



### **Al-Lauh**

Bi-Annual, Trilingual (Arabic, English, Urdu) ISSN: (P) 2618-088X. (E) 2618-0898  
Project of **Govt. College Women University Faisalabad,**

Madina Town, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Website: [www.allauh.com](http://www.allauh.com)

Approved by Higher Education Commission Pakistan

Indexing: Euro Pub, Journal Factor, DOAJ, DRJI, Urdu Jaraid, Asian Research Index

### **TOPIC**

**ŞŪFĪ THOUGHTS OF ASHRAF ʿALĪ THĀNVĪ: A REFLECTION  
ON ITS PRACTICAL RELEVANCE TO THE PRESENT ERA**

### **AUTHOR**

1. Dr Musferah Mehfooz, Assistant Professor, COMSATS University, Lahore
2. Dr. Uzma Saffat, Assistant Professor, Department of Arabic & Islamic Studies, Govt. College University, Lahore

**How to Cite:** <https://allauh.pk/>

<https://allauh.pk/index.php/allauh/issue/view/4>

Vol. 3, No.1 || January–June 2024 ||

Published online: 30-06-2024

## Şūfī Thoughts of Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī: A Reflection on its Practical Relevance to the Present Era

Dr Musferah Mehfooz<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Uzma Saffat<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

Şūfism played a significant role in the dissemination of good morals, the prevalence of peace and harmony, inculcation of Islamic norms, and spiritual values into humanity. For this purpose, the şūfīs had developed a structure that was conducive to their social framework, which left a remarkable impact on establishing Islamic norms among the general population. Some Sufis were far ahead of their times particularly during the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century figure Mūlānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī (1865-1943), considered the most important and influential in the subcontinent/North India. He was an immensely erudite, Sufī, and the torchbearer of movements for Islamic revival in the subcontinent. But unfortunately, the least has written about his life, contribution, and particularly regarding his Şūfī aspect. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to highlight the prolific contribution of Mūlānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī for the reformation of the subcontinent according to the Islamic paradigm and inculcation of spiritual values into the community of the subcontinent during his period. The study would devote its efforts to highlight his approach to introduce the Şūfism in a highly practical manner through his teachings and writings and addressed against all those adulterations who have been emerged into the Şūfism during his era by the Muslim community. He not only diagnosed these impurities and spiritual entanglements but provided a substantial infrastructure and an effective remedy to the Muslims to reform the mystical thought of Islam during his era. The research is qualitative, the inductive and deductive methodology would be applied to collected data. The study would be concluded by arguing the dire need for the promulgation and dissemination of such thoughts for attaining a spiritually oriented society, which doubtlessly in present morally deteriorating and spiritually distorted.

**Key Words:** Mūlānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, Spiritual Virtues, Subcontinent, Şūfism

### Introduction to Şūfism

Man is a social being prone to thinking, innovation, creativity, and inquisitiveness and intrinsically constructive. Man can achieve perfection in his living and manners with sound thinking, right actions, and right intentions. so that he can live in peace with all the creations and achieve heaven on earth itself, without destruction Islam is a complete code of life and in its ideology of life, all the systems are interconnected. There is an interrelation between the social, economic, political, and judicial system of Islam. Only that society can be called Islamic society in which all the systems are according to Islamic jurisprudence. It has described in Qur’ān:

“Oh, you who believe! Enter into Islam wholly and do not follow the fool step of Satan.”<sup>1</sup>

Prophethood is a true and accurate source of divine guidance according to the shariah. Historically speaking, those specific personalities have been chosen by Allah the Almighty to convey His message to mankind, so that all human beings might be allowed to follow the right path. These chosen people were called prophets, or messengers. The Prophet must enlighten people so that they may curtail this human inadequacy. He provides the reality of things unveils the hidden facts and also gives information about the hereafter. He thereby enables the individual to formulate a plan for his entire existence in the full light of knowledge and awareness so that he may carve out a successful life for himself.

