a citadel erected after years of hard work came crashing down in a very short time. This happened not as a result of losing some debate with an Arya Samaj Hindu, a Christian missionary, or some other enemy of Islam. Forget about having any faith in the Blessed Prophet as the Messenger of Allah, I couldn't even imagine him as a great or noble human being! The enormous gift of Islam and faith had turned into a barren wasteland of apostasy.

This part of my autobiography deserves careful reading and reflection by every Muslim because of the lessons and insights it offers. A boy—rather a young adult—raised and

educated in a deeply religious environment was overpowered by the devil's very first or second assault. There are many doors that lead to misguidance, and there are many paths that the devil can use for that purpose. Under such conditions, how could I maintain regularity in performing my obligatory daily prayers? Initially, I started to become somewhat irregular; then irregularity became the norm. I began to skip a prayer here and there; then the skipping started to add up, until I reached a point where I stopped praying altogether and gave up entirely such things as ablution, Qur'ān recitation, and fasting. In the beginning, the fear of and deference to my father kept me attached to ritual obligations—but for how long? Whenever I would go home to Sitapur from Lucknow, I would slip away from him whenever the time for prayer approached, or I would pretend to be sleeping. The most delicate issue was the Friday congregational prayers. At first my late father would try desperately to wake me up so that he could take me with him to the *masjid*; seeing that I—the miserable wretch—was not going to get up for prayer and that time was running out, he would leave me in my pathetic state and depart for prayers. What went through his heart and mind during these episodes? Who can tell today?

When I look back upon these events and think about what that pious, God-fearing man went through because of my rebellion, I feel like crawling into a hole in the ground on account of feeling ashamed at my wretchedness. But at a time when I was bent upon open rebellion against God and His Prophet, what possible deference could I have extended to my poor father!

It must be noted that even during that period my study of religious texts was not insignificant, but it proved to be entirely inadequate in the face of the raging tsunami of Western atheism. The laws of nature are operative throughout the majestic expanse of the universe, and the Almighty Creator does not make any exceptions or give any special favours to anyone or anything—not even His revealed religion, not even

His *masājīd*, not even His Qur’ān, not even His Ka‘ba, and not even His own Prophet. The capacity to cut, slice, and chop that He has bestowed upon the blade of a sword remains equally effective regardless of the object that has been placed in front of it—whether it’s the pages of the Holy Scripture, the pulpit of a *masjid*, the walls and gates of the Ka‘ba, the head of a saint or sage, or the blessed body of a noble prophet.

Do not come in front of a sword without a shield,
The sword cannot but cut down what is in front of it.

Chapter 30

Atheism and Apostasy

While in college, I gave particular attention to logic and philosophy. Logic was part of the college curriculum, but I had started studying it even during High School when it wasn’t a required subject. When I was in 9th class at Sitapur High School, my elder brother was in college in Lucknow. Once, when he came home for summer vacation, he brought one of his textbooks with him: it was Stock’s *Logic*.⁹ I got hold of the book and started reading, though I understood only bits and pieces of it. I also read his earlier essays on the logic of major and minor premises.¹⁰ In college, I finally got the opportunity to fully satiate my thirst for the study of logic. In addition to the required course readings, I began to borrow and read books on logic from the college library on a regular basis. I was such a voracious reader that I went through Mill’s difficult and bulky *A System of Logic*, even though it was more of a book of philosophy than it was of logic.¹¹ I also began to study philosophy as such—especially that branch of philosophy that came under the heading of “psychology.” Even though hardly anyone would believe it today, psychology in those days was not a branch of science but of philosophy, and it was divided into a number of subfields; in addition to individual psychology, there were additional subfields like social psychology, abnormal psychology, etc. There was no shortage of atheistic and semi-atheistic thinkers writing in English. I consciously searched for and diligently read the works of such

thinkers; [John Stuart] Mill [1806–1858] was on the top of the list. My heart and mind were deeply influenced by skeptical ideas as I went through the writings of [David] Hume [1711–1776] and [Herbert] Spencer [1820–1903]. Some of these writers were actually scientists but were counted among atheistic philosophers. I also paid homage to the dogmatic proponents of atheism—including Britain’s Charles Bradlaugh,¹² Germany’s Büchner,¹³ and America’s Ingersoll.¹⁴

It goes without saying that studying this literature only nourished my skepticism and strengthened my atheism. However, the writings of these atheists and semi-atheists were not nearly as significant in turning me away from Islam and moving me towards manifest apostasy as were those scientific books on psychology that were penned by the experts in the field. On the surface, these latter writings had nothing to do with religion—they appeared to neither reject nor affirm religion in any noticeable way—but a deadly poison still ran through the lines of these apparently objective and harmless textbooks.

For example, a man named Dr. Maudsley authored two voluminous books which gained wide acclaim, *Mental Psychology* and *Mental Pathology*.¹⁵ In this second book, as he was discussing mental diseases and psychological disturbances, this miserable wretch offered, apparently out of nowhere, the revelatory experience of Muhammad (peace be upon him) as an example. Mentioning the Blessed Prophet by name,¹⁶ he wrote that it was entirely possible for an individual suffering from epilepsy to leave a great legacy in the world. The foundations of my faith had already been hollowed out; after hearing about the research done and results attained by “the experts in the field”—these miserable wretches—any remaining traces of faith quickly vanished. In short, my atheism and apostasy had now reached their full maturation.

If your faith is dear to you, please read these lines very, very carefully—for God’s sake. Pause here for a bit and think about the consequences that are awaiting your beloved children

whom you're pushing into that raging fire which goes by the name of "modern education."

