

Snippets from the life of Allamah Anwar Shah Al Kashmiri

By Maulana Muaz Billoo

With the passage of time, Allah ﷺ created great scholars who served as guardians of the Prophetic knowledge. The closer we come to the Prophet ﷺ's life, we find great examples of oceans of knowledge among the Sahabah and the Tabi'een. In more recent years, one such individual whose mastery over the Islamic sciences resembled the scholars of old was 'Allamah Anwar Shah al-Kashmiri ﷺ.

Life Summary

Allamah Anwar Shah al-Kashmiri ﷺ was born in the year 1292 AH and passed away in the year 1352 AH. He was born into a household of knowledge and piety. He embarked on the path of knowledge at the age of five under the tutelage of his father. He went on to graduate from the prestigious Darul Uloom Deoband¹ in 1313. He would go on to teach in Darul Uloom Deoband for nearly a third of his life, and would move to Dabhel, India in 1346 where he taught for the remainder of his life. 'Allamah al-Kashmiri was an academic prodigy, displaying the ideal qualities of a student of knowledge such as self-sacrifice, dedication, and piety.

Shaikh 'Abdul Fattah Abu Ghuddah's Description

Sheikh Abdul Fattah Abu Ghuddah ﷺ describes him as "the Imam of the era (*Imam al-'Asr*)," and "the Hadith master of the era (*Hafiz al-'Asr*), the narrator of the time (*Musnid al-Waqt*), the traditionalist (*Muhaddith*), the exegete (*Mufassir*), the Hanafi jurist, the distinguished legist, the sharp theologian, the refined historian, the linguist, the poet, the critical researcher, the gifted examiner, the Imam, the Shaikh, Muhammad Anwar Shah al-Kashmiri ibn al-Shaikh Mu'azzam Shah ibn Abdul Kabir Shah al-Kashmiri. His ancestors came from Baghdad and settled in Multan. They then travelled to Lahore, and from there to Kashmir, which became their abode."

¹ Established in 1866 by Maulana Qasim Nanotwi ﷺ in North India. Shaikh 'Abdul Fattah Abu Ghuddah describes Darul 'Uloom Deoband, "This institution was the Cordoba of India, and its prosperous Azhar, overflowing with great scholars in every field, be it in Hadith and its sciences, Tafseer and its sciences, Fiqh and Usul, history, literature, logic, and Arabic... This great institution was a radiant sun. illuminating the various regions of India. It revived the Prophetic sunnah both academically within its campus, and practically within the lives of the scholars and their behaviors. It extinguished the darknesses born out of the widespread religious innovations that had accumulated over the ages... it managed to replace these religious innovations with the pure, unadulterated, Prophetic sunnah.

In Shaikh ‘Abdul Fattah Abu Ghuddah’s ﷺ abridged biography of Anwar Shah al-Kashmiri ﷺ, located in the opening pages of *al-Tasrih Bi Ma Tawatara Fi Nuzul al-Masih*, he states that in his younger student days, the only time he would ever lay down to sleep was on Thursday nights. He would spend all the other nights engaged in his studies. If he ever felt sleepy in those other nights, he would let sleep overtake him while he was sitting upright and studying. Even while in excruciating pain, he would remain engaged in his studies.

Academic Achievements, Contributions, and Students

Allamah al-Kashmiri would go on to become one of the greatest minds produced in Islamic history. He became the first *sadr mudarris* (head teacher) to succeed Shaykh al-Hind ﷺ in Darul Uloom Deoband. His lectures on *Sahih al-Bukhari* were compiled by his student, ‘Allamah Badr ‘Alam al-Meerati ﷺ, into what is now known as *Fayd al-Bari*. Additionally, many of his insights and lecture notes on *Jami’ al-Tirmidhi* are found in ‘Allamah Yusuf al-Binnori’s *Ma’arif al-Sunan* as well as in *al-‘Arf al-Shadhi*. There are a number of other works of his, many of which have been published in four volumes in *Majmu’ Rasail al-Kashmiri*, while other works are still to be published, such as his lecture notes on *Sunan Abu Dawud*, as well as his annotations on ‘Allamah al-Nimawi’s ﷺ *Athar al-Sunan*, entitled, *al-Ithaf li Mazhab al-Ahnaf*. He produced many of the greatest luminaries of the last century, including, but not limited to: Mufti Muhammad Shafi Uthmani, Mawlana Idris Khandelwi, Maulana Badr ‘Alam Meerati, Maulana Yusuf al-Binnori, Mawlana Muhammad Manzoor al-Nu’mani, and many others ﷺ.