As *Qur'ān* mentions:

Indeed, God bestowed favour upon the believers when he raised up in their midst an apostle from among themselves, to convey His messages unto them, and to cause them to grow in purity, and to impart unto them the divine writ as well as wisdom.<sup>2</sup>

One of these qualities of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) discussed in the above-mentioned verse was to purify the human being from all the outer and inner defilements. This includes outer purification that relates to one's body and dress, and also the inner purification that relates to one's faith, actions and moral attitude. The second objective of the Holy Prophet is to: (make them pure) which is derived from *tazkiyah* and it means 'to make pure'. Often it is used exclusively for inner cleanliness, that is, to be free from such inner adulterating matter as *shirk* and free from inner moral defilement.<sup>3</sup> Because the actual successful individual is, who purifies himself from worldly greeds. *Qur'ān* states in this reference, “To a happy state shall indeed attain he who causes this [self] to grow in purity”.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, the concept of purification of the soul is the primary purpose of *ṣūfism*. Because terms *ṣūfī* is used for Muslim saints who attempted to achieve the development of their intuitive faculties through ascetic exercises, contemplation, renunciation and self-denial. A famous *ṣūfī* of Baghdad, Junaid Bagdadi had described,

“That *ṣūfism* had been originated from the Holy *Qur'ān*. One who does not read the Holy *Qur'ān* and does not write the hadiths does not have permission to talk about *ṣūfism*.”<sup>5</sup>

Ṣūfīsm is infact the translation of “*Tasawuf*”, which literally denotes “becoming a ṣūfī”<sup>6</sup> and which has been commonly equated with “Islamic mysticism” or “Islamic esotericism” in western scholarship.<sup>7</sup> Those who practice ṣūfīsm (*Tasawuf*) called ṣūfīs which belong to different silsala or “orders”.<sup>8</sup> There is a group of people called ṣūfīs. Four interpretations are given for this name. Some see, looking at their exterior, that they wear rough woollen garb. In Arabic the word for wool is “ṣūf”, and they call them ṣūfīs from this. And they explain the following hadiths as an example of “ṣūf”.

“He washed his face and hands while he was wearing a woollen cloak (the sleeves of which were narrow).”<sup>9</sup>

Imam Ghazali postulates about ṣūfīsm in the following words:

“According to my perception that those who practice ṣūfīsm called ṣūfī. Because ṣūfī follows the path of Allah. Their nature is the moral values are purer then all you collect all bits of intelligence together, all wisdom together, all knowledge of the scholars together, so you could find the alternate method of the ṣūfī, which is better than theirs because there are taken from the source and light of prophethood, and there is no substitute guidance in this universe the guidance of prophethood.”<sup>10</sup>

The way and the style of ṣūfī of practising the religion are very easy, simple, convenient and moderate, ṣūfī strongly avoid overburdening the individual, and believe that maximum ease should provide to the believers, which will according to the intent of Islam. As Qur’ān indicates:

“And has laid no hardship on you in [anything that pertains to religion]”<sup>11</sup>

The Prophet (ﷺ) advised his companions:

“Facilitate things to people (concerning religious matters), and do not make it hard for them and give them good tidings and do not make them run away (from Islam).”<sup>12</sup>

Therefore because of these features, the influence of ṣūfīsm had extended over almost the entire Muslim community and many ṣūfī silsilas had established in the sub-continent but the most prominent are four, like **Chishti** order which was founded by Khwaja Abdul Chishti however Kwaja Moin-ud-Din Chishti implanted this chain in India. The second one is the **Suharwardi** order, founded by Sheikh Shahbudin Umar Suharwardi in Baghdad and third is the **Naqshbandi**

order, popularized in India by efforts of Khwaja Baqi Bilah. The fourth prominent ṣūfī silsila or order is **Qadiriya** which was established by Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani in Baghdad. The most important contribution of ṣūfism is that it helped to dull the edge of Hindu-Muslim prejudices by forging the feelings of solidarity, harmony and brotherhood between these two contrast religious communities.