During Intermediate,¹⁷ when my tendency towards irreligion and disbelief was becoming more and more pronounced, I came across the catalogue of London's Rationalist Press Association.¹⁸ This was nothing less than a dream come true! In promoting the rationalist school of thought, all of these books argued for the negation of religion and the promotion of atheism. Even though the main focus of their attack was Christianity, no religion was safe from their debunking criticism. Each book could be bought for a trifling amount. Such affordability was surprising even in those days of low prices. At first, I would borrow these books from others; as my addiction and craving increased, I became a dues-paying member of the Association and accumulated a notable collection of its publications. I started calling myself a "rationalist" and felt proud in doing so. How gratified I felt every time I looked at the mini-library I had assembled! There was no branch of the Rationalist Press Association in India; I would send the dues on a regular basis to London and paid for a subscription to its flagship bi-monthly publication "The Literary Guide and Rationalist Review." Gradually, I began to feel embarrassed at being associated with the term "Islam." When I had to fill out the form to register for annual exams, under religious affiliation I wrote "Rationalist," instead of "Muslim."

In mental, intellectual, and rational terms I had now become completely Westernized—a brown *ṣāhib*. My interaction with Muslims naturally decreased and I stopped attending Islamic functions and festivities altogether. The one saving grace was that my personal and social links with family members and relatives remained intact. Around the same time, I observed one of my classmates who had completely cut himself off from his family and had adopted the cultural, social, and behavioral norms of Hinduism to such a degree that he was completely assimilated into that tradition. In contrast, I

remained Muslim in my outward appearance, eating habits, and everyday manners. In fact, it could be said that to a certain extent I remained Muslim in my emotional life as well, albeit as an “Enlightened Muslim”—but at that time who among the young generation of Muslims was not an Enlightened Muslim? Thank God that the roots of my attachment to the Muslim community were not severed. A commitment to Muslim nationhood is itself a great blessing, second only to the religion of Islam itself—and no one should belittle it as lacking in real value. It was only later in life that I became conscious of the immense worth of this blessing. There was nothing exceptional about the extent to which I wore Western clothing—other Muslims did that too. I went to the movies as often as was the norm among Muslims. The one thing I did not do was drink alcohol—even though I repeatedly made the intention to try it. But even if I had tasted alcohol, it would not have been anything totally out of the ordinary.

The point is that I did not do anything which would have led to outright ostracism by my family and relatives, or a social boycott by some segment of the Muslim community. The most important blessing was that I never said anything which would’ve offended Muslim sensitivities. I made it a point to keep all conversations within the bounds of academic discussion and remained strictly focused on the issues themselves. Whenever I did critique, it was always in relation to beliefs and ideas; I never criticized or attacked any particular person.

There is a funny story related to my emotional attachment to Islam that is worth narrating. Whenever a non-Muslim would raise objections against Islam, I never ever felt the urge to affirm him in his criticism—to say nothing of supporting his position. In spite of my complete apostasy, I always felt an inner urge to offer a rejoinder to the criticism of Islam by a non-Muslim. In October 1911, there was a large conference of Christians, in which one of the participants was a famous anti-Muslim polemicist named Zwemer, who had come

from Bahrain to attend the conference and whose notoriety preceded him.¹⁹ I was studying for my B.A. at that time and had completely rejected Islamic beliefs and doctrines. Upon hearing of Zwemer's arrival, my friend Maulvi Abd al-Bari Nadavi and I went to meet him as soon as the first chance availed itself. Zwemer received us warmly but as was his habit he began to raise objections against Islam. As hard as it is to believe—but you have to believe me—just as my friend started to respond to the objections in Arabic, I began to respond to them in English. Zwemer never got the slightest hint that I had become totally disillusioned with Islam and had become an apostate. After all, I was not in the least influenced by any Christian priest or any Arya Samaj missionary or anyone who declared themselves to be an enemy of Islam. All that I was influenced by came from Islam's hidden enemies—those individuals who claim to be objective and unbiased in their knowledge and expertise and in their sophisticated research programs, but who—either deliberately or inadvertently—would inject poison in the student's mind. A naïve and uninformed reader, failing to maintain his defensive faculties at high alert, could not but eventually become their hapless prey. Since I was convinced of the greatness and wisdom of Western thinkers, and since my mind had already surrendered to them intellectually, every single thing that they said or did appeared to me as if it were above all suspicion and beyond all doubt.

As I have noted elsewhere in this book, from March 1910 until the end of that year, Maulana Shibli Nu'mani's book *Al-Kalām* was extensively discussed and critiqued in the periodical "Al-Nāẓir." The critique of the book was merely a pretense, however. The attacks were actually aimed at the fundamental beliefs and doctrines of religion, such as the reality of God, prophethood, revelation, and life hereafter. While this critique did not seal my materialism, it did provide a certificate of authenticity for my agnosticism and skepticism.

My father (may his soul rest in peace) passed away in November 1912 in Makkah while performing Ḥajj. My turning

away from religiosity had caused him profound sadness and heartache, and he had taken me to every notable religious figure he could think of in the hope that I would repent and reform. Later on, I learned from a relative who was with him during Ḥajj that he had grabbed on to the covers of the Ka‘ba and prayed from the bottom of his heart for the guidance and return of his son. How was it possible for the sincere prayer of a true person of faith to not be answered sooner or later? Why would the Almighty Creator—the one who answered the prayers of Prophet Jacob (peace be upon him) for the return of his son after making him weep without end—not respond to the supplication of this individual, Abd al-Qadir, who was both a member of the ummah of Muḥammad (peace be upon him) and also a descendent of Prophet Jacob (peace be upon him)?²⁰

Chapter 31

Light at the End of the Tunnel

The period of atheism and apostasy lasted for a decade—from 1909 or a little earlier until the final quarter of 1918. Now that a long time has passed since that ten-year period came to an end, it seems if it were only a fleeting moment. But create a mental image of the period of atheism when it was not something in “past” but very much in the “present,” something that was actually occurring—and occurring with great force and intensity. *I seek refuge in Allāh!* How protracted did it appear at the time—it was as if this period would never come to an end so long as I was alive. This was the sense that I had, and it was also the sense of those around me—friends and enemies, supporters and opponents—everyone. (The only exceptions were a handful of perceptive individuals who recognized that my atheism was temporary.)