Refutation of the Qadiyani Movement

One of Allamah al-Kashmiri's greatest contributions to the Ummah was his refutation of the Qadiyani Movement. Their claim that a prophet had come after the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had duped many of the uneducated Muslims into accepting a new prophet. It was a threat to Islam at its very foundations. A number of Muslims, while unbeknownst to them, had lost their faith in adopting this idea. Thus, Allamah al-Kashmiri exerted the last portion of his life towards refuting the Qadiyani

Movement. This line of work preoccupied his mind day and night. He once lamented to his students,

“This thought preoccupies me day and night: in our lectures and writings we tend to propagate the excellence of the Hanafi school; however, the real threats are atheism and Qadianism. As to the differences between the Hanafi and Shafi'i schools, these are, at most, related to preferences and priority. These differences will not be an issue on the Day of Judgment. In contrast, the mischiefs of Qadianism and atheism have been striking at the roots of our Islamic beliefs. This is what makes me sad.”²

He also wrote a number of books on the subject. One such book is known as *al-Tasrih bi ma Tawatara fi Nuzul al-Masih*, in which he compiled over one hundred ahadith ranging from Prophetic statements, statements of the companions, and the statements of the Tabi'een, demonstrating that the 2nd coming of Isa ﷺ is an integral part of Islamic creed, and that anyone who rejects it, falls into disbelief.

The first court to declare the Qadianis as non-Muslims was a court in Bhawalpur. The Qadianis rallied together to push their claim to Islam. Upon hearing this, Allamah al-Kashmiri presented himself in the court and defended the court's ruling. He was able to eloquently elucidate the Qadiani beliefs in such a way that the court requested his speech be submitted as a written document.

Thus, Allamah al-Kashmiri ﷺ was able to push back against the Qadiani Movement with his knowledge, hardwork, writings, and speeches. Imam al-Baihaqi ﷺ narrates that The Prophet ﷺ said: “This knowledge will be carried by the righteous scholars of every generation, removing from it the alterations of the misguided people, the false claims of the liars, and the interpretations of the ignorant people.”³ Allamah Kashmiri was a living embodiment of this Hadith.

² *The Great Scholars of the Deoband Islamic Seminary*, Justice Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani, pg. 61. Mufti Taqi Usmani writes in a footnote under this quotation: "Allamah Kashmiri had pressed home the above point with the fervor of a true believer. However, it is both regrettable and intriguing that far from appreciating the spirit permeating his assertion, some people have misquoted it for sectarian reasons. Yet, his observation seeks to extirpate sectarianism from the Muslims. Furthermore, it is outrageous that some people misinterpret these words to mean that in his last days Allamah Kashmiri had disavowed his allegiance to Hanafism. How deplorable is this! What Allamah Kashmiri meant was that, while the Muslim community was faced with the dangers of disbelief and atheism, everyone should focus on these. In such circumstances, it would be both unwise and a waste of time to engage in sectarian debates. It is the height of injustice that his above statement is twisted to imply that he recanted his Hanafism or that he had withdrawn his endorsement for the Hanafi school in his lectures and juristic rulings."

³ *al-Madkhal Ila 'Ilm al-Sunan* #731, Shaikh Muhammad 'Awwamah says, “The Hadith is authentically established due to its numerous chains,” also see his annotation in *Tadrib al-Rawi* 4:19-29.