Annemarie states that:

“The messages of the ṣūfīs are universal and they illumine the mind and soul. Their messages touch the soul and mind because message based upon love and truth. They love everyone without any discrimination. People faith in them because they are part of Islam and they have a great contribution in preaching the teachings of Islam. Ṣūfī philosophy is based upon universal love and brotherhood”.<sup>13</sup>

Ṣūfism became a popular movement in which anyone could freely participate as opposed to a tiny spiritual elite practising spiritual exclusivity. The main ṣūfī goal of reaching spiritual unity with God was broadened to include simple social actions aimed at helping the common individuals attain relief from worldly anxieties.<sup>14</sup> The impact of ṣūfism in the subcontinent was not based on the development of new mystical principles or concepts but instead was directly related to the development of structure and organization which facilitated the practical application of mystic ideology to the conditions of subcontinent society. The impact of ṣūfism in the subcontinent was not based on the development of new mystical principles or concepts but instead was directly related to the development of structure and organization which facilitated the practical application of mystic ideology to the conditions of subcontinent society.<sup>15</sup>

### **Mūlānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī’s Life, Literary Efforts & Obligatory Endeavors**

Some Sufi masters were far ahead of their times particularly during the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century figure Mūlānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī (1865-1943), considered the most important and influential in Subcontinent. He was an embodiment of the “alim-Sufi amalgam and have been at the forefront of movements of Islamic revival in the Subcontinent (1865–1943) but to date, very little has been written on him and particularly regarding his Sufi aspects. Therefore, the main aim and objective of this study are to highlight the prolific contribution of Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī for the reformation of the subcontinent according to the Islamic paradigm.

Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī was born in 1863 at Thana Bhawan, UP, British India. He graduated from the famous Islamic University Darul-Uloom Deoband and at the age of twenty years, he started teaching Islamic tradition. Under the guidance of his spiritual guru, Haji Imdad-Allah he crossed the difficult valleys of the mystical world. Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī became very famous as a teacher of Islamic sciences and as a grand spiritual master, for he produced a lot of intellectual material as well as religious books and illuminated thousands of Muslims in Islamic knowledge and *Tasawwuf*.

The Mutiny of 1857 pitted the Muslims directly against the British. In the mayhem that followed the failed mutiny, the British realised that any threat to their power was from the Muslims and to crush them and suppress them forever a general massacre followed. The leaders were either hanged or exiled and their properties were forfeited. A whole lot of the Muslim leadership was wiped out. The stunned Muslims were unaware of what had befallen them and had nowhere to go. Their society was uprooted; their education system was not in the tune with the time and circumstances. All their systems were being replaced by the British. Once the rulers were now turned into paupers.

At this time the entire Muslim thinkers were confused and unable to figure out a definite strategy for their survival. The people of other religion had adapted themselves to the British system as for them only the rulers had changed they remained the subjects but the status of the Muslims had taken a downward trend. They were hesitant in adapting to the British system.

The Muslims religious thinkers had assessed the situation differently and blamed their religious degradation for their pitiable condition. Muslim religious seminaries were opened one at Deoband - the Darul-Uloom and another, at Lucknow - the Nadwat-al-Ulama. These two centres later developed to become the leading Muslim institutions for religious learning and scholars of these centres thronged to every nook and corner of India guiding the Muslims in their religious matters. The Darul-Uloom, Deoband gained the reputation of being more strict and uncompromising in matters of religion. It was the former institution where Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī studied and trained and later on himself became a teacher.

Based on his works on Islamic subjects and by his excellent contribution and achievements, Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī won the title of "Hakim al-Ummat" He is also considered to be a Mujtahid and Mujaddid as he realized the increasing sickness in spirituality among the Muslim community which he diagnosed by and tried to set right by offering an easily available remedy for the Muslims of the time. He

spent all his life towards the prosperity and reform of the community. Allah helped him and in all comers of the country Muslim awakening was felt. He is the author of near about 1000 research publications on Islam and the numbers of pages of his published works exceed the number of days of his life. His books spread throughout India and were translated into English, Bengali, Gujrati, and Sindhi and Hindi. He had left behind him a well equipped and well-trained team of his Khilafahs who after him they took up his mission effortlessly and continued to spread the message not only in the India subcontinent but also to places in other continents such as America and Africa, Europe, Australia, etc. The last of his Khulafa lived up to the beginning of the twenty-first century. The second generation of his followers is continuing his mission in the modern age and even has put up their websites on the internet and most of Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī's books are freely available and even translated into different languages.