It was in August of 1918 that I moved back from Hyderabad to Lucknow. There, I began reading the works of religious and semi-religious philosophers out of sheer interest and curiosity. After quickly going through the works of Europeans like [Arthur] Schopenhauer [1788–1860], the first major thinker I came across was the Chinese sage, Confucius.

Whatever else one may say about Confucius' teachings, his ideas, like those of Schopenhauer, were not at all purely materialistic. The ethical dimension was so dominant in his thought that its outer edges touched the borders of spirituality, and he did seem to have an inclination towards the unseen realm of reality. This was my first encounter with the work of a philosopher or sage whose point of view was characterized by something other than pure materialism. This encounter further stimulated my curiosity. One of my college classmates, Dr. Muhammad Hafiz Sayyid, was most helpful in pointing me in the direction of Buddhism, Jainism, and theosophy. In this way, God—the Most Wise—continued to provide the means for guidance and inner cultivation that were appropriate to my condition, and He did so not just at every stage but at every step of the way.

After reading an important and profound book on Buddhism, I realized that, far from being some hodgepodge of superstitions, Buddhism actually contained many deep truths and insights about human ego and spirit. Next, I started to delve into theosophical literature. (For obvious reasons, all of this study was in English.) Theosophy can be considered another name for Hindu mysticism or Hindu mystical philosophy—the entire focus is on the spirit and its various states, with some similarity with elements of the occult sciences [that are familiar to Muslims]. Mrs. Annie Besant [1847–1933], who had converted from Christianity to Hinduism, was the animating spirit as well as the leading advocate and missionary of this movement. Dr. Bhagavan Das [1869–1958], a philosopher and mystic from Banaras, was another important figure in this regard; he was among the best expositors and interpreters of Hindu mysticism and philosophy. I read many of the writings of these two thinkers and learned a great deal from them. I went through the writings of Tilak of Maharashtra²¹ and Aurobindo Ghose [1872–1950] of Bengal/Northern India as well. Around the same time, I studied every English translation of Sri Krishna's *Bhagavad Gita* that I

could find.²² This text turned out to be a most amazing eye-opener for me, as it brought to light an entirely new spiritual universe—a universe above and beyond the material world—into my field of awareness. I also read many of the writings by [Mohandas Karamchand] Gandhi [1869–1948] during this period. Gandhi was able to offer a spiritual interpretation of, and confer spiritual meaning on, every minor or major event that occurred in the material world—an approach that left [a positive] imprint on my heart and mind.

As a result of 18–24 months of continuous, focused study during 1919–20, the idol of Western and materialist philosophy that had been enthroned in my mind was shattered to bits. I could now see that the final word and the decisive interpretation of the mysteries of the universe could not be the ones provided by Western materialists. On the contrary, I realized that one could find in this world many different interpretations and theories about the universe—all of them quite coherent, and each more appealing than the previous one. I also realized that the world of the spirit was not a world of fantasy and superstition worthy of ridicule and cursory dismissal, but rather a real, actual world of fact that must be approached with great respect. If the profundity of insight along with the scope of inquiry and attention to detail were the criteria by which a text was to be judged, then the teachings of Buddha and Sri Krishna were not just on par with those of Mill and Spencer, but were actually far superior to them in many respects. In comparison to the teachings of these towering sages, the writings of Western intellectuals began to appear shallow and mediocre.

The spiritual teachings mentioned above were quite remote from Islam; nonetheless, they allowed an entirely new perspective to come into focus with respect to life's big questions and the mysteries of the universe. As a result, the grand edifice erected on the foundations of materialism, skepticism, and agnosticism through years of painstaking work came crashing to the ground. My heart came to accept the

reality of a spiritual universe in addition to—and far transcending—the world of matter. I understood that what was felt, mirrored, and observed by the physical senses wasn't all that was real, that underneath its depths and beyond its heights there was an entire “realm of the unseen”—‘*ālam al-ghaib*—that existed in its own right.

Indeed, there is profound wisdom and significance in the fact that the Qur’ān explicitly identifies [the capacity for having] faith in the unseen—*īmān bi al-ghaib*—as the defining characteristic of faith. A person must begin by attaining faith in the reality of the “unseen”—for this is the necessary prerequisite for subsequently acquiring any knowledge of its different elements and details. The typical *mullā* may not recognize the real value of this particular stage [in a person’s journey], but the fact is that my affirmation of a spiritual world constituted the first major “clear victory”—*fath-i mubīn*—of faith over and against the combined forces of atheism and skepticism.

