requirement to carry out religious obligation on the basis of either or both of these branches. A key principle here is his treatment of the concept of mazinna, pl. mazann or mazinnat which can be understood as derived from the Arabic root “z-n-n” meaning to think or believe, thus a mazinna is “a place where something is expected or thought to be, a supposed location or instantiation” or “a mark or indication of something”. Certain “mazann” are symbols or acts which were set from pre-ternity as most suitable for the natures of all humans. The relationship of the mazinna to the principle for which it stands is compared by Shâh Wali Allâh to that of a word to its referent or the mental image to the reality which is being thought about.

Then when God inspired this knowledge to the Highest Council and revealed to them that the anticipated sources (mazinnat) would stand in the position of the principles, and that they were their embodiments and representations, and that religious obligations could not be imposed on a people except through them, a certain consensus (ijma’) obtained in the Holy Enclave that they (the laws) were like the word in relation to the reality which is its referent, and like the mental image in relation to the external reality from which it is derived, and like the painted portrait in relation to the one of whom it was drawn in its portraying him, and like the written form in relation to the words which it puts down. For, in all of these things, when the relation between the signifier and the signified is strengthened there arises between them a permanent bond and a close association with each other, and in a certain scope, one is the other.16

It is thus in Shâh Wali Allâh’s concept of mazinna that we find the basis of his theory of change, variation, and abrogation of religious rulings. While the relationship of the symbol to its referent is fixed within any context, it is possible that just as there are different languages, there may be different sets of mazann, even corresponding to successive revelations of the one true din. According to this theory of change, the symbols for the best interests (masâlih) of the human race will vary with its ages and customs. “The anticipated sources (mazann) of things conducive to benefit, (masâlih) differ in accordance with the differences in the eras and customs.”17

Some of these mazann may be considered natural rulings or symbols, as they are derived through the branch of rulings based on the beneficial purposes (masâlih)—i.e., those things which are in accordance with the nature (fitra) and purpose of the human race. Violating rules connected with such mazann leads to a natural punishment or harm coming to a person even if no religious law had been revealed explicitly requiring them. In the case of the religious laws connected with historical contexts; the religious symbols embodied in their rulings are also derived from particular historical contexts and situations. These, then, come to have a more general validity at the higher spiritual level and from there come to have an effect of the form of the entire human species which has existed from pre-ternity at the archetypal plane of the World of Images. In this manner a symbol or anticipated source of benefit derived from the shari’a branch of legislation becomes “naturalized” so that being required on the basis of these rulings has a natural effect, as well as being based on legislative decrees. Some of these religious laws and symbols may be explained or understood through reason while others are not rationally comprehensible, and thus textual sources are required in order to know of them. This conclusion reinforces Shâh Wali Allâh’s argument for the importance of the study of the hadith or saying of the Prophet, an argument central to this entire volume of the Hujjat Allâh al-Bâligha.

Part seven then proceeds to the central topic of the volume, the hadith reports of the Prophet Muhammad, by treating the traditional elements of the discipline, reviewing the methods of evaluating and interpreting the hadith reports, and surveying the historical development of this field and its major works.

The final section comprises four chapters concerning juristic disagreement within the four Sunni legal schools (madhâhib) which were likely appended to the original work. Shâh Wali Allâh’s position on ijtihâd and taqlid as expressed in these chapters and elsewhere will be discussed later in this introduction.

Biography

Shâh Wali Allâh was the great intellectual figure of eighteenth-century Islam in India and a prolific writer in Arabic and Persian. Biographical material and anecdotes concerning his life and family

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16 Ch. 58.
17 Ch. 57.
may be found in his brief autobiography Al-Juz' al-Latif fi Tarjuma
al-'Abd al-Dā'īf and in his work Anfas al-'Arifīn which features
accounts of his father, his uncle, and his spiritual teachers in India
and the Hijaz. Shāh Wali Allāh was born on the 4th of Shawwāl,
1214 A.H. or February 21, 1703. He was the first child of his fa-
ther’s second marriage entered into when the latter was already
sixty years old. His father and spiritual guide, Shāh ‘Abd al-Rahīm
(d. 1719) was an extremely learned man and a practicing mystic
of the Naqshbandiyya order, as well as the Chishtiyya and Qādirīyya
orders. In Shāh Wali Allāh’s anecdotes about his father in the Anfas
al-'Arīfīn we get a sense of the deep reverence in which he held
him. His father was in charge of his own madrasa or teaching
academy in Delhi and was a very well-known scholar. For a time
Shāh ‘Abd al-Rahīm was engaged to work on the compilation of
legal rulings commissioned by the Mughal ruler Aurangzeb (d. 1707)
and known as the Fatāwā ‘Alamgīri. Apparently he wished to avoid
being involved with the court but had difficulty in getting himself
excused from the task. There is a suggestion that conflict with
some of the other scholars working on the text finally led to his
being excused and offered a land grant, which he refused.