### **Efforts For Reformation of Mystical thoughts of Islam**

Mūlānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī was an exponent of Islamic Moral Philosophy and tasawwuf most towering personalities among the religious reformers in Islamic history. He did not leave any field of Islamic learning untreated. No doubt, Maulana Thanvi was a master of Islamic spirituality. He is "considered the prominent Sufi of Modern India.<sup>16</sup> His approach to tasawwuf was in complete harmony with the Qur'an and Sunnah. Accurately summarizing the approach of the scholar associated with Dar al-Uloom Deoband, regarding Sufism, Kenneth W. Jones writes: "Deobandis conceived of Islam as having two points of focus Shari<sup>17</sup> (the law, based on scriptures and religious Knowledge), and the Tariqah<sup>18</sup> (path derived from religious experiences). Thus they accepted Sufism with its form of discipline and the role of 'Ulama' in interpreting the four school of Islamic jurisprudence. The Qur 'the hadith, qiyas (analogical reasoning) and Ijma (consensus) provided the foundation of religious knowledge and understanding them required the Ulama as a guide. The Deobandis, while accepting Sufism and rejected numerous ceremonies and the authority of Pirs who claimed sanctity by their descent rather than by their learning. Knowledge granted authority and not inheritance. Pilgrimage to saint's tombs and the death anniversary (urs) also lay outside acceptable Islamic practice. Among the types of behaviour seen as erroneous innovation was any social or religious practice that appeared to come from Hindu culture. The scholars of Deoband purified Islamic mysticism in the Indian subcontinent, from all unIslamic elements and practised a Tasawwuf that earlier Muslims, such as Hasan al-Basri, Junaid al-Baghdadi, and Abd al-Qadir

Jilani would advocate if they were living in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Pure, unadulterated Sufism is an important part of the Islamic faith. Dar al-Uloom Deoband trained individuals to become rational scholars, as well as sound practitioners of Tasawwuf. In choosing "Muftis and Shaikhs" as the title of the chapter in her well-researched monograph *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900*, Barbara Daly Metcalf emphasizes this beautiful combination."<sup>19</sup>

Imam Shafa'i said, "Knowledge is not what is memorized; knowledge is what benefits".<sup>20</sup> Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī's knowledge was not only benefited his companions, but it continued to benefit Muslims all over the world. but to date, very little has been written on him and particularly his Sufi aspects. Several sources identify Thanvi as a, if not the pre-eminent Sufi in late British North India. This designation is borne out by his large numbers of disciples, including many 'Ulama who were to play a major role in subsequent South Asian Islam, Mawlana Thanvi's contributions to the Sufi literary tradition include his multi-volume commentaries on the *Mathnawi* of Jalal ad-Din Rumi (1207–1273), and the *Diwan* of Hafiz Shirazi. It is in the practical dimensions of Sufism, consisting of writings on practical Sufism and participation in the institution of Sufism as a spiritual master (murshid or pir), that Mawlana Thanvi's significance becomes especially apparent. It would be instructive to mention here that the majority of his works on Sufism are concerned with practical Sufism, focusing on the inculcation of spiritual virtues, the annihilation of vices, spiritual exercises to control and cultivate the self, and the maintenance of spiritually conducive attitudes. The unity of inward and outward reform in his method can be seen in that these spiritually oriented topics, usually confined to Sufi manuals and treatises, are to be found throughout his works, even those written for the widest audience such as *Bihisht i Zewar*, *Hayat al-muslimin* (The Life of Muslims), *Talim ad-Din* (Teachings of Religion), and *Fur u "al-iman* (Branches of Faith), all works dedicated to explaining Islamic beliefs and duties to the ordinary Muslim. One of his most important works of practical Sufism, and among the most important in twentieth-century South Asian Islam in the genre of letters of Sufi masters, is the multi-volume *Tarbiyat al-Salik* (Nurturing the Spiritual Traveler), which consists of thousands of letters from his disciples on numerous aspects of the spiritual path and the interior life together with his replies. Thanvi's written output on spiritual practice is formidable, ranging from short epistles to lengthy monographs. Some of the best-known of these works are *Qasd al-Sabil* (Embarking on the Path), *Masail al-*



Suluk (Problems of Spiritual Journeying ), and Haqiqat-e-tasawwuf-e-taqwa (The Reality of Sufism and God-consciousness).