This stage of my journey had barely begun when the first volume of *Sīrat al-Nabī* (The Life of the Prophet) by Maulānā Shiblī came off the press. It was enough for me that the book was authored by Shiblī, for I would have eagerly devoured anything written by him regardless of the subject matter. I opened the book and did not take a break until I had read it from cover to cover. Right there was the real cause of my disenchantment! The biggest obstacle that had caused my soul to stumble and fall had to do precisely with the blessed life of the Prophet (peace be upon him). It was nothing other than the biography and personality of the Prophet that had been the main target of criticism by Orientalists and other Western scholars, particularly regarding his participation in wars and battles. These bigots had convinced me through all sorts of machinations that the Noble Prophet was—*I seek refuge in Allāh*—nothing but a ruthless conqueror. Through this book, Maulānā Shiblī (may Allāh shower His mercy on his grave) had put healing ointment on precisely this wound and

administered medicine to cure exactly this pain. By the time I reached the book's end, the image of the Blessed Prophet that emerged in my mind was that of a great reformer of nation and community and a most merciful and munificent leader—a person who engaged in fighting and violence only as an absolutely last resort after he had been left with no other option. Today, most Muslims would think that the image of the Prophet as a generous reformer and a kind ruler does not do full justice to his exalted status, and for this reason they would probably judge Maulanā Shiblī's work as lacking in value. But if people really wish to know the true worth of this book, they should ask the person whose heart was—*I seek refuge in Allah*—full of hatred and revulsion for the Noble Prophet! I will never forget the immense debt I owe to Shiblī's book. After all, whatever opinion Muslims may have of Abū Tālib, the fact of the matter is that he belonged to an entirely different category than the evil wretches named Abū Lahab and Abū Jahl.

Thus far I have been describing the role of different books and authors who paved the way for my journey back to Islam. It would now be worthwhile to mention the names of those individuals who helped me during this stage. A question will naturally arise in the reader's mind that, even though I maintained good relations with my Muslim friends and relatives, why did most of them keep quiet—why didn't they fulfill their obligation of sincere council and advice, either publicly or privately? Part of the answer lies in run-of-the-mill oblivion, apathy, inertia, and excessive tolerance. Secondly, many individuals did try as best as they could, but I was not the type of person who would give them the time of the day. A famous *maulvī ṣāhib* from Farangi Mahal in Lucknow, a distinguished Shaikh of *ṭarīqa* from Uttar Pradesh, a well-known Sufi from Delhi—all of them tried to persuade me in their own way but none of them was able to win me over:

No matter how much medicine and treatment I received / The disease went on spreading and I did not regain health.

If I have to name the individuals whose sincere and sagacious attempts, often carried out in a quiet and unpretentious manner, proved most effective in changing the direction of my life, then it would be the two men mentioned below.

The first of these was Akbar Allāhabādī [1846–1921], the celebrated master of witty and satirical poetry. He never allowed even the whiff of contentious argumentation or debate into our conversations, nor did he ever preach, admonish, or moralize. Every now and then, however, he would make a comment in his usual sweet and jovial manner that would penetrate deep into my heart, while also expanding my mind to create room for the acceptance of truth. One day he said to me:

Well mister, you studied Arabic in college—so are you still in touch with it? It’s important to cultivate the knowledge of language, whichever it might be.

I replied:

I didn’t have free time to continue my study of Arabic.

He said:

It doesn’t have to be anything arduous or time consuming. Even the Europeans acknowledge the literary excellence of the Qur’ān, and I have heard that in Western universities the latter half of the Qur’ān is included in courses on Arabic literature. Forget about beliefs—simply study the Qur’ān from the viewpoint of language and literature. Read it every day for as much time as you can easily spare. When you read something you don’t understand, just ignore it and move on; tell yourself that those sections aren’t meant for you. But eventually you will come across at least a few sentences that you will like—when you do, read those a few times over again. And you don’t even have to be in a state of *wuzū* to do this.

That's just one example of how tactful he was in fulfilling his duty of *tablīgh*.

The second person who was successful in making me re-think my views was the renowned leader of nation and community, Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar [1878–1931]. His was a forceful personality, and the affection between the two of us was deep. Sometimes he would employ humour; at other times, he would thunder with passion, or entreat with his tears. Through letters and in person, whenever he got a chance he would counsel me to return to Islam.

I had complete confidence in the intellect, intelligence, knowledge, and sincerity of both of these individuals, which is why I never felt irritated or annoyed by any of the advice they gave me. For their part, both men earned heavenly reward for the sincere concern they showed for my well-being.

After these two individuals of considerable stature, the third person worthy of mention is my friend Maulvi Abd al-Bari Nadavi—who, at the time of this writing (in July 1967), is widely known as Maulana Shah Abd al-Bari, the *khalīfa* (successor) of Shaikh Ṭhānavī. His influence, ever so gentle and quiet, was always for the better. And here I almost forgot to mention a fourth name, that of a non-Muslim—Bhagavan Das of Banaras, who was a philosopher and mystic of high acclaim. He too played an important role in leading me out of the dark pit of materialism and into the light of spirituality. In addition to benefitting from his writings, I also had the opportunity to meet with him often.

I had developed an inclination towards *taṣavvuf* after studying the *Bhagavad Gita*. As a result, I was no longer scandalized by the narratives concerning the extraordinary deeds—*karamāt*—of ṣūfī saints or by the spiritual teachings recorded in their *malfūzāt*. Instead of being repelled by such topics, I now started enjoying them. As a result, I ended up reading a considerable number of books on *taṣavvuf* in both Persian and Urdu. Among those who influenced me at the time, the name of Haji Waris Ali Shah [1819–1905], a widely known

ṣūfī sage from Dewa, is particularly worth mentioning. With great reverence and devotion, I studied his *malfūzāt* and listened to the stories of his various *karamāt* and supernatural exploits—*khavāriq*—that were quite popular at the time. I did all of this, even though I had not yet become a conscious Muslim.