Shāh ‘Abd al-Rahīm decided to marry a second time at the late
age of sixty years, as he had had a mystical intimation that a son
would be born to him who would reach a high mystical attainment.
One of his disciples, Shaykh Muhammad of Phulat, offered
the hand of his daughter to his teacher. When criticized by some
for this late marriage, Shāh ‘Abd al-Rahīm disclosed that he knew
that he would have more than one child, and, in fact, he lived
until the seventeenth year of Shāh Wali Allāh’s life and had an-
other son, who was named Aḥlūl Allāh. A number of anecdotes re-
counted in Shāh Wali Allāh’s works, indicate that his mother also
possessed exceptional religious devotion and mystical insight.

The ancestors of Shāh Wali Allāh had settled in the town of
Rohtak, near Delhi in the thirteenth century, soon after the con-
quest of Delhi. On his father’s side his ancestry could be traced
back to the caliph ‘Umar and on his mother’s side to ‘Ali, fourth
caliph and son-in-law of the Prophet.”

Shāh ‘Abd al-Rahīm devoted considerable attention to the edu-
cation of his precocious son. Shāh Wali Allāh began his schooling
at the age of five. When he was seven he began to pray and fast
and completed his first reading of the Qur’ān. At this same age he
began to read Persian treatises, and by the time he was ten he was
able to read and study independently. At some time before or after
his second marriage, Shāh ‘Abd al-Rahīm moved from Agra to
Delhi. The family lived in a house in the district of Kotla Firuz
Shāh, where Shāh ‘Abd al-Rahīm’s madrasa was located.19

With his father, young Wali Allāh studied hadith works such as the Mishkāt
al-Masābīh20 and the Sahīh al-Bukhārī, works on Qur’ān interpre-
tation, Islamic jurisprudence, and theology. In addition, he was
exposed to works of Sufism by such masters of Ibn ‘Arabī’s school
of the Unity of Existence as ‘Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī (1492), and
Fakhruddīn Trāqī (1289).21 Besides religious subjects, his studies
included Astronomy, Mathematics, Arabic and Persian Language
and Grammar, and medical science (tibb) from which many con-
cepts and theories influence his works.

Shāh Wali Allāh was married during his fourteenth year to the
doughter of his maternal uncle. According to his autobiography,
this was at the insistence of his father who had foretold that there
was some secret reason for conducting the marriage with all haste.
It turned out that shortly after the marriage a number of family
members died in succession which would have resulted in a long
delay and possibly cancellation of the match. When Shāh Wali
Allāh was fifteen years old his father accepted him as a disciple in
the Naqshbandiyya order and he began to perform the practices of
that order. He also completed his course in Islamic studies in that
year and was permitted by his father to teach others. When Shāh
‘Abd al-Rahīm was on his deathbed he gave his son permission to
initiate others in Sufism and to give them spiritual guidance. For
twelve years after his father’s death in 1719 Shāh Wali Allāh taught
and studied the religious sciences and continued in meditative

19 Sayyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, Shāh Wali Allāh and His Times (Canberra: Muslim
20 Mishkāt al-Masābīh by-al-Marghirānī, trans. James Robson (Lahore: Ashraf,
1963). A large number of the hadith cited by the author in this work may be found
in the Mishkāt.
21 “‘Al-Juz’ al-Latif fi Tarjuma al-‘Abd al-Dā’īf” (Persian original) in Journal of
the Asiatic Society of Bengal 14 (1912): 161–175 with English translation by M.
Hidāyat Hūsain.
science through the study of the reports of the Prophet. The revitalization of hadith studies as a discipline supporting attempts at social and moral reconstruction has been cited as a feature of eighteenth-century Islam. In the preface to the Hujjat Allah al-Baligha, Shāh Wali Allah writes that he delayed for some time in undertaking such an ambitious project, but the urging of one of his closest disciples, Muhammad `Ashiq of Phulat (1773), and his recognition of the desperate need for such a work led him to embark on the work.

It was sometime after his return to India that he concluded a second marriage from which four sons and one daughter were born. From his first marriage he had one son and a daughter.

After Shāh Wali Allah's death in 1762, his teachings were carried on by his descendants, in particular his sons, Shāh 'Abd al-'Aziz (d. 1823) and Shāh Rafi' al-Dīn (d. 1818), and his grandson Shāh Ismā'īl Shahid (d. 1831). The influence of this notable family has been termed a "Wali Allāhi movement." While the works of his descendants show some influence of Shāh Wali Allah's thinking, they do not appear to have the same grasp of universal principles as the original. The extent of Shāh Wali Allah's influence and the shift in interests and intellectual positions among his descendants still remains to be studied.


