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International Seminar on Shah Wali-Allah's Thought

Ahmad ibn Abd al-Rahim, better known as Shah Wali-Allah of Delhi (1703-1762), is perhaps the greatest intellectual figure of Islam in South Asia. An international seminar was organized on his thought (as contained in *Hujjat-Allah al-Balighah*) on February 20-22, 2001 by the Shah Wali-Allah Dehlavi Research Cell of the Institute of Islamic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, India.

Wali-Allah was a prolific writer in Arabic and Persian and a "synthetic thinker" like Al-Ghazali and ibn-Khaldun. He made his contribution on the eve of the modern (colonial) period. The British in the Bay of Bengal had their eyes set on Delhi, the Mughul seat of Muslim power. Deeply concerned, Wali-Allah understood his mission to be a two-fold reformation of "the religion and the state." With his favorite slogan "Back to the Qur'an", he called for a complete change of the old order and sought to "reopen" the doors of *jihad* and *ijtihad*.

In his resistance to the growing power of the Mrathas and Sikhs, he is believed to have set a tradition for the subsequent generations of Muslim India. Acclaimed variously by different Islamic groups as a reformer, a purifier, a revivalist and a modernizer, Wali-Allah is considered to be the spiritual and intellectual progenitor to a host of religio-political movements in South Asia, including the Mujahidin movement, the Deoband movement, the Aligarh movement and the Pakistan movement. His influence has also been acknowledged on the subsequent generations of Muslim thinkers in the Indian subcontinent including Allama Muhammad Iqbal and Mawlana Abul Aala Mawdudi.

In his magnum opus, *Hajjat-Allah al-Balighah* (The Conclusive Argument from God), Wali-Allah has worked out an "integrated scheme" of Shari'ah, or a theoretical basis for interpretation and application of Shari'ah against a background provided by his ideas of "human purposefulness" and "beneficial interests". He believed that his (pre-modern) age demanded a projection of Shari'ah with reasoned and convincing "arguments", unraveling the secrets (deeper meanings) of religious symbols and injunctions.

Prof. M. Hamid Ansari, the vice chancellor of the Aligarh Muslim University, presided over the inaugural session of the three-day international seminar, which was held in the Conference Room of the Administrative Block. Inaugurating the seminar, Prof. Ansari stressed the need for making fresh investigations into Wali-Allah's thoughts and relevance to the contemporary world. Welcoming the delegates, earlier, Prof. Abdul Ali briefly spoke about the Institute of Islamic Studies and its library which houses more than fifty thousand books in Arabic, English, French, German, Persian, Turkish and Urdu. Prof. M. Yasin Mazhar Siddiqui, the director of the seminar, spoke on the aims and objectives of the Shah Wali-Allah Dehalvi Research Cell and invited the Islamic intellectuals and scholars to cooperate in materializing the proposed specialized projects of the Cell. In his speech, Prof. Siddiqui also elaborated on the unmatched excellence achieved by Wali-Allah in "*Hajar-Allah al Balighah*", which is acknowledged and admired throughout the Arab-Islamic world for its singular magnificence. Prof. M. Abdul Haqq Ansari, an eminent professor of Islamic philosophy, in his key-note speech, concluded that Wali-Allah's formulation of four basic characteristics of excellence in human conduct, i.e., cleanliness, humbling oneself before God, magnanimity and justice could be construed as guiding principles towards a "perfect society" and a new humane world order. A book

authored by Prof. M. Yasin Mazhar Siddiqui and entitled, "Shah Waliullah Dehalvi: Shakhsiyat aur hikmat ka ek taaruf" (An Introduction to Wali-Allah's thought) was also released on the occasion by the Vice Chancellor, Prof. M. Hamid Ansari, in its Arabic, English and the original Urdu versions. The vote of thanks to the delegates and the audience was proposed by the convenor of the seminar Dr. Obaidullah Fahd Falahi.

A total of fifty nine papers were presented in the ten academic sessions of the seminar which were held in the library of the Institute of Islamic Studies. The foreign delegates included Dr. Muhammad al-Ghazali (editor al-Dirasat al-Islamia, Islamabad), Prof. Kulsoom Pathan, Prof. Mumtaz Bhutto, Hafiz Munir Ahmad and Dr. Muhammad Anwar Pathan from the University of Jam Shoro, Hyderabad Sindh, Pakistan, and Prof. Mohammad Mujtahid Shabistri of the University of Yehran, Iran.