His Unrivaled Memory

His close student, ‘Allamah Muhammad Yusuf al-Binori ﷺ says in his biography of the Shaikh, entitled, *Nafhah al-‘Anbar Min Hayat Imam al-‘Asr al-Shaikh Anwar*,

“He (‘Allamah Kashmiri) was an Imam and an authority in the Quranic and Hadith sciences. He was accurate in his ability to derive the objectives and goals of these sciences. He served as an authority in their meanings and foundations. He was a Hafiz, well versed in the views of the scholars of the Ummah of Muhammad ﷺ, while having depth in derivation and analysis. He was well versed in their differing views, capable of giving preference to some over others. He had a vast, comprehensive knowledge of the rational sciences...

It has reached me that the Shaikh, the Hadith master, the jurist, Maulana Husain Ahmad al-Muhajir al-Madani said: ‘I heard the great Shaikh – al-Kashimiri, may Allah have mercy on him, – say, ‘When I read through a book casually, not intending to deeply commit its discussions to memory, it still remains in my memory for approximately 15 years.’””

Allah ﷺ had granted ‘Allamah Anwar Shah al-Kashmiri ﷺ a truly remarkable memory. He was thorough in his study and research. The first time that the Shaikh read through the *Musnad* of Imam Ahmad, he would read through 200 pages each day, meticulously analyzing the chains of narration and words of the text.

In the year 1321, he read through *Fath al-Qadeer*, a renowned and complex commentary of *al-Hidayah* (an authoritative work in the Hanafi school) of one of the great scholars of the Hanafi school, Kamal al-Din ibn al-Humam ﷺ (d. 861 AH) along with its *Takmilah* in just twenty days. He even wrote a summary of the work up to the book of Hajj. He even answered some of the objections levied by ibn al-Humam against the author of *al-Hidayah*. Due to his impeccable memory, he never needed to refer back to the work in quoting its discussions for the rest of his life. ‘Allamah Kashmiri ﷺ once told his students,

“For the last 26 years, there has been no need for me to refer back to the book. Whatever discussions (from the book) I do quote, if you were to refer back to the book, then you will find no difference (from what I quoted from memory).”

‘Allamah al-Binori ﷺ states, “You (the reader) are (likely) aware of the fact that the book, *Fath al-Qadeer*, is from the most complex books of fiqh. The author dives into issues pertaining to Usul al-Fiqh, differences of opinion, disputation, theology, and other valuable branches of the Islamic sciences with deep analysis. It is a book that has no peer in its unique characteristics...the Shaikh (al-Kashmiri) used to say, ‘Indeed there has not been a scholar of Usul, nor of debate throughout all of the four schools similar to Ibn al-Humam. His book on Usul, entitled, *al-Tahrir* is one of the most complex books on the science of Usul.’”

The Scholars of Kashmir Refer to ‘Allamah al-Kashmiri

Once the scholars of Kashmir disputed over a legal issue regarding a divorce case. It so happened that ‘Allamah al-Kashmiri was in Kashmir at the time. The scholars of both groups presented their respective arguments in written form.

‘Allamah Kashmiri had ‘Allamah al-Binori write his response⁴ after explaining the issue in detail.

One of the two groups of scholars supported their fatwa using a text that they quoted from a book entitled, *al-Fatawa al-‘Imadiyyah*, which was only available in manuscript form. ‘Allamah al-Kashimiri ﷺ instructed ‘Allamah al-Binori to write,

“I have previously read through *al-Fatawa al-‘Imadiyyah* via an authentic manuscript located in the library of Darul ‘Uloom Deoband, and this text (that the group quoted) is not found anywhere therein. Either that which they are quoting from was altered, or they have intentionally misquoted (the text) in order to support their stance.”

⁴ ‘Allamah al-Binori states that in the written response he wrote on behalf of ‘Allamah al-Kashmiri, he described the Shaikh in the paper as “the authority, the ocean (of knowledge), Maulana Muhammad Anwar Shah.” When Allamah al-Kashmiri reviewed the response, he took a pen and crossed out “the authority, the ocean (of knowledge),” and, as explained by ‘Allamah al-Binori, rebuked him, “I do not give you permission to describe me in any such way other than ‘Maulana Anwar Shah.’” May Allah haver mercy on ‘Allamah al-Kashimiri; in spite of being an authority and an ocean of knowledge, he maintained sincere humility.