The very kernel (*al-Lubb*) of *Tasawwuf*, according to Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, is to have a divine nexus. Neither *kashf* nor *karamah* is required or expected. He reconnected the *shariah* injunctions with spiritual doctrines. There is no spirituality without Islamic law. One of his important books on the spiritual aspect of Islam is ‘*al-Takashshufun-Muhimatal-Tasawwuf*’ in which he tried to untie many knots of mystical obscurities. His biography writers mention that he struggled to transform Muslims into excellent human being (*Insan*) which he thought was better and different than being a saint (*Wali*). He used to say, ‘it is obligatory to be human not a saint.’

The pivotal point of Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī’s mystical discourse is the purification of ‘nafs’ and the spiritual development of an individual. He didn’t engage in public debates about the religious themes and the frivolous *fiqh* issues rather primarily interacted with people in his capacity as a Sufi master. The task of the Sufi master, he argued, ‘is not to engage in debates with his disciples but to engage in their treatment.’ Mohammad Ajmal, one of the good scholars of sufism, writes that Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī takes up each imperfection of the novice separately and guides him towards its cure. He expects the novice to meditate on both his imperfection and suggested cure. The useless questions from the novice were always burdensome for him. He teaches the virtue of relevance. The ‘irrelevant thought’ is an expression of frustrated spirituality.

An important aspect of Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī’s religious thought is that he always used a moderate approach to deal with the religious hassle. Concerning to Ibn Arabi, the great Spanish mystic, he wrote a book *al-Tanbihal-tarabifitanzih IbnArabi* (The Delightful Caveat in the Elevation of Ibn Arabi) where he declares, ‘I am entirely convinced of Ibn Arabi’s legitimacy and sainthood. This assessment agrees with the testimonies of a significant number of Muslim luminaries.’ Regarding the mystical insights of Ibn Arabi he says that they are beyond his intellectual comprehension and deals with the category of esoteric secrets. Therefore he neither recommends their affirmation nor refutation. Moreover, it is harmful, he argues, to investigate and propagate esoteric teachings without normatively-sanctioned necessity (*zarrurat-ishariyyah*).

In brevity, Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī revived the mystical legacy based on the traditional understanding of Islam. He followed the spiritual path of his predecessors like Imam Ghazzali and Shah Walliullah Dehlwi to solve the mystical discourse of Sufism. He also employed his spiritual perception in deconstructing the false ideas of modernism. His book, *al-Intibahat al-mufidah an al-ishtibahat al-*

*jadidah* (The Beneficial Intimations Regarding the Newly-Arisen Doubts) is an intellectual response to modernism, scientism and rationalism. Joseph Lumbard called him an exemplar of “*Ihsani*-intellectual tradition,” for he combined intellectuality with spirituality, theoretical doctrine with spiritual practice.

In the intellectual domain, his writings include a number of works on speculative Sufism such as his most comprehensive work, which contains discussions of Sufi ontology and cosmology among many other subjects, *at-Takashshuf* “*an muhimmat al-tasawwuf*, (*Unveiling the Important Matters of Sufism*), his commentaries on Ibn al-‘Arabi’s *Fusus al-Hikam* (*Ringstones of Wisdom*) as well as his defense of the latter entitled *al-Tanbih aḥ-ḥarabi fī tanzih Ibn ‘Arabi* (*Delightful Counsel on the Transcendence of Ibn al-‘Arabi*). Also falling in the intellectual dimension are scholarly works on Sufism such as *at-Tashsharuf bi-ma’rifat(t)i-ahadith al-tasawwuf* (*Gaining Nobility through Knowledge of the Traditions of Sufism*), a four-volume dissertation on Prophetic sayings found in the corpus of Sufi writings together with an explication of their authenticity, status, and meanings, and *Al-Sunna al-jaliyah fī al-Chishtiyyah al-‘aliyyah*, (*Manifest Tradition concerning the Great Chishtis*), an explication of defense of the Chishti masters regarding controversial elements found in their hagiographies. Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī’s contributions to the Sufi literary tradition include his multivolume commentaries on the *Mathnawi* of Jalal ad-Din Rumi (1207–1273), and the *Diwan* of Hafiz Shirazi.