Towards the end of 1919, I happened to come across a six-volume set of the *Mašnavī* by Maulana [Jalal al-Din] Rumi. This particular set, published in Kanpur, was most attractive because of its bold typesetting and beautiful printing. It was in the possession of one of my relatives, Sayyid Mumtaz Ahmad Bansvi Lukhnavi. I felt a strong desire to read the *Mašnavī*, and the dear relative agreed to start loaning me one volume at a time. All I had to do was start reading, and it felt as if someone had cast a spell on me. Even if I wanted to put the book down, I found that the book wouldn't let go of me! My Persian was weak and I couldn't make any sense of hundreds—probably thousands—of couplets. Nonetheless, I was so completely taken over by the text that I could not stop myself from reading it—I was experiencing the euphoric intoxication of someone hit by Cupid's arrow. I neglected eating and sleeping; all I wanted to do was lock my door and read the *Mašnavī* in complete seclusion. Every now and then tears would flow, and sometimes I would let loose a scream of ecstasy. The quality of the annotations provided in the margins was incredible—having been penned by “our revered spiritual guide.” These comments were brief, no more than a few words for each couplet, yet they succeeded brilliantly in extracting the essence of each couplet. I learned later on that the author of these annotations was none other than Haji Imdādullah Muhājir Makkī [1817–1899].

I can't recall how long it took me to finish reading the entire *Mašnavī*, but what I do recall is the profound gratitude I felt for my dear relative who had let me borrow the books, for he was the means through which this priceless blessing had reached me. Without any debate or argumentation, all doubt

and suspicion withered away from my heart. I couldn't wait to declare my faith in the composer of the *Maṣnavī*; it was as if the poet who had written this wonderful poem—*I seek refuge in Allāh*—was my God and my Prophet and my everything. Clearly, I was not yet a Muslim by any stretch of the imagination. At the same time, however, my heart had thoroughly distanced itself from *kufr* and had denounced skepticism and atheism.

During this period, I read many Persian books on Sufism, such as *Mantiq al-Tair* by Attar and *Nafhāt al-Uns* by Jami.²³ I also became fascinated with the paranormal and the supernatural, and would listen with reverent devotion to the marvellous stories of ṣūfī saints and their extraordinary feats. One of my cousins, Shaikh Naʿīm al-Zamān, came to stay with us; he turned out to be a living library of ṣūfī hagiographies whose company further intensified my interest. I started visiting ṣūfī shrines and attending ṣūfī festivals both within and outside Lucknow. *I seek refuge in Allah* — but for a while I actually believed that Haji Waris Ali Shah was an omnipresent and omniscient being! Overall, however, my alienation from Islam was shrinking day by day, and every step was bringing me closer and closer to Islam—even though the road along which I was travelling passed through the veneration of saints and their tombs.

Chapter 32

The Return to Islam

Due to the changes in my inner attitude, as discussed above, I found myself moving slowly but steadily towards Islam. I had become more than fifty percent Muslim when, in October 1920, I happened to stay at the home of one of my relatives—Justice Nāẓir Yar Jang—in Aurangabad, during a journey to [Hyderabad] Deccan. In his library, I happened to come across the English translation and commentary of the Qurʾān written by Muḥammad ʿAlī Lāhorī, a member of the Aḥmadiyya movement.²⁴ I eagerly took it out of the cabinet and started reading it. The more I read—*all praise belongs to*

Allah—the more my faith increased. Given my Westernized mindset at the time, the exact same meanings and explanations that I found to be banal and ineffective when I read them in Urdu now seemed to have a powerful impact on me as I encountered them in English. This may or may not have been the result of my mind playing tricks on me; either way, in my case at least this turned out to be the real fact of the matter. After reading this English rendering of the Qur’ān, I scrutinized my heart and discovered that I was, indeed, a Muslim—having uttered the *shahāda* with a clear conscience and without any hesitation, self-deception, or reservation. May Allāh grant this Muḥammad ‘Alī paradise at every turn. I do not want to get into the debate about whether his beliefs about Mirzā Ghulām Aḥmad were right or wrong, for the one thing I cannot deny is my personal experience. He was the one who put the final nail in the coffin of my atheism and apostasy.

The Islam which I had abandoned furtively and ever so gradually, by the grace of Allah I returned to that very Islam in the same gradual, step-by-step manner. Just as it is difficult to give a precise date and time for the beginning of my departure from Islam, it is not at all easy to provide the exact date and time for my return. Nonetheless, I can say that my journey back to Islam reached its culmination in October 1920. I went astray as a result of intellectual inquiry and study, which also turned out to be—*all praise belongs to Allah*—the means through which I was guided. As a result of my own journey, I personally experienced the verity of Akbar Allahabadi’s line “as education changes, so will the hearts.” The impact of living persons was relatively minor vis-à-vis the twists and turns of my journey.²⁵

Hindu philosophy and folk mysticism served as a bridge between *kufr* and *īmān*. This suggestion is particularly noteworthy for those austere and puritanical individuals who throw a fit at the very mention of Hindu philosophy and who equate it categorically with infidelity and misguidance. In fact, that same Hindu philosophy can be very easily turned into a

source of guidance. Nor should such people allow themselves to be so blinded by their religious zeal that they totally dismiss the contributions made by Shiblī Nu‘mānī and Muḥammad ‘Alī Lāhorī for the propagation of Islam. I for one have personally benefitted from the helping hand of both these authors. Even the work of Justice Sayyid Amīr ‘Alī [1849–1928]—author of *The Spirit of Islam* [1891]—should not be belittled, even though the poor soul probably considered the Qur’ān to be the speech of the Prophet.

