Imām Ahl al-Sunnah

Mawlānā Muḥammad Sarfarāz Khān Ṣafdar

(1332-1430 AH/1914-2009 CE)

Foreword by Shaykh Mawlānā Muḥammad Saleem Dhorat

Abu ʻĀşim Badrul  İslām
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Abu ʿĀṣim Badrul Islām
For ʿAllāmah Shaykh al-Ḥadīth Mufti Muḥammad Taqī Usmani và
Shaykh Mawlānā Muḥammad Saleem Dhorat

With special thanks to
Mawlānā Ḥabrāhīm Muḥammad Amin
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Foreword 1

Shaykh Mawlānā Muḥammad Saleem Dhorat¹

My first acquaintance with Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā Muḥammad Sarfarāz Khān Ṣafdar sahib (may Allāh sanctify his soul) was when Ḥaḍrat had come to the UK to attend a conference as the chief guest and also visited Leicester during that trip. It was the sheer grace of Allāh that Ḥaḍrat’s host called me and requested that I should make all necessary arrangements whilst Ḥaḍrat was in Leicester. I took this opportunity as an honour for myself and made arrangements for his stay at my late father’s residence.

This was my first meeting with the honourable Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā Muḥammad Sarfarāz Khān Ṣafdar sahib and thereafter my love and respect for this luminary only increased as I continuously learnt of his academic status through his works, publications and other leading luminaries.

The honourable Ḥaḍrat has been amongst those great scholars from whom I have longed to seek ijāzah in ḥadīth, but have been unfortunate and this grief and sorrow will always remain with me.

Mawlānā Badrul Islam sahib, who has authored this short biography, is a graduate of Jāmi‘ah Dār al-‘Ulūm at Karachi and a murīd of the honourable Ḥaḍrat. Mawlānā is a young academic ʿālim who has much love for our pious predecessors and elders and also has much love and respect for me. Due to this love, after the honourable Ḥaḍrat’s demise, I requested Mawlānā to write an article for our monthly Magazine, Riyāḍul Jannah, which would concisely

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¹ Khalīfah of Shaykh Mawlānā Muḥammad Yūsuf Ludhyānwī Shāhīd; founder and Shaykh al-Ḥadīth, Jami‘ah Riyāḍ al-‘Ulūm; founder, Islāmic Da‘wah Academy (Leicester, England); editor, Riyāḍul Jannah Magazine.
highlight the life of the honourable Ḥaḍrat.

It has always been my endeavour and desire that the biographies of the eminent ʿulamāʾ of the Indian subcontinent be written in English for the benefit of the English speaking masses who would otherwise be unable to realise the lofty status of these eminent scholars directly from their Urdu and Arabic works. I was pleased that Mawlānā took up this request and now this short article has taken the form of a very informative yet concise booklet.

My knowledge and vision of the honourable Ḥaḍrat was that of an Islāmic academic and a man of spirituality and piety. Despite having only one occasion of meeting him, my admiration and respect for the honourable Ḥaḍrat ever remained. Nevertheless, having read this book, many other aspects of the honourable Ḥaḍrat have now come to light and the sorrow of not having the opportunity of benefiting from his company only remains.

I pray that Allāh taʿālā accepts this endeavour of Mawlānā Badrul Islam sahib, makes it beneficial for the readers and a means of salvation for him and grants the honourable Ḥaḍrat a place in the Aʾlāʾ ʿIlīyyīn. Āmīn.

Muḥammad Saleem Dhorat
Islāmic Daʿwah Academy
Leicester, UK.
Foreword 2

Mawlānā Ismaeel Nakhuda

It was during a lesson on ʿImām al-Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ that the renowned ʿustād of ḥadīth at the Dār al-ʿUlūm at Deoband and freedom fighter Shaykh al-Islām Mawlānā Sayyid Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madani (1879-1957) saw a student, late for the lecture, crossing the rows at which he said, “Ṣafdar is coming. This is the ṣafdar who will, inshā Allāh, separate the ṣaff (row) of [the people of] truth from that of [the people of] falsehood.” It was a foretelling that came true — this Pathan student later became ʿImām Ahl al-Sunnah Mawlānā Muḥammad Sarfarāz Khān Ṣafdar (1914-2009).

