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The Untold legacy of Professor Mufti Abdul Ghani Al Azhari: a man with a Mission

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Abstract

Professor Dr Abdul Ghani al Azhari, a polymath is an internationally renowned Islamic scholar and sufi of India. His political inspirations include his teacher Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad who both have to their credit the honour of being great Freedom Fighters of India. Azhari has served both religion and country as well. From the past 7 decades, he works to avail the basic necessities such as clothing, shelter, bread, education especially for orphans, economically weaker sections, scheduled tribes etc. He serves the people regardless of caste, creed and religion. His work even caught the eye of Oriental Theologian, Emmanuel David Singh, who later on highlighted his contribution in his work: Islamization of Modern South Asia.

In this research paper, I have brought to light for the first time the legacy of Professor Azhari by the virtue of highlighting his educational background, defining his tower of knowledge, his religious and social contributions, his role on propagation of anti racial and anti apartheid thought, his focus on theistic philosophy, his contribution to communal harmony and establishment of peace, as he is a true practising Sufi.

Keywords: Polymath, Qur'an, Hadith, Fiqh, Sufi.

Introduction

His Immense *Sheikh al Islam*¹ *Allamah* Dr Abdul Ghani Al Azhari was born in the year 1922 CE², to Ali Miyan Shashi at Poonch in Jammu and Kashmir³. He later on settled in Sagam area of Kokernag in Anantnag Kashmir. The benefactor of muslims, *Allamah* Dr Abdul Ghani Al Azhari is an internationally renowned scholar with high proficiency in religious sciences. He served and continues to serve his religion and society by the virtue of educating, clothing and availing the bread for the poor and unprivileged.

Alma Mater: Darul Uloom Deoband (1363 A H) 1943, Mazahir al uloom Saharanpur (1369 A H) 1949.^{4,5}, Dar al uloom Deoband (1378 AH) 1958, Jamiatal Azhar sharif (1386 AH) 1966.

His immense holds the position of Hadith teacher (*Musnid al Hadith*) Internationally. Sheikh is witness to the century old rise and fall of *Ummah* and moreover is an epitome of spirituality. He is the man with a mission for which he left no stone unturned, the mission of Islam, the never dying vigour to serve the *Ummah* of The Final Prophet SAW. He is a *mufassir*, *muhaddith*, *Faqih*, *mujtahid* having a tight grip on contemporary discourse in knowledge as well. His literature even served and continues to serve against Atheism. He is the founder of multiple religious seminaries throughout India. Sheikh serves the seat of *Sheikh al Hadithat* Darul Uloom Nizamiyah Saharanpur (UP). Sheikh even has to his credit a diploma in psychology and a Ph.D in Hadith from al Azhar.⁶ His Ph.D thesis is entitled as: *Al Imam Al Muslim Wa Manhajuhu Fi Al Hadith Riwayatn Wa Dirayatan*. Sheikh served *Madinat al Uloom* in Hazratbal Sgr as a professor⁷ and has to his credit the seat of headship of Kashmir University's Arabic Department where from he retired in the year 1997.

His prominent teachers mainly include his grandfather Maulana Abdul Halim al Shashi.⁸ Prominent teachers from Mazahir al Uloom⁹ include:

1. Qutb al Aqtab Sheikh al Hadith Muhammad Zakariyah Kandhalwi (d.1402 AH): Sheikh al Azhari studied under him books of Hadith and *fiqh* mainly *Bulugh al Maram*, *Mishkat al Masabih*, *Awjaz al Masalik*, and *Fazail i 'Amal* are sheikh's distinctive contributions.
2. Maulana Abdur Rahman Kamilpuri (d.1385 AH) was a polymath. He had a deep love particularly for Hadith, used to teach Sunan of Imam al Tirmithi.
3. Allamah Maulana Syed Sidiq Nahwi al Kashmiri (d.1389 AH) is regarded as *Sheikh al Maqulat* and Imam of *Nahw*.

His chief teachers from Pakistan are

1. Sheikh al Qur 'an Maulana Ghulam Allah Khan (1905-1975), was a dedicated student of Anwar Shah Al Kashmiri, He had studied Qur'an from Maulana Hussain Ali.
2. Sheikh al Tafsir Ahmad Ali Lahori (1887- 1962) was among chief students of Sheikh al Hind and Ubaid Allah Sindhi. The chief quality of Ahmad Ali Lahori was his tight grip on *Rabr*¹⁰ between the verses and its impact on the translation and exegesis.

