

From Bukhari to Bangladesh

Muaz Billoo

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم، الحمد لله رب العالمين، والصلاة والسلام على رسول الله، أما بعد

When one thinks of the various seats of Islamic learning globally, one cannot deny the presence and impact that the scholars of Bangladesh have had on the Hadith sciences in the last century. From the students of the great muhaddithin like ‘Allamah Anwar Shah al-Kashmiri (d. 1352) رحمه الله, we find the likes of Maulana Zuhur al-Haq al-Sylheti (d. 1366) رحمه الله. From the students of Shaikh al-Islam Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani (d. 1377) رحمه الله we find luminaries like Maulana Shah Ahmad Shafi (d. 1442) رحمه الله, and we find a plethora of contemporary scholars carrying the mantle of Hadith scholarship today, such as Maulana ‘Abdul Matin, Mufti Abdul Malik al-Kumillai, Maulana Hifzur Rahman al-Kumillai, and even our respected shaikh and teacher, Mufti Ruhul Amin al-Faridpuri (may Allah preserve them). The list can go on and on for both the past and present.

One question comes to mind: who was the blessed individual who – by Allah’s ﷻ divine assistance – initiated the study of Hadith works like *Sahih al-Bukhari* in Bangladesh? Who became the means by which Allah ﷻ caused the words of His beloved Prophet ﷺ to spring forth and become rooted in the Bangladesh landscape? Although some might say the grand Muhaddith and Imam Shah Waliyullah Muhaddith al-Dehlawi (d. 1176) رحمه الله, but is there any possibility that there was somebody before him? For example, we find Muhaddithin in India who initiated circles of Hadith prior to Shah Waliyullah, such as Shah Abdul Haq al-Dehlawi (d. 1052) رحمه الله, Muhammad ibn Tahir al-Pattani (d. 986) رحمه الله, Muhammad Muttaqi al-Hindi (d. 975) رحمه الله, and others. Can the same be said for Bangladesh?

By the grace of Allah ﷻ, Maulana Mahfuz Ahmed al-Sylheti (may Allah preserve him) oversaw the publication of *Manhaj al-‘Ulama al-Kibar Fi Tadris Sahih al-Bukhari* by ‘Allamah Mufti Muhammad Fadl al-Haq al-Amini (d. 1434) رحمه الله, which endeavors to analyze the various ways that the *Sahih* of Imam al-Bukhari (d. 256) رحمه الله has been taught and studied by the scholars of the Indian subcontinent in the last century and a half. The first part of the book has a brief yet beneficial study of the contributions of the scholars of Bangladesh to the study of *Sahih al-Bukhari*, and the various institutions of learning in the country. It is in this section that Maulana Mahfuz Ahmad sheds light on who is **potentially** the first (if not, one of the first) individual to initiate circles of learning for *Sahih al-Bukhari* and Hadith in general: Shaikh Sharaf al-Din Abu Tawwamah (d. ~700) رحمه الله.

Historical sources are scarce in what they convey about Shaikh Sharaf al-Din Abu Tawwamah. The 14th century historian, Maulana Abdul Hayy al-Hasani (d. 1341) رحمہ اللہ, writes:

“The shaikh, the great scholar, Sharaf al-Din Abu Tawwamah al-Hanafi al-Dehlawi, buried in the city of Shonargao.¹ He was from the great teachers; he left Delhi during the days of (Sultan) Shams al-Din al-Iltimash, and travelled to Shonargao, wherein he taught and benefitted (the people) for the duration of his life. Ahmad ibn Yahya al-Maneri studied from him, and he (al-Maneri) wrote in *Khawan Purni 'mat* in the sixth sitting of the book, ‘Indeed, Sharaf al-Din Abu Tawwamah was a great scholar, an exemplary model with respect to his ocean-like knowledge. None disagree on that.’”²

From other sources, we find that he was originally from Bukhara (modern-day Uzbekistan). He would teach in Khurasan and eventually moved to Delhi in the era of Sultan Ghiyath al-Din Balban (d. 686). It was in Delhi that he invited the people to Islam through his character and words, which resulted in them developing a deep love and reverence for him. He would go on to move to Shonargao, wherein – as he did in Delhi – called the people to Islam with his character and words.

It was here in Shonargao that he established an academic institution for higher Islamic studies. The locals called it, “Darsbari,” from the word “dars,” which is Arabic for “class,” and “bari,” which is Bangla for “home.” It was in this Darsbari that Shaikh Abu Tawwamah began holding classes for the dissemination of the Prophetic inheritance found within the books of Hadith such as *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, *Musnad Abu Ya'la* and others, connecting the people to the words of the Prophet ﷺ via chains of narration containing the names of those righteous and blessed souls who preserved these pure words.

Unfortunately, it seems the impact of Shaikh Abu Tawwamah’s teachings and lessons faded within a few generations, as we have not come across his name in our chains of narration for Hadith. What this tells us is that it seems that his chains of narration for Hadith faded from existence relatively quickly. Allah ﷻ knows best.

He passed away towards the end of the eighth century, somewhere around the year 700 AH. May Allah ﷻ inspire us with the love of the sunnah of His Prophet ﷺ, and to follow in his ﷺ footsteps. For reference, see Maulana Mahfuz Ahmad al-Sylheti’s notes on the biography of the Shaikh in *Manhaj al-Ulama al-Kibar fi Tadris Sahih al-Bukhari* pgs 29-31, and Shaikh Husain Muhammad Na’eem al-Haq’s small treatise on <https://www.madarisweb.com/ar/articles/3336>.

¹ A district in modern day Bangladesh.

² *Nuzhah al-Khawahir* 1/102.