The Scholars' Consulting With Him

Some of the greatest scholars of his era would refer back to him whenever they were unsure about certain issues. Among them was the sage of the Ummah, the jurist, the worshipper, the ascetic, Maulana Ashraf Ali al-Thanvi ﷺ (d. 1362 AH). He would consult with the Shaikh on a number of occasions regarding obscure legal matters. ‘Allamah al-Binori ﷺ has reproduced one such letter from Maulana Ashraf Ali al-Thanwi to ‘Allamah al-Kashmiri,

“From the lowly Ashraf ‘Ali, may he be forgiven, to the respected compendium of knowledge and practice, Maulana al-Sayyid Anwar Shah, may his light remain:

Assalamu ‘Alaykum Wa Rahmatullah,

Out of necessity, I must refer back to you a second time regarding the previous investigation. Another issue has arisen which relates to me, and for this reason I bother you again for a second time...”

Shaikh ‘Abdul Fattah Abu Ghuddah ﷺ writes,

“The fact that the sage of the Ummah, Shaikh Ashraf ‘Ali al-Thanvi, may Allah have mercy on him, referred to ‘Allamah Kashmiri for legal issues is a clear testament to ‘Allamah Kashmiri’s deep understanding (of Islam) and (of his) value. Indeed, the sage of the Ummah himself was from the highest-ranking jurists of the fourteenth century in India. His valuable and comprehensive verdicts are published in six thick volumes, not to mention those that exist in the rest of works, reaching up to a thousand works, which are filled with knowledge relating to the science of jurisprudence.”

Among the scholars who would refer to ‘Allamah Kashmiri was the Shaikh, the jurist, the authority, the Hadith master, Maulana Khalil Ahmad al-Saharanpuri al-Madani ﷺ (d. 1346 AH), the author of the acclaimed commentary of *Sunan Abu Dawud*, entitled, *Bazl al-Majhud Fi Hall Sunan Abu Dawud*. While writing the

commentary, ‘Allamah al-Saharanpuri would continuously refer to ‘Allamah al-Kashmiri for guidance on issues of transmission and cognizance.

The famed and renowned Maulana Mahmud al-Hasan ﷺ (d. 1339 AH), who was given the title of *Shaykh al-‘Alam*, but more famously known as *Shaykh al-Hind*, who was from ‘Allamah al-Kashmiri’s teachers would sometimes consult him on various issues, asking: “(Are you aware of any of the scholars of the past) having made a statement regarding this issue? Have you ever come across anyone providing a solution for this complexity?” In doing so, he has displayed his recognition of ‘Allamah al-Kashmiri’s encyclopedic and vast, oceanic knowledge.

The great Hadith master, Shaikh Maulana Muhammad Zahir Hasan al-Nimawi ﷺ (d. 1322 AH), author of *Athar al-Sunan*, an invaluable work on Fiqh al-Hadith in defense of the Hanafi school as well as its subsequent annotations, *al-Ta’leeq al-Hasan* and *Ta’leeq al-Ta’leeq*, used to benefit from ‘Allamah al-Kashmiri by sending him correspondence regarding complex matters relating to the Hadith sciences. In fact, ‘Allamah al-Nimawi would request ‘Allamah al-Kashmiri’s assistance in writing *Athar al-Sunan*. ‘Allamah al-Kashmiri writes in *Nayl al-Farqadain*,

“The late Shaikh al-Nimawi, may he be encompassed in mercy, while writing his book

would send me portions of his book at a time...I have added many things to it after him.”

His annotations on *Athar al-Sunan* are entitled *al-Ithaf Li Madhab al-Ahnaf*, and although it is still in manuscript form, some of the ‘Ulama in Karachi are currently working on having it published. May Allah ﷺ allow them to complete the work thoroughly and properly.