The main takeaway of my journey is this: The sort of intellectual state I was in would not have allowed me to consider the writings of sages like Shaikh Thanavi as worthy of my attention, let alone study them diligently. In fact, their sermons and admonitions would have affected me in a way that was the exact opposite of the one intended. The food may be nourishing and of the finest quality, but if it doesn’t agree with the condition of the patient’s stomach, it is bound to cause more harm than good.

There can be no doubt that by this time I was blessed with the riches of faith. However, I was still stumbling around in the world of folk religion and monastic *taṣavvuf*, regularly visiting sufi shrines and participating in sufi festivals. One day I would pay homage at the shrine of Ajmēr,²⁶ the next day at the tomb of Khavaja Bakhtiyar Kaki.²⁷ I was a regular pilgrim at the various shrines within Lucknow (such as Shah Mina and Sufi Abd al-Rahman) as well as those in nearby towns such as Rudauli,²⁸ Bansa,²⁹ and Dewa.³⁰ I became especially fond of Delhi’s Niẓām al-Din Auliya³¹ and, as a result, became a regular guest of Khavaja Hasan Niẓami [1873–1955] for a long time.

At the beginning of 1921, I left Lucknow and moved to Daryabad. For two consecutive years in Daryabad, I sponsored the annual festival in honour of my [earliest known] ancestor, Makhdūm Ābkash Daryabadi, with great fanfare, including *qavvālī* gatherings. Early next year, I got hold of several ecstatic poems composed by Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar

in praise of the Prophet (peace be upon him). I had them performed by *qavvāls*, along with some of my own odes that I composed in the same metre. It so happened that numerous *qavvāls* had arrived in Daryabad, one of the most prominent being the late Afzal Qavvāl. Attending *qavvālī* sessions became virtually a part of my daily routine, and over time I even began to shed tears while listening to mystical songs. I vividly recall the first time I wept uncontrollably—it was when I heard Jāmī’s famous ode that begins with the following couplet:

Walk, once more reveal your stately beauty,
Make dizzy the heads of devotees full of love for
you

My eyes would well up with tears whenever I heard the blessed name of Allāh’s Messenger (peace be upon him). On several occasions, I saw in my dreams saints and sages who had passed away, as well as those who were still living.

This stage lasted for two-and-a-half to three years. It was probably around September 1923 that I was blessed with the opportunity to study the *Maktūbāt* [letters] of Mujaddid Sirhindi.³² I got hold of a nine-volume set published in Amritsar.³³ This edition was impressive in every way—beautiful script clearly printed on high quality paper, along with annotations in the margins—just like the Kanpur edition of the *Maṣnavī*. This text had more or less the same effect on me as Rūmī’s *Maṣnavī* had had three or four years earlier—with one major difference. The *Maṣnavī* had given birth to the intoxication of spiritual ecstasy, which I experienced as something akin to the heat of passion. As a result, I had so far been aimlessly wandering hither and thither, giving myself over to every saint—whether dead or alive—whom I happened to come across. Now, through reading the *Maktūbāt*, I found the solid path of following the *sharī‘a*. The desired end became clearly established—the attainment of God’s pleasure—and the means of attaining that end became obvious as well—obeying the Prophetic injunctions. As long as I am alive, I will not

forget the blessings and favours that were bestowed upon me by means of the *Masnavī* and the *Maktūbāt*. Whatever guidance I received, I must acknowledge that, in the final analysis, it came about as the fruit of my study of these two texts—and this was despite the fact that the study took place without the help of a teacher, and that it remained to a large extent superficial and cursory due to my deficient capacity and competence.

It was at this point that I began my study of core religious texts. The little bit of Arabic that I had learned in college finally paid off. I embarked upon the study of *tafsīr*, *ḥadīṣ*, *fiqh*, and *kalām* with great interest and diligence, often relying upon Urdu translations. By the grace of Allāh, the majority of the key texts in each of these areas had already been translated into Urdu. I got my hands on a number of Urdu and Persian translations of the Qur’ān, and I carefully went through all of them one by one. Then I turned to the classical commentaries on the Qur’ān, and read *al-Kashshāf* [by Imām al-Zamakhsharī] and [its condensed and revised version by Imām] *al-Baizāwī*, as well as others. Studying everything in all the available collections of *ḥadīṣ* wasn’t a realistic goal, but I did read those sections of the *Ṣaḥaḥ al-Sitta* that appealed to my taste. Similarly, I went through those parts of the well-known and frequently referenced works on *fiqh* that I considered relevant, studying them with the help of translations and marginal annotations. I quickly learned to make use of any book that I could find on Qur’ānic terminology, *ḥadīṣ* terminology, and *fiqh* terminology. I had always been a compulsive reader, and this “disease” of mine proved pretty useful at this stage too, as I devoured page after page of these texts with varying degrees of understanding.

There was a venerable elder in Lucknow, Maulvi Abd al-Ahad Kasmandvi (d. 1929)—in appearance government bureaucrat but a man of deep intuition and insight in reality. I enjoyed his company very much, for I could be mischievous around him, and even a little stubborn. Outside Barabanki there