24 The connection of this movement with reformist tendencies in Sufism in this period was first noted by Fazlur Rahman in Islam (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970), 206, who coined the term Neo-Sufism for such developments. For a discussion of scholarship on "Neo-Sufism" see R.S. O'Fahey, Enigmatic Saint (Evanston: Northwestern U. P., 1990), 1–9 and the subsequent article by R.S. O'Fahey and Bernd Radtke, "Neo-Sufism Reconsidered" in Der Islam: Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur des Orients, LXX (1, 1993) 52–87 which attempts to refute the "neo-Sufi" hypothesis on the basis of historical and textual evidence from Africa and the Middle East. Perhaps the South Asian context evidences stronger trends in this direction.


26 This understanding seems to have been developed by 'Ubaydullah Sindi in Shāh Wali Allah aur unhi Siyasi Tairik (Lahore, 1970) and remains influential in South Asian studies on the legacy of Shāh Wali Allah, for example Aziz Ahmad "The Waliullah Movement," in Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964).
The Historical Context

Shāh Wali Allāh’s life and work must be set against the background of the troubled age in which he lived. The stable and powerful leadership of the Mughal ruler Aurangzeb ended in 1707 when Shāh Wali Allāh was still a child. During the remainder of his life of slightly less than sixty years, ten monarchs sat upon the throne of Delhi. The power of the Mughal rulers declined steadily after Aurangzeb and the power and control of the central government gradually weakened, as both internal and external forces pressed on the empire, pushing it toward instability and decay. From 1708 until 1716 the Sikhs plundered the northwest until they were driven back by the Mughals. The Hindu Marathas from the south invaded suburbs of Delhi in 1738, and the Mughals were forced to give up the province of Malwa to them, thus dividing their empire. By 1750 they were involved in the Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, and they managed to attack Delhi in 1757.

In 1739 the disastrous invasion of Nadir Shah, King of Persia, occurred in which the imperial treasury was looted and the citizens of Delhi were put to the sword.

The power of another outside force, the Afghan Rohillas under Ahmad Shāh Abdālī, was also on the rise and an invasion of India from the northwest began so that by the 1740s the Punjab was occupied. At the battle of Panipat in January 1761, the Maratha forces were defeated by the Afghans, but Abdālī’s army mutinied and he was forced to retire, ending anticipations of a renewed Muslim power in Delhi.

In his work, Shāh Wali Allāh ke Siyāsi Maktubāt, Professor Khatā Ghanī Ahmad Nizāmi published a collection of Shāh Wali Allāh’s letters to various Muslim nobles and leaders, urging them to either strengthen the current administration, or in the case of outside Muslim leaders such as Abdālī, to defeat Hindu threats to Muslim rule such as the threat of the Marathas. This involvement of Shāh Wali Allāh in the politics of his time seems to have been prompted by the urgency of the situation, and was more in the nature of a respected religious leader and scholar speaking out of conscience, than that of an active political force. It was not uncommon for Sufis of the Naqshbandiyya order to take stands on political issues in this way, and to have contacts with the ruling class and nobles. While Shāh Wali Allāh occasionally comments on injustices and the need for a better government, his political thought consists principally of presenting idealized models of the state and the qualities of its rulers and officials.

Another feature of the Muslim society of his time was the conflict between Sunni and Shi‘i factions at the court and in the society at large. The Sunni Muslims condemned Shi‘a practices such as the Muharram processions as excessive, and the issue of who should have been the successor of the Prophet was actively debated by representatives of each belief—Shāh Wali Allāh was very staunch in his defense of the Sunni position and his repudiation of Shi‘a views of the caliphal succession. His enterprise of the reconciliation of divergent positions among Muslims, therefore, did not include these Shi‘i elements.

Shāh Wali Allāh’s Views on Iktīlāf, Ijtihād, and Taqlid

The subject of juristic disagreement or iktīlāf was often treated by the Muslim jurists once legal schools began to form. Among the most influential of these works on Shāh Wali Allāh’s formulations are al-Shāf‘ī’s Risāla and al-Suyūtī’s (1505) works on ijtihād. Shāh Wali Allāh’s position on following the legal schools seems to have moderated over the course of his lifetime. Mażhar Baqā‘a categorizes these developmental stages chronologically as 1) inherited tendencies, 2) the youthful outcome of his own reflections, 3) influences of his stay in the Hijaz, and 4) the effects of the practical environment in which he taught in India.

As previously indicated, his family background would have stressed the Hanafi school which was by far the dominant school in Central Asia and India. While his father was a prominent Hanafi jurist, he was known to have disagreed with the school on a number of issues.22