The topics (all with reference to Hujjat-Allah al-Balighah) included. The literary style, the thought and craft of Wali-Allah, his understanding of the Qur'an, the issues in prophecy, the argument for prophecy, his view of human nature and society, his concept of *irtifaqat* (stages and tools of civilization), his view of *Shari'ah* and the Islamic law, his fiqhi orientation with respect to the schools of *fiqh*, his theory of *Kalam* (Islamic Theology), his conception of Islamic mysticism, his social and political thought, critical studies on the chapters on the True Nature of the Spirit, the World of Images and the Holy Enclave, *Iman*, *Salah*, *Zakah*, Fasting, Spousal Rights, *Qada*, *Fitan*, Ranks of the Books on *Hadith*, a study of the Qur'anic citations, an analysis of the *Hadith* Citations; studies on Wali-Allah and al-Ghazali, Ali Shariati, Syed Ahmad Khan, Mawlana Muhammad Qasim Nanawtavi, Shibli Nomani, Ashraf Ali Thanvi, Abdul Hamid Farahi, Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi, a lay reader's observations, a general study, an "historical" study.

In the valedictory session the director of the seminar, while proposing a vote of thanks, also extended his invitation to all the participants and delegates to participate in the next, proposed seminar on "Wali-Allah's Tasawwuf" (Mystical Philosophy), to be held in March 2002.

Many issues of contemporary relevance were also discussed at the seminar, eg., the possibility (or otherwise) of usury-based economy and un-Islamic, exploitative media being construed as *Kufr-Bawah* (which is the legitimate basis for *Khuruj* against a Muslim ruler), the (legitimate) "means of change" in a dictatorship, the "accommodative" areas of Islamic *Sharia'h* (which are accommodative to modernization). It was also felt at

the seminar that in cases of academic pursuit and cultural exchange, the visa rules should be "liberalized" and travel restrictions relaxed bilaterally by the governments of India and Pakistan.

The participants also included the Ulama of the traditional Madrasas from across India, namely Darul-Uloom, Deoband, Nadwatul-Ulama, Lucknow, Madrasatul-Islah, Azamgarh, Jamiah Salafiah, Varanasi, Jamiatul-Falah, Azamgarh, and Jamiatul-Rashad, Azamgarh, etc. The names of the participant scholars are as follows: Mawlana Ziauddin Islahi, Ms. Anjum Ara, Dr. Qaisar Habib Hashmi, Dr. Hamid Nasim Rafiabadi, Dr. Razaullah Mubarakpuri, Ms. Darakhshan Anjum, Dr. Zafar Ahmad Siddiqui, Mawlana Fahim Akhar Nadvi, Mr. Sawar Alam Nadvi, Mr. Fayyaz Ahmad Butt, Prof. Badruddin al-Hafiz,, Prof. Ehtesham Ahmad Nadvi, Mr. Ghazanfar Ali Khan, Dr. Masood Anwar Alvi, Prof. M. Aslam Islahi, Dr. A. B. Shabnam Subhani, Mr. Ibn Laiq Azmi, Ms. Saminah Bi, Prof. M. Rashid Nadvi, Dr. Zafarul Islam Islahi, Dr. Anjum Ara Anjum, Dr. M. Raziul Islam Nadvi, Mawlana Ashhad Rafiq Nadvi, Prof. Abdul Bari, Dr. Ghulam Yahya Anjum, Dr. Jamshed Ahmad Nadvi, Mawlana Waliullah Qasmi, Hakim Altaf Ahmad Azmi, M. Farrukh Jalali, Dr. Wali Husain Jafri, Mufti M. Mushtaq Tejarvi, Dr. M. Saleem Qasmi, Prof. Mahmudul Haq, Dr. Abdur Rasheed Butt, Dr. Tawqir Alam Falahi, Mawlana Habib Rehman Khan Nadvi Azhari, Mawlana Obaid Iqbal Asim, Dr. Abdul Majid Nadvi, Dr. Nazeer Ahmad Abdul Majeed, Ms. Shbnam Bilal, Mr. Shakeel Ahmad Samadani, Dr. Abdul Azim Islahi, Dr. M. Ayyub Nadvi, Mr. Ehsanullah Khan, Mr. Mohammad Muslihuddin, Mawlana M. Jarjis Karimi, Prof. M. Ijteba Nadvi, Mawlana Abdul Moeed Madani and Mawlana Nizamuddin Islahi.

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