was another well-respected elder, Maulvi Ābid Husain Fatehpuri (d. 1927)—a learned person, meticulous follower of the *shar'īa*, and a man of high spiritual station. I learned from both men to the extent of my own capacity. By far the greatest benefit that I received in terms of faith came from the company of Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar (d. 1931). In appearance, he was neither a mystic, nor a scholar, nor a reformer. In reality, he was a spiritual heavyweight, raging in front of faith. A deep love for the Prophet and an intimate attachment to the Qur'ān dominated his everyday existence. If any life was breathed into my own faith, it was through the blessings of his company. I met him frequently from the end of 1923 to the end of 1930, mostly in Lucknow and Delhi but also in Bombay, Aligarh, and other places. Each meeting provided spiritual nourishment to my moribund faith. My first meeting with Maulanā Husain Ahmad³⁴ had already occurred in Kanpur in December 1925 in relation to the Khilāfat Committee. Afterwards other such opportunities presented themselves in Deoband, Lucknow, Saharanpur, and in Daryabad itself. It was because of his generosity of spirit that in July 1927 I was able to gain access to Shaikh [Ashraf Ali] Thanavi. I cannot describe in words the incredible benefits—religious, spiritual, and moral—that I received through my association with Shaikh Thanavi. One of his students was Haji Muḥammad Shafī' Bijnauri (d. December 11, 1951 or Zu al-Hijja 8, 1370); he was so kind and affectionate towards me that for all practical purposes he appeared to be one of my closest relatives. May Allāh grant all of these righteous souls the loftiest of stations. Other than offering heartfelt prayers for these elders, what else can a worthless commoner and sinner like me do to repay them for the blessed favours they bestowed on me.

Notes and References

- * Associate Professor, Lahore University of Management Sciences, Lahore.
- ** Associate Professor, Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota, USA.
- 1 ‘Abd al-Mājid Daryābādī, *Āp Bītī* (Karachi: Majlis-i Nashrīyāt Islām, 1996), p 233-259.
- 2 The reference to the supererogatory night vigil—*tahajjud*—implies that the elders in the household maintained a higher level of ritual piety than is pursued by most people.
- 3 Abd al-Hayy Farangi-Maḥalli (1848–1886) was a well-known scholar and teacher of religious sciences, especially ḥadīṣ and fiqh. He belonged to a prominent and influential family of religious scholars from the Lucknow neighbourhood of Farangi Mahal—so named because the estate once belonged to a French merchant before it was bestowed on the family by Emperor Aurangzēb in 1695. One of the distinguished scholars of this family was Mulla Niẓam al-Din Ahmad (d. 1748), who helped standardize what became the dominant system of Islamic education in South Asia, viz., Dars-i Niẓāmī. For details, see Francis Robinson. *The ‘Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers Ltd., 2001). The term *mujaddid* means “one who renews (religion).” It is widely believed, on the basis of a ḥadīṣ, that a renewer of religion appears at the beginning of every Islamic century.
- 4 Muhammad Ali Mungēri (1846–1927) was one of the founders of Nadvat al-‘Ulamā as well as its first rector; in order to resist the influence of Christian missionaries, he issued a newspaper, published several books, and established an orphanage for Muslim children. Sanā’ullah Amritsari (1868–1948) was an anti-missionary debater and author of several polemical works on Christianity.
- 5 The Arya Samaj movement was founded by Swami Dayananda in 1875 as a missionary form of Hinduism. Starting in early twentieth-century, the movement began a campaign—known as *Shuddhi*—for bringing Indian Muslims and Christians back into Hinduism.
- 6 Shibli Nu‘mani (1857–1914) was a widely influential poet, historiographer, and man of letters.
- 7 The original title of the book was *Physical, Sexual, and Natural Religion* (first edition 1854), by George R. Drysdale (1825–1904),

a British physician. In earlier editions, the author was identified only as “A Graduate of Medicine” due to the controversial nature of the book’s subject matter.

8 *The International Library of Famous Literature: Selections from the World’s Great Writers, Ancient, Medieval, and Modern, with Biographical and Explanatory Notes and Critical Essays* was edited by Richard Garnett, Leon Vallée, Alois Brandl, and Donald G. Mitchell, and published in 1898-99 in London and New York (20 volumes).

9 *Logic* by St. George Joseph Stock (1903).

10 This is probably a reference to Stock’s *Deductive Logic* (1888).

11 *A System of Logic: Ratiocinative and Inductive* by John Stuart Mill (1843).

12 Charles Bradlaugh (1833–186) was a British activist and author who wrote numerous books attacking Christianity and promoting atheism; he founded the National Secular Society in 1866.

13 Ludwig Büchner (1824–1899) was a German philosopher and physician, famous for his advocacy of scientific materialism; he founded the German Freethinkers League in 1881. Büchner’s most important work was *Kraft und Stoff* (1855), translated into English as *Force and Matter* (1864).

14 Robert G. Ingersoll (1833–1899) was an American lawyer and orator, noted for his defence of agnosticism.

15 Henry Maudsley (1835–1918), British psychiatrist and author of *The Physiology and Pathology of the Mind* (1867). Revised editions of the book were subsequently published as two separate volumes, *The Physiology of Mind* (1876) and *The Pathology of Mind* (1879).

16 According to the research done by Tehsin Feraqi, Dr. Maudsley does not explicitly mention the Prophet’s name. He does describe the mental and physiological state of an individual experiencing “revelation”. Please see: Tehsin Feraqi, *Abd al-Majid Daryabadi: Ahvāl-o-Āsār* (Lahore: Idara Saqafat-i Islamia, 1993), p 49-52.

17 The first two years of college.

18 The Rationalist Press Association was founded in London in 1885 to publish books that mainstream publishers didn’t want to touch because they considered them to be too anti-religious.

