

Life Sketch:

Shaikh al-Islam Husain Ahmad al-Madani ﷺ

Seldom do we find individuals who were able to have an indescribable impact on the lives of both the intellectual class and the laity; those who were active not just within academic circles but also connected with the Muslim Ummah as a whole. Shaikh al-Islam Husain Ahmad al-Madani ﷺ was one such individual.

Born in the year 1296/1879, he travelled to Darul Uloom Deoband in the year 1307 at the age of eleven, remaining there for seven years and acquiring the Islamic sciences. He studied Hadith from the likes of Shaikh al-Hind Mahmud Hasan (d. 1338/1920) ﷺ and remained in his company for a significant time. Shaikh al-Hind would have a significant impact on Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani. He also managed to study a bit with Maulana Khalil Ahmad Saharanpuri (d. 1346/1927) ﷺ. He embarked on the spiritual path under the wing of al-Imam al-Rabbani Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (d. 1323/1905) ﷺ.

His father, a disciple of Maulana Fazlur Rahman Ganj Muradabadi (d. 1313/1895), travelled to the blessed city of Madinah Munawwarah in the year 1316. When they reached the sacred city of Makkah Mukarramah, Maulana Madani met the shaikh of his spiritual mentor, Haji Imdadullah Muhajir Makki (d. 1317/1899) ﷺ, from whom he benefitted tremendously.

Maulana Madani remained in Madinah Munawwarah for two years until 1318 when Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi called for him, wherein he travelled back to India, remaining there for a few months upon which Maulana Gangohi granted him the mantle of spiritual succession (*khilafah*), through which he was now authorized to guide others along the spiritual path. He then travelled back to Madinah Munawwarah, arriving in Muharram 1320.

While in Madinah Munawwarah, he dedicated himself to teaching and dispersing the knowledge of Islam. He would teach Hadith, Tafsir, and Fiqh from the morning until the evening. The advice of his teacher, Shaikh al-Hind, would echo within him wherein he instructed him to remain steadfast on teaching the Islamic sciences without concern for the number of students. It was the decree of Allah that many flocked to learn at his feet.

When Shaikh al-Hind Mahmud Hasan ﷺ set out for Hajj in the year 1333, he entered Madinah Munawwarah, and Maulana Madani decided to accompany his teacher on the journey. They arrived in Makkah Mukarramah while the political climate was unstable, as the Ottoman Empire was beginning to crumble amidst World War I. This situation led to the arrest of both Shaikh al-Hind and Maulana Madani, and they were ultimately imprisoned in Malta. They remained therein as prisoners for three years and two months. Shaikh al-Islam Husain Ahmad Madani used this time as an opportunity to engage in more worship, research, and service for his teacher. It was here that he completed his memorization of the Qur'an.

Maulana Abdullah Saleem once said that during the nights in Malta, the water would get very cold. Shaikh al-Hind had a regular habit of performing the Tahajjud prayers (usually performed in the last third of the night). Shaikh al-Hind would perform his wudu with this freezing water, which would cause him additional hardship. Shaikh al-Islam, upon seeing the difficulty his teacher would endure, came up with a plan. He would pour out the wudu water in a vessel before going to sleep and would embrace the vessel against his body. His hope was that by pressing the vessel against his own body, the temperature of the water would rise, thereby reducing the stress on his teacher.

Maulana Abdullah Saleem suggests us that the reason why Allah ﷻ granted Shaikh al-Islam such a lofty rank was due to the service he rendered for his teacher. There is no doubt that he possessed great intelligence and academic fervor, but what made him shine was the service and respect he rendered to his teacher; a deep lesson for all of us in the path of knowledge.

Upon release, they reached India in the year 1338, and Shaikh al-Hind passed away six months later, may Allah engulf him in His mercy. Maulana Madani then travelled to Sylhet, Bangladesh, and remained there for six years, teaching Hadith and advising the Muslims. Numerous people, both of scholarly class and laity, benefitted from his words and advice.

During this period wherein Shaikh al-Hind had left Darul Uloom Deoband to go for Hajj, the responsibility for teaching *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sunan al-Tirmidhi* fell on the shoulders of Imam al-‘Asr Anwar Shah Kashmiri ﷺ. Due to Shaikh al-Hind’s passing, he remained at this post until 1346, after which he transferred to Jami’ah Dabhel in Gujarat. Thus, the senior scholars of Darul Uloom Deoband’s council (*majlis istishari*), the head being Hakim al-Ummah Ashraf Ali Thanvi ﷺ, needed a suitable candidate to fill the post of “Shaikh al-Hadith.” There was none suitable for the task other than Shaikh al-Islam Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani ﷺ. After insistence from the council and the then principal, Maulana Habibur Rahman Uthmani ﷺ, he took up the post and continued teaching until he left this world in 1377/1957, for a total of thirty years.

Not only was Maulana Madani an instructor of advanced Islamic subjects, but he was also a freedom fighter, pushing back against the injustices and oppression of British forces. He would regularly travel throughout the Indian subcontinent, speaking to the Muslims and instilling within them the spirit of honor, dignity, and courage. He endured many difficulties in his mission, spending the nights studying and teaching, while maintaining a bright yet humble composure. He was also the head of the Jamiat Ulama i Hind – an organization for the unity and direction of Muslim scholars – and the British despised him.

They would eventually arrest him again in 1361 and imprison him in Muradabad and Ilahabad for a little over two years. He remained patient and steadfast, forbearing everything the British threw his way. He was released in 1363, and immediately continued where he left off, inspiring the Muslims with the spirit of bravery and resilience against the British. After the

partition in 1947, Shaikh al-Islam remained in India. He centered his time around teaching Hadith, calling the people towards Allah, and rectifying their souls.

He was one of the rare gems of the Ummah, unparalleled among men in his sincerity, courage, strength, discipline, and forbearance. He was always busy with something; he never wasted his time. Upon performing the Fajr prayer, he would eat breakfast with his numerous guests, and then would turn his attention towards his Hadith classes. He would conduct a lesson on *Sahih al-Bukhari* and another lesson on *Jami' al-Tirmidhi*. After the Zuhr prayer, he would engage in writing various treatises, letters, refutations, and answers to questions. Towards the end of the academic year, he would teach from the morning straight until the Maghrib prayer.

Upon completion of the Maghrib prayer, he remained engaged in supererogatory (*nafl*) prayers, lengthening his recitation of Qur'an and standing before Allah ﷻ. Thereafter he would spend time with his spiritual disciples. After the Isha prayer, he would teach *Sahih al-Bukhari* until one-third or half of the night would pass, and only then would he go home to rest. He would get up in the middle of the night to stand for the Tahajjud prayer, lengthening the recitation. He would engage in the remembrance of Allah and in supplication until the time of Fajr came in. He would eventually pass away in the year 1377/1957 ﷺ.

There is much more to be said about his life and these few pages cannot do justice. For more information, one may refer to his own work wherein he describes parts of his own life and his family heritage entitled, *Naqsh e Hayat*.¹

¹ See: *al-'Anqaid al-Ghaliyat min al-Asanid al-'Aliyah* p. 107