His teachers from Darul Uloom Deoband¹¹ include:

1. Sheikh al Islam Hussain Ahmad Madani¹², 1878-1957 who was among the chief students of Sheikh al Hind Mahmud al Hassan Deobandi, 5th chief instructor of Darul Uloom. He was majaz and khalifa of Rashid Ahmad Gangohi in Tasawwuf. He was a high ranked Muhaddith and his Hadith lectures were quite a famous. Some 4483 students studied Sahih al Bukhari from him, he also used to teach Sunan al Tirmithi. He was a great freedom fighter, always remained in the forefront for the salvation and betterment of India for which he even was sent to Malta as a prisoner. He was chief of Jamiat i ulma i Hind.
2. *Hakim al Islam* Qari Muhammad Tayyab (1897 -1980), served Darul Uloom for more than half a century as a central figure¹³. His one of the achievements is that he studied Hujjat Allah al Balighah from Ubaid Allah Sindhi. Sheikh al Azhari studied Hujjat from Hakim al Islam.
3. Allamah Muhammad Ibrahim Balyawi: He served as *Sadr al Mudarrisin* of Darul Uloom from 1377 AH, particularly regarded as master of Philosophy, logic and rational sciences (*Sheikh al Maqulat*). He chiefly taught Sahih al Muslim¹⁴. He was Sheikh al Hind's murid in Tasawwuf.
4. Maulana Azaz Ali Amrauhi (d.1374) graduated from Darul Uloom in the year 1321 AH Served as Mufti Azam, is regarded as Sheikh al Adab also taught Sunan al Tirmithi.
5. Maulana syed Fakhr al Din, he succeeded Hussan Ahmad Madani as Sheikh al Hadith post his death in 1957.

Prominent Azharite teachers:

1. Prof. Dr Abdul Halim Mahmud al Shaf 'ii (1910-1978), grand imam of al Azhar a great Scholar. Did his done his PhD under Louis Massignan Harith al Muhasibi the great Sufi.
2. Sheikh Abdul Wahhab Abdul Latif (1907-1970): Sheikh al Azhari has *Ijazah* and *Isnad* from sheikh Abdul Wahab Abdul Al Maliki. It will be enough to introduce Sheikh Abdul Wahhab Abdul Latif by the virtue of him being editor/ researcher and author of some major books related to ulum al hadith. He researched¹⁵ *Taqrib al Tahthib* of Sheikh al Islam Ibn al Hajr, *Tanzih al Shari 'ah* of ibn 'Araq, *Al fawa'id al Majmo 'ah fi Ahadith al mawdhu 'ah* of Imam al Shawkani, *Muwatta Malik bi Riwayat Muhammad bin Hassan al Shaybani*, *Tadrib al Rawi li suyuti*. He has authored books like *Al Mubtakir al jami 'ah likitabi al mukhtasar fi ulum al athar*, *Al m 'utasar min mustalahat ahlul atharminas sunnah washshi 'ah al imamiyyah wal zaydiyyah*, *Al takmilah fi tarikh al ulamah wa al naqlah*.

His other teachers of high repute include Sheikh Sayid Sabiq (1915-2000) the recipient of Shah Faisal Award has authored many books like *Masadirul Quwwah fil Islam*, *al riba wal Badl Fiqhul Sunnah*. (his magnum opus)¹⁶ etc.

Shuyukh in Tasawwuf to whom he has the honour of being deputy and authority to permit/certify (*Khalifa and Majaz*) include: Maulana Shah Abdul Qadir Raipuri¹⁷ (b.1875), was disciple of Shah Abdul Rahim Raipuri (*Khalifa and Majaz*). Maulana Muhammad Ibrahim Balyawi, was disciple of Sheikh al Hind. Muhammad Zakariya Kandhelwi, was disciple of Sheikh Khalil Ahmad Saharanpuri. Syed Rasul Shah Bukhari¹⁸, was *khalifa* and *majaz* of his father Syed Abdul Ahad. Abdul Hafiz Makki, was *Khalifa* and *majaz* of Sheikh al Hadith Zakariya. Sheikh has also to his credit the pupilage of Kawthar Ali safawi Naqshbandi mujaddidi Afghani.