19 Samuel Marinus Zwemer (1867–1952) was an American missionary and scholar who was nicknamed “the Apostle to Islam.” In 1911, Zwemer founded the quarterly journal *The Moslem World* with the aim of educating American Christians

about Islam and Muslim societies. The journal is still being published under the title *The Muslim World* by Hartford Seminary. The extent of Daryabadi's atheism can be gauged from the following passage. After telling the reader that twin sons were born in July 1917, he goes on to note:

The first son died almost as soon as he was born. The funeral preparations and the burial itself were done by my relatives: What did I—the committed atheist that I was—have to do with such things? The second son survived childbirth and I named him “Akbar” in honour of Akbar Allahabadi. After reaching the age of 13 months, he too passed away in September 1918. The mother was beside herself in mourning and grief. What words of comfort could I—being the stone-hearted atheist that I was—offer her? I did not take part in the arrangements for the funeral, the burial, or anything of the sort. (*Āp Bītī*, p. 367)

This is probably a reference to Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856–1920). *Bhagavad Gita* (“Song of the Lord”) consists of chapters 25–42 of the sixth book of *Mahabharata*; its narrative framework is that of a dialogue between Prince Arjuna and his guide Lord Krishna regarding the absoluteness of the imperative to fulfill one's duty.

Farid al-Din Attar (1145–1221) was a Persian ṣūfī poet, best known for his long mystical poem *Mantiq al-Tair*, translated into English as *The Conference of the Birds*. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (1414–1492) was a prolific scholar, poet, and ṣūfī theologian; his book *Nafḥāt al-Uns min Ḥazrāt al-Quds* is a collection of ṣūfī hagiographies.

The Aḥmadīyya movement was founded in the Punjab in 1889 by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835–1908). The movement is based on Ghulām Aḥmad's messianic and prophetic claims, including the belief that he represented the fulfillment of various eschatological prophecies. Following the death of Ghulām Aḥmad's first successor in 1914, the movement split into two: the Qādiyānī faction stressed Ghulām Aḥmad's claim to prophethood while the Lāhorī faction held him to be only a renewer of religion, or *mujaddid*. Muhammad Ali Lahori (1874–1951) was a leading figure of the latter faction; his English translation and commentary of the Qur'ān was first published in 1917.

The following description of Daryabadi's first major publication in English poignantly sums up some of the most important issues concerning the relationship among intellectual curiosity, scholarly inquiry, and a person's inner spiritual-intellectual condition:

In 1913, I penned a long English essay titled “Psychology of Leadership.” I had it typed up and sent it to a well-known British monthly “19th Century” to be considered for publication. It was hardly worth being published in this periodical and was returned to me with a cordial note of thanks. I reviewed the essay, expanded it, and turned it into a book. Once again, I sent it to London. Now good fortune smiled upon me and one of the leading publishers of the day, T. Fischer Unwin, agreed to publish it on the condition that the cost of publication be borne by the author. I managed to put together the needed amount and the book was published in London in 1915. After publication, reviews of the book started to appear in the English press—so much so that it was reviewed in *The Times Literary Supplement*. For me this was nothing less than a priceless treasure and I was puffed up with pride and a sense of self-importance to the bursting point. [...]

As my book was being prepared for publication in English, I began to expand its Urdu version by adding new examples and supporting evidence. The additions were so copious that the length of the Urdu version became twice or two-and-a-half times the length of the English version. Instead of naming it *Social Psychology*, I chose the title *Social Philosophy*. If I recall correctly, it was published in 1916 by Anjuman Taraqqi-i Urdū. [...] Strictly speaking, the book was on the topic of psychology, but since this was the period during which my atheism was in its vigorous, youthful stage, it was as if a potent dose of poison was injected into every single line of the book. Taking the approach of the Orientalists as my model, I did not explicitly attack the Qur’ān or the sīra of the Prophet; instead, I offered such explanations and interpretations concerning them that the reader was left with the impression that both of them were completely worthless. After about a year and a half, when I went to Hyderabad as an employee in the Department of Editing and Translation at Osmania University, a great deal of religious controversy surrounded this book, and many *fatāvā* were pronounced declaring me a *kāfir*. Being firmly in the grip of atheism, I went toe-to-toe with my detractors—meting out as much as I absorbed. But when I finally regained my senses after many years and was blessed to re-enter Islam, the first thing I did was to repent and seek refuge in Allāh from this vile book. I publicly expunged this book from the list of my publications. I seek refuge in Allāh from this book and the

other transgressions and sins that I committed during that period of my life. (*Āp Bīṭī*, p. 277-8)

26 The “shrine of Ajmēr” refers to the tomb of the mystic-saint Moeen al-Din Chishti (1141–1236), the founder of the Chishti order of Sufism.

27 Khavaja Sayyid Muḥammad Qutb al-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki (1173–1235) was a mystic-saint of the Chishti order; his tomb is located near Qutb Mīnār in Delhi.

28 The tomb of Shaikh Aḥmad Abd al-Haq (a 14th/15th century mystic-saint) is located in Rudauli, a city in the Faizabad district of Utter Pradesh.

29 The tomb of Abd al-Razzaq Shah, a 17th/18th century mystic-saint, is located in Bansa, a city in the Barabanki district of Uttar Pradesh.

30 The tomb of Waris Ali Shah (1819–1905) is located in Dewa, is a city in the Barabanki district of Uttar Pradesh.

31 Shaikh Khavaja Sayyid Muhammad Nizam al-Din Auliya (1238–1325) was one of the most famous representatives of the Chishtī order; he is buried in Delhi.

32 Shaikh Aḥmad Sirhindī (1564–1624), often described as Mujaddid Alf Šānī (the renewer of Islam’s second millennium), was a Ḥanafī jurist and a mystic-saint of the Naqshbandī order.

33 This edition of Shaikh Sirhindī’s 124 letters was edited by Maulvi Nur Ahmad Amritsari and published between 1909 and 1916.

34 Sayyid Husain Ahmad Madani (1879–1957) was a religious scholar and political leader, associated with Dār al-‘Ulūm Deoband and Jam‘īyyat-i ‘Ulamā-i Hind.