One of his most important works of practical Sufism, and among the most important in twentieth century South Asian Islam in the genre of letters of Sufi masters, is the multi-volume *Tarbiyat al-Salik* (*Nurturing the Spiritual Traveler*), which consists of thousands of letters from his disciples on numerous aspects of the spiritual path and the interior life together with his replies. Thanvi’s written output on spiritual practice is formidable, ranging from short epistles to lengthy monographs. Some of the best-known of these works are *Qasd al-Sabil* (*Embarking on the Path*), *Masa’il al-Suluk* (*Problems of Spiritual Journeying*), and *Haqiqat-e-tasawwuf-e-taqwa* (*The Reality of Sufism and God-consciousness*). A passage from *Islah-e-inqilab* sums up Thanvi’s view on the significance of Sufism, and particularly the Sufi shaykh, for curing the second cause of Muslim decline, weakness of will and lack of determination in the fulfilment of religious obligations and the pursuit of spiritual perfection: Experience has proven that the following means are especially efficacious for the strengthening of one’s spiritual will (*himmat*). The first of these ways is the spiritual company (*suhbat*) of perfect spiritual masters (*shuyukh-e-kamilin*), whose characteristics are the following:

He possesses necessary knowledge of the religion; he firmly follows the dictates of the Shari‘a in beliefs, practices, and morals; he has no desire for the world; he makes no claims to complete perfection, for these too reveal attachment to the world; he has stayed for a while in the spiritual company of another shaykh-e-kamil; the honourable ‘Ulama’ and Sufi shaykhs of his day have a good opinion of him; compared to the ordinary people (“awamm), the elite (khawwass), meaning intelligent and virtuous people are more inclined to his company; the condition of the majority of his disciples concerning obedience to the Shari‘a and diminishing of worldly desire, is good; he is alert to the condition (hal) of his disciples and disciplines them and not leave to their fancies; after sitting in his company for a few times, one’s love of the world is diminished and love of God-the Real- (Haqq Ta’ala) is increased. He engages in the invocation and remembrance of God (dhikr) and meditation and contemplation (shaghl), for it is through them alone that there is a blessing (barakat) in spiritual instruction. Spiritual unveilings (kashf ), miracles (karamat), the acceptance of prayers (istijabat-e-du’a), and paranormal acts (tasarrufat) are not requirements to be a shaykh. The spiritual companionship of such a shaykh-e-kamil is exceptionally efficacious. But the prerequisite of this efficacy is that the intention of the disciple should truly be for spiritual progress and resignation before God and detestation for sin. It is essential also that the disciple keep his master informed of his spiritual conditions and should firmly put into practice that which the master prescribes.<sup>21</sup>

### **Revival of *Khānqah* System**

He discussed the practical Sufism, in the majority of his works focusing on the inculcation of spiritual virtues, the annihilation of vices, spiritual exercises to control and cultivate the self, and the maintenance of spiritually conducive attitudes. As for participation in the institutional aspect of Sufism, Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī was initiated into the spiritual path by Hajji Imdadullah, the shaykh of many Deobandi ‘Ulama’, including its founders, Rashid Ahmad Gangohi and Muhammad Qasim Nanautvi. He later became one of Imdadullah’s most influential spiritual successors (khulafa”) and took up residence in Imdadullah’s khanqah at Thana Bhavan. It was here that Thanvi developed both aspects of his teachings to their fullest – training disciples, who reputedly numbered in the tens of thousands, in the Sufi path and making efforts for the revival of Islam. Activities related to the latter included everything from the translation of classical Islamic texts, including many Sufi texts,