Brief introduction to major seminaries founded by Sheikh al Azhari

Oriental theologian and researcher, David Emmanuel Singh has highlighted Sheikh's role in Islamizing the Modern South Asia, uplifting the unprivileged and educating the orphan, economically weaker sections of the society.¹⁹

Sheikh al Azhari by the virtue of founding, Makatibs/madaris/Darul Uloom facilitated free Clothing, shelter, bread as well as basic education pertaining to basics of English and full-fledged studies leading to proficiency in logic, Urdu, Persian and Arabic Languages. However, the soul binding principle of all the seminaries is adhering to the principles of *Ahl Sunnat wal Jama 'at*.

Prominent Seminaries in Kashmir:

1. Maktabah Anwar al Uloom is established in Dandhipura area of Kokernag Anantnag. It was co-founded by Sheikh with Maulana Hafiz Muhammad Chiragh Qasmi in the early 1950's.
2. Maktabah al Azhariya²⁰: 'Azhariya markaz Ahli Sunnat wa al Jama 'at' was established in the year 1960 as a *maktaba*, which in 1980 bloomed into a Darul Uloom. This served as an axis for overall works of Sheikh al Azhari.
3. Darul Uloom Kawthariya: Located in the feet of Zabarwan Hills, just prior to the Dachigam Park at New Theed Harwan Srinagar. This seminary was founded in the year 1990.
4. Darul Uloom Shah wali Allah: Located in Donipawa Brakpora of District Anantnag, just 2 miles away from the main town, this seminary was established in the year 2003.
5. In Jammu Sheikh al Azhari has established seminaries in areas like Nagrota, Sidrah and Tandah etc.

Top most ranking Seminary among all however is **Darul Uloom Nizamiyya Madinatul Islam**, located in the foot hills of Shiwalik at Maganpora Badshahi Bagh Saharanpur UP. Here students are taught upto *Daura- e Hadith*, an open school also has been established with this seminary where education is facilitated upto 10th standard. This was the hard work of Ulema of Harswali who paved the way for establishing Darul Uloom by encouraging Sheikh al Azhari. This Madrasa fully catered the needs of under privileged especially Gujjar²¹ as well as privileged ones at the same time.

Sheikh al Azhari and Qur 'an:

One of the main reasons for establishing *Madaris* is to serve the Qur'an and make it reach every single person. According to Sheikh, only 1% Muslims in the Sub-continent know how to read Qur'an as it ought to be. Sheikh al Azhari practiced the Sheikh al Hind's call for *Ruj 'u ilal Qur'an*²². Sheikh firmly holds the view that Qur'an is the basic constitution of Muslims, their betrayal to it is the reason for all of their agonies. Sheikh urges Muslims to read Qur'an with meaning in any convenient language. Sheikh during his golden period in Kashmir 1960's-90's used to lecture *Jalalayn* mostly at Darul Uloom al Azhariya. Moreover, many epistles related to *Ulum al Qur'an* by the title *talimat-e qur'an* are authored/dictated by him but are yet to be published.

Sheikh al Azhari and Hadith:

Muhaddith al Azhari often travels abroad for lecturing Hadith and certifying to teach it. He certifies through the chain of Musnid al Hind wal Iraq -Imam Shah wali Allah Dehalwi. He mainly travels to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Dubai. Sheikh al Azhari in such old age put to records by lecturing full Sahih al Bukhari in just 13 days in Kuwait. He even taught Sahih of Imam al Bukhari at different intervals in *Masjid-e Nabawi*, Madinah. Sheikh al Azhari firmly believes and preaches that Hadith should be taught for the sake of Hadith and not wrongly mould in accordance with ones Jurisprudic views²³. Same was the approach of *Amir al Muminin fil Hadith* Muhammad Yunus Jaunpuri²⁴. Hence Sheikh al Azhari adheres to the methodology of *Fuqaha al Muhaddithin*. He considers *Akhbar al Ahad* as Authority and gives it the due credit in contrast to the approach of adherents of *Mutakallimun* and rationalist faction of scholars. Sheikh al Azhari's lectures(partly) of Sahih al Bukhari have been penned down by his student/ son Hafiz Maulana Abdul Halim Zia