Allamah al-Binori ﷺ beautifully encapsulates his mastery over the various Islamic sciences,

“A person may ask him about jurisprudence, another may ask him about Hadith, even a scholar may ask him about some complexities in Arabic syntax, or another may ask him about minute issues of the Islamic and medical sciences. Another would ask about the foundational sciences. One would ask him about history; its ambiguities and complexities. Another may ask about the lives of the authors (of academic works) and their habits. In this way: one after another; sometimes he may address this person, and sometimes he may answer this person, sometimes that person and sometimes that. He would satisfy and provide cures for people’s thirst for knowledge, until you would feel that he is a flowing ocean...If he began talking on Hadith, you would assume that he only excelled in that and nothing else. If he began to digress into the complexities of jurisprudence, you would assume that he only had knowledge of that and nothing else. If he began speaking on rhetoric and its minutia, you would assume that Shaikh Abdul Qadir has come back to life.”

His Method of Study and Research

His method of study and research was unlike that of most scholars, who only refer to specific books when they are in need of them, specifically looking only at those discussions that pertain to them. Whenever ‘Allamah al-Kashmiri came across any book regardless of it being in manuscript or published form, regardless of it being a defective copy or a sound copy, if it discussed any matter of knowledge, whichever subject it may be, from whichever author it may be, he would take the book and read it in its entirety from cover to cover. He would not leave any part of the book unread. He would focus his efforts on the works of the early generations of scholars, and then he would look into the works of the critical senior scholars of the middle generations.

When it came to Islamic jurisprudence, he studied the works of the early generations of scholars e.g. in the Hanafi school, he thoroughly studied the works of the student of Imam Abu Hanifah ﷺ, Imam Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Shaybani ﷺ, such as the books of the *Zahir al-Riwayah*, his recension of the *Muwatta*, *Kitab al-Athar*, *Kitab al-Hujjah* in detail. Thereafter he studied the commentary of Shams

al-‘Aimmah al-Sarakhsī ﷺ, *al-Mabsut*, which is a commentary of the books of *Zahir al-Riwayah* which were gathered by al-Hakim al-Sadr al-Shahid in his book, *al-Kafi*. He also studied *Sharh al-Siyar al-Kabir* of al-Sarakhsī, thereafter whatever he was able to acquire from the works of Imam al-Tahawi such as *Sharh Ma’ani al-Athar*, *Mushkil al-Athar*, and his *Mukhtasar*, regarding which he said, “I have studied the *Mukhtasar* of al-Tahawi approximately twenty times, and despite this my heart is not content (regarding) a number of places (in the work).” He did not suffice on studying the works of the Hanafi school, but he also studied some of the great works of the Maliki, Shafi’, and Hanbali schools.

He managed to study works in entirety such *Badai’ al-Sanai’* of al-Kasani, *al-Bahr al-Raiq* of ibn Nujaim, *al-Nahr al-Faiq* of his (Ibn Nujaym) brother, *Radd al-Muhtar* of al-Shami, and *Kitab al-Umm* of Imam al-Shafi and other encyclopedic works of Islamic jurisprudence. He would especially praise Imam al-Shafi’s *Kitab al-Umm*, “Whenever I peruse through *Kitab al-Umm*, the thought further settles in my heart that Imam al-Shafi’ was among the most intelligent of this Ummah.”

Shaikh Sayyid Sulaiman al-Nadwi ﷺ said,

“He (Shaikh Anwar) was an ocean of knowledge. He was the monarch of intelligence, unique in his vastness of knowledge. Truthfully, he was a living, breathing library.”

There is so much more that can be said about ‘Allamah al-Kashmiri, but we will stop here. For more details, one may refer to Shaikh ‘Abdul Fattah Abu Ghuddah’s *Tarajim Sittah Min Fuqaha al-‘Alam al-Islami*, ‘Allamah Yusuf al-Binori’s *Nafhah al-‘Anbar Fi Hayati Imam al-‘Asr al-Shaikh Anwar* as well as Qari Tayyib’s *Pacchas Mithali Shaksiyat* and Mufti Taqi Usmani’s *The Great Scholars of the Deoband Islamic Seminary*.