undertaken by him and his disciples, to the writing of various pedagogic works to inspire the ordinary Muslim, to missionary (tabligh) activities among newly converted Indian Muslims, to the refutation of modern ideas and practices, brought in by the British and adopted by modernist Muslims that he believed threatened the integrity of Islamic culture and thought. Particularly important was Thanvi's the establishment at the khanqah of a scholarly program in which he and his disciples, among them many scholars of repute, produced numerous original works as well as Urdu translations of and commentaries upon classical Islamic texts. *Naqshbandiyah* or *Chishtiyah* are different names but their reality is one. Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī used to initiate the seekers in *Bai'at* in all four Sufi orders

i.e. *Chistiyyah*, *Qadriyyah*, *Suharwardiyah* and *Naqshbandiyah* so that the novice gets spiritual benefits from all these great Sufi orders. Besides, he revived *Khanqah* system, explained its real essence and made it free from many misconceptions and ill-practices. For the novices and the seekers of the truth Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī penned many important treatises like *Masai al-suluk*, *Talimal-Din*, *Haqiqatal-Tariqah* etc.

It would be pertinent to share that khānqāh is a Persian word which means the centre of moral training, its meaning in English is Monastery, and its definition is given in the new oxford encyclopedia dictionary as "Monastery mean the residence of Community of monks". Because the religious figures in Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity, selected some specific place for their meditation was called a monastery. Some religious traditions mandate isolation for purposes of contemplation removed from the everyday world, in which case members of the monastic community may spend most of their time isolated even from each other. Encyclopedia Americana declares it a complex for meditation.<sup>22</sup>

The term Khānqāh meaning 'ṣūfī convent' assumes important overtones in more contexts than one. Shaikh Nasir al-Din Chiragh considered it to be a compound of khanah (house) and qah (prayer).<sup>23</sup> The Khānqāh or jama'at khana was a special building to meet the requirements of the ṣūfīs, their followers and visitors, which provided accommodation for each visitor and inmate. At that time, Khānqāh were made for feeding the poor and the dervishes.<sup>24</sup> The establishment of Khānqāh was based on the conviction that a life of solitary, self-sufficient contemplation was incompatible with the highest mystic ideals because it made man ego-centric, limited his sympathies and cut him off completely from the energizing currents of social life.<sup>25</sup>

The Khānqāh saw several stages in evolutionary history. According to Ibn Taimaiyah, the first house for the mystics was built in Basra, but the popularity of

the Khānqāh and rabtra (derived from Arabic root rabata, which means to bind or to attach etc.) started at a later period.<sup>26</sup>

The Khānqāh was a place of shelter and gathering for members of a particular silsilah, It generally was a building that provided sleeping quarters, a meeting room, and a center for worship for a particular shaykh, his disciples, as well as travellers or visitors. The centrepiece of a Khānqāh was the ṣūfī shaykh who was the spiritual leader. As a ṣūfī shaykh earned a reputation and prestige, students and admirers would flock to the respective Khānqāh to listen to the wisdom of the saint,<sup>27</sup> become a disciple of the shaykh and pledge to the silsilah, <sup>28</sup> there are several advantages... First, it provides shelter for visitors who do not possess any house of their own... Secondly, by gathering at a place and mixing, the shaykh get an opportunity of regulating their life and developing uniform inward and outward ways... Thirdly, in this way, they get an opportunity of criticizing and mending each other's ways.<sup>29</sup>

The majority of his work based on practical Sufism along with the inculcation of spiritual virtues, the annihilation of vices, spiritual exercises to control and cultivate the self, and the maintenance of spiritually conducive attitudes. Mūlānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī aimed to reform the mystical thought of Islam from various impurities and spiritual entanglements. Particularly, his writings remain unmatched among the Islamic scholars of the Indian subcontinent. There are over one thousand books to his credit mostly related to tafsir, hadith, jurisprudence, logic, philosophy, theology, spirituality and other related issues of Islamic tradition. Doubtlessly. he was most towering personalities among the religious reformers in Islamic history.