Mazahiri this work is not published yet. Sheikh al Azhari used to lecture *Mishkat al Masabih* at Darul Uloom Azhariya .He mainly laid emphasis on *Kitab al fitan* (book of trails),he lectured it 50 years ago that too for laymen. Sheikh even used to lecture *Al ikmal fi asma al rijal* on the topic of Science of .The question here arises why *Mishkat al Masabih*, the answer to which is very simple that *Mishkat* is a compilation of overall major Books of Hadith encompassing every subject.Sheikh al Azhari directed his student Maulana Noor Hussain to translate *Fazail i Amal* of Sheikh Zakariyya into Gojri language. His grip on different branches of Science of Hadith is tremendous,when he starts lecturing on history of Hadith in the Sub continent he begins it from the time of advent of Companians of the Prophet SAAS. And it were the three sons of Abul ‘Aas al Thaqafi, Uthman, Hakam, Mughirah who are credited as being the first *muhaddithun* of Hind²⁵ While highlighting the rich legacy of Kashmiri Muhaddithun he said *Mujaddid alf Thani*, Ahmad of Sirhind to gain the high chain (‘Ali Isnad) came to Kashmir to take it from Sheikh al Muhaddith Muhammad Yaqub Sarfi, who in turn had attained it from Sheikh al Islam Ahmad ibn Hajr al Haythami.

His chain of Hadith transmission:

Chain number 1: Abdul Ghani from Syed Hussain Ahmad Madani from Sheikh al Hind (directly from Shah Abdul Ghani Mujaddidi²⁶) from Muhammad Qasim Nanotwi²⁷ from Shah Abdul Ghani Mujaddidi from Shah Muhammad Ishaq from Shah Abdul Aziz al Dehalwi from Musnidul Hind wal Iraq Shah wali Allah Dehalwi.

Chain number 2: Abdul Ghani al Shashi from Abdul Wahhab Abdul Latif from Muhammad al Baqir al Kettani from *Al musnid Imam* Abdul Hayy al Kettani.

Sheikh al Azhari and *Fiqh*:

Sheikh al Azhari due to his tremendous hold on Arabic and logic is very much proficient in *Fiqh* especially *Fiqh al Muqarin*, *Fiqh al M ‘asra* (Cosmopolitan jurisprudence, Contemporary/modern issues related to jurisprudence). Sheikh al Azhari is a *mujtahid*. He has tight hold on *Fiqh* of Imam Abu Hanifah and that of *Syed al Fuqaha Imam Nasir al Hadith wa al Sunnah* Muhammad ibn Idris al Shaf ‘ii. Sheikh al Azhari mainly teaches the following books on Hanafi *Fiqh* which include *Mukhtasar al Quduri*, *Nur al Anwar*, *Hidaya*, *Bahr al Raiq*. and highly recommends reading *Bahr al Raiq* of Ibn Nujaym to Hanafis.

Shaf ‘ii books he teaches includes *Al Umm* of Imam al Shaf ‘ii with focus on its introduction, *Al ghaya wal taqrib-matn* of Qazi abu shuja ‘a, *Fath al Wahab* of Zakariyya Ansari, *Mugny al Muhtaj sharh al Minhaj* of Khatib al Shirbini. *Fatawa al Kubra* of Sheikh Ahmad ibn Hajr al Haythami al Makki, *Al Waraqat* of Imam al Juwayni on usul al *Fiqh*.He highly recommends *kitab al Umm* and *Mugny al Muhtaj*. He discovered and translated the work of benefactor of Kashmir Imam *Amir al Kabir* Mir Syed Ali Hamadani al Shaf ‘ii²⁸ on Shaf ‘ii Madhab titled as *Ma La Budda Minh*, which was used by Qadhi Thana Allah Panipati as a blueprint to author a book on the same format, with the same name but pertaining to Hanafi Madhab.

Sheikh al Azhari and *Ihsan/Tasawwuf*:

Sheikh al Azhari’s grandfather Maulana Abdul Halim, a revered Sufi and spiritual personality, who enjoys title of first gujjar Mufassir, paid special attention in raising and training him. From very beginning till date, Sheikh al Azhari never gave up learning, practising and preaching *Tasawwuf*-the *fiqh* of *Qalb*, the art of gaining *Taqwa* of Allah and giving up negative notions-*Radhail*, purifying the inner. Sheikh is considered as highly revered spiritual personality internationally and especially by the people of Kashmir, east UP, Gujarat, the South of India-Karnataka, Maharashtra, Ratnagiri etc. He extends his full support to the mission of *Awliya Allah* and works days and nights together for attaining peace and harmony. Sheikh did a diploma in Psychology which clearly points towards sheikh’s deep vision pertaining to the said science as psychology deals with essence and characteristics of *Lataif*.