### **Conclusion**

Sufism is as old as the man himself and all the teachings of Sufism are about the need for peace, harmony and humanity, which is the vital necessity of all the societies regardless belong to any period or era because their foremost teaching was humanism and love. To unite mankind in bondage so that society can be stable and mankind can achieve peace and happiness. the study has devoted its efforts that how Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī presented Sufism in a highly practical manner through his teachings and writings and addressed all those adulterations who have been emerged into the Sufism during his era by the Muslim community which he not only diagnosed but provided a substantial infrastructure and effective remedy to the Muslims of that time. He spent all his life towards the prosperity and reform of the community. Therefore, the study has argued the dire

need for the promulgation and dissemination of such thoughts for attaining a spiritually oriented society, which is, unfortunately, morally deteriorating and distorted at present.

## References

- 
- <sup>1</sup> *al-Qur'ān*, 2: 208  
<sup>2</sup> *al-Qur'ān*, 3:164  
<sup>3</sup> Mufti Taqi Usmani, *Mariful Qur'ān*, (Karachi: Mīr Muḥammad kutub khānah, nd) vol. 8, p.448  
<sup>4</sup> *al-Qur'ān*, 91:9  
<sup>5</sup> Fareed-ul-Din [Attar Nishapuri](#), [Tazkirat al-Awliya](#), London, England.: Penguin (Non-Classics), 1990. [ISBN 0-14-019264-6](#), 32-38  
<sup>6</sup> Carl Ernst, "Tasawwuf," *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, ed. Richard Martin, Vol. 2 (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 684.  
<sup>7</sup> William Chittick, "Sufism, Sufi Thought and Practice," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, ed. John L. Esposito, Vol. 4 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 102.  
<sup>8</sup> <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/583591/tariqa>  
<sup>9</sup> 'Imām Bukhari, *Al-Jāmi' Al-Sahīh*, Book of Dress ,Chapter: To wear a woolen cloak during the Ghazawat, Hadith No. 5799  
<sup>10</sup> Abu Hamid, Al Ghazali, *Ihya Uloom al-Din*, Dar al- Kutub al-ilmiyyah, Beirut,2001, p,249  
<sup>11</sup> *al-Qur'ān*, 22:78  
<sup>12</sup> 'Imām Bukhari, *Al-Jāmi' Al-Sahīh*, Book of Knowledge, Chapter: The Prophet (saws) used to take care of the people in preaching by selecting a suitable time so that they might not run away (never made them averse or bored them with religious talk and knowledge all the time), Hadith No. 69  
<sup>13</sup> Annemarie, S. "Mystical dimensions of Islam". (Chapell Hill Uni. Of North Carolina,1975).  
<sup>14</sup> Richard Maxwell Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978.), xxxi.  
<sup>15</sup> Simon Digby, "The Sufi Shaykh as a Source of Authority in Medieval India," in *India's Islamic Traditions, 711-1750*, ed. Richard M. Eaton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 237.  
<sup>16</sup> Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900*, New Jersey, 1982, p. 157  
<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.  
<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.  
<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140  
<sup>20</sup> <http://annoor.word/press.com/biography-of-hazratthanvi>  
<sup>21</sup> *Ishlah-e-inqilab-e-ummat* (Deoband: Talifat-i awliya', 1972), p. 23-24  
<sup>22</sup> *Encyclopedia Americana*, A popular Dictionary, THOMAS, COWPERTHWATE & CO, 1840, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition, 8/474  
<sup>23</sup> (see his conversations, *Khair al-Majalis*)

<sup>24</sup> Syed Ziauddin Sajjadi, *Maqadanai Bar Mabani-i-Irfan Tasawwuf*, Simat, Teheran,

1372 SH, Vol.-I, p.256

<sup>25</sup> Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, Some Aspects of Khānqah Life in Medieval India, *Studia Islamica*, No. 8 (1957), pp. 51-69 Published by: Maisonneuve & Larose

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*

<sup>27</sup> Nizam ad-Din Awliya', *Morals for the Heart*, recorded by Amir Hasan Sijzi, trans. Bruce B. Lawrence, *Classics of Western Spirituality*, 74 (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), p.153

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>29</sup> *Misbah al-Hidyyah*, pp. 118-119