Sheikh al Azhari recommends *Ghazaliyat* as a base for studying *Tasawwuf*, as Ghazalian model is the idealist of all and serves as base directly or indirectly for all *Salasils* of *Tasawwuf*. He is *Jamiul Salasil* (combiner of all sufi silsilas). He has authored *Gulzar-i Marifat* in punjabi language and compiled and edited *Noor-i ‘Irfan* on the subject of *Tasawwuf*.

Thus above mentioned information proves sheikh al Azhari as Muhaddith, Faqih and a Sufi at the same time. Hence, ought to be sheikh ahlus Sunnah wal Jama ‘at/Sheikhul islam , other reasons :

1. Grand Muftis have been from long back labelled as sheikh al islam, the example of it is highly prevalent from the times of Ottomans eg *Mulla Funnari*-the Sheikh al Islam.
2. Sheikh al Azhari is currently *Amir al Shari ‘ah /Sadr al Muftiyeen* of Jammu and Kasmir.

Introduction to his chief works:

Noor-i Irfan:

This book is on the theme of Tasawwuf (*Irfan*) and is actually the compilation of epistles of a great Naqashbandi Sheikh, Peer Muhammad Sharifud din. Compiled on the order of Maulana Syed Rasul Shah, the Sheikh of both the writer and compiler of epistles. Books sheds light on life of Peer Sharifud din, Reality of Seerah and a complete account of Seerah, introduction to the lives of *Shuyukhs of Naqashbandi al Mujaddidi silsila* as in the chain of Peer Sharifud din and finally the book contains a total of 78 letters all pertaining to the theme of Tasawwuf.

*Ma La Budda minh*²⁹ (translated into urdu from persian):A brief description

Bāb al Iman (pp, 2-14),the main feature while explaining the Names and Attributes of Allah is that Mir Syed Ali Hamadani has not indulged into *Kalām* and put forth *Aqida* according to the methodology of Muhaddithin.In this chapter Mir Syed Ali Hamadani has poured light on Creed Of Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama ‘at with which the translator is in full agreement.

Bāb al Islam (pp, 15-24), Bāb dar bayan Ihsan (pp25-29) Bāb dar bayan dosti (pp29-35) pertaining to the principles of befriending, essence of muslim brotherhood .Pages 33-35 are especially dedicated to Rights of The Beloved Prophet SAAS and Authority of Prophetic Hadith and the proper methodology of deducing injunctions ,And from pp 35-173,book encompasses the rulings pertaining to Pillars of Islam

*Qadim Tarilh Gujar*³⁰:

By writing on this theme Sheikh al Azhari gave a teeth shedding reply to the movement of Apostasy that was momentous in Gujjar Tribes. Hence Sheikh built a fence between inferiority complex and Gujjars by reminding them of their Golden age and origin.

The book is quite useful for both Non Muslim as well as Muslim Gujjars.In the case of non Muslims, they had a deep sigh after a long time from inferiority complex. Another useful application of this book was that in Russia it gave a death blow to Atheism. While for Muslim Gujjars then in Islam there is no Scope for such things like Racial inferiority or superiority. As the Seal of Prophets gave death blow to all such notions and declared them to be characteristics of *Jahiliyya*/Ignorance/barbarism. Prophet SAW made his companions as whole torch bearers of civilizations with no exceptions. Bilal was elevated because of Islam and his racial background had no impact on it, while Abu Lahab a Qurayshite couldn't find any place to escape from the Wrath of Almighty.

Conclusion:

Sheikh al Azhari is a great polymath his only focus is the service to Islam ,living and dying for the sake of Allah, loving for him, hate for him, giving for Him and refraining for Allah, striving every single moment to gain *Taqwa* of Allah relying completely on Allah believing that One day he would return to Allah who is in all control and hence was/is content that Allah rose him From the Gujjar clan according to His wisdom in which he had no part to play but the duty obliged on Sheikh al Azhari was to attain Allah's consciousness and fear and be a Muslim by every single virtue and be a part of Prophetic Mission. He was true to the marrow of his bone and adhered to the sunnah of Bilal of Habsha, Salman of Fars and Suhaib of Rome, He is Abdul Ghani the son of Islam. Sheikh throughout his life has keenly served the *Ummah* and worked days and night together for the upliftment of Ummah. He truly is an upholder of Musnid al Imam Shah Waliullah's thought and movement. His chief quality is uncompromising when it comes to the unification of Ummah. 'Being true to the words he is an eminent researcher.

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