Reading the life of ‘Allāmah Muḥammad Sarfarāz Khān Ṣafdar reminds one of those ʿulamā’ of a bygone era. As a meticulous researcher, expert in ḥadīth and tafsīr, prolific writer and ṣūfī shaykh in the Naqshbandī tariqah, ‘Allāmah Ṣafdar was at the forefront of serving Islām, piety, research and defending the Ahl al-Sunnah. Living up to the ripe-old age of 95, ‘Allāmah Ṣafdar authored approximately 50 books. His writings have enjoyed widespread acceptance among leading scholars of South Asia, so much so that even learned men of knowledge such as Muftī Muḥammad Taqī Usmānī take pride in possessing all his works.

A close confidant of many leading ʿulamā’ in Pakistan, ‘Allāmah Ṣafdar was the embodiment of a rare breed of scholar-cum-ṣūfī — a notable trait among those affiliated with the Deobandī maslak — and was bay’ah to Shaykh al-Qur’ān Mawlānā Husayn ‘Alī, a student of ʿImām Rabbānī Mawlānā Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī.
This biography is a rare treat for those wanting to read about a genre of Islāmic scholars whose life stories are still largely untold in the English medium. Mawlānā Abu ‘Āṣim Badrul Islām, himself a murīd of the late ‘Allāmah, has taken the time to write this beautiful and heartwarming short biography that readers will, inshā Allāh, take delight to absorb themselves in.

Ismaeel Nakhuda
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.
“This is the ṣafdar who will, inshā Allāh, separate the ṣaff (row) of [the people of] truth (ḥaqq) from that of [the people of] falsehood (bāṭil).”

(Shaykh al-İslām Mawlānā Sayyid Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madani, 1296-1377 AH/1879-1957 CE)

Childhood and education

Sometime in 1332 AH (1914 CE) in a little known village within the Mansehra district of the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan was born a child who would grow up to be the unparalleled master of the Ahl al-Sunnah wa ‘l-Jamā‘ah and an iconic figure in combating bid‘ah and misguidance in all its guises within the Muslim Ummah; a child in front of whom, during the latter part of his almost century-long life, the most eminent of ‘ulamā‘ would humble themselves and would consider it a great honour to have their names included in the list of his thousands of students who would be flocking toward him from all parts of the globe.

Born in a family known for its strict adherence to Islām and exceptional hospitality, İmām Mawlānā Muḥammad Sarfarāz Khān Ṣafdar began his primary Islāmic education in his locality before travelling to the Punjab for further education. After completing his primary and intermediate level education in 1939 CE, he and his younger brother, ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, who, later in life, would come to be known as Shaykh Şüfi ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Sawātī, set off for the prestigious ‘al-Azhar of the East’, the Dār al-ʿUlūm at Deoband (India). He
exelled in his studies, surpassing all his fellow students and, thus, winning the attention and affection of his legendary teachers at the Dār al-ʿUlūm.²

Imām Mawlānā Muḥammad Sarfārāz Khān Ṣafdar would himself later explain how he was given the title Ṣafdar. During his student days at the Dār al-ʿUlūm, he was once late for a hadīth lecture. Upon arrival at the lecture hall, he made his way to his usual place at the front by skipping the rows of fellow students. He says, “Seeing this, my revered teacher Shaykh al-ʿArab wa ʿl-ʿAjam³ Mawlānā

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³ Meaning ‘the shaikh of the Arab and the non-Arab world’, this is a title that was given to Shaykh al-Islām Mawlānā Sayyid Ḥusayn Āḥmad Madani by the leading ʿulamā’ of undivided India.

Born in Bāṅgar, Mao, the Indian district of Annow on 19 Shawwāl 1296 AH (5 October 1879 CE), the Shaykh al-Islām began his primary Islāmic education in Faizābād. At the age of twelve he travelled to the Dār al-ʿUlūm at Deoband where he studied the intermediate and higher level books of the traditional Dars-e-Nizāmī course. During his seven and a half years at the Dār al-ʿUlūm the Shaykh al-Islām studied about sixty books, twenty four of which were taught by the legendary imām of undivided India, Shaykh al-Hind Mawlānā Muḥammad al-Ḥasan Deobandī (1268-1339 AH/1851-1920 CE). He describes in his two-volume Urdu autobiography (Naṣḥ-e-Ḥayāt – A Sketch of My Life) how, as a young student at the Dār al-ʿUlūm, he was very close to Imām Shaykh al-Hind and had free access to the latter’s home. Similar affection was shown by all his illustrious teachers at the Dār al-ʿUlūm.

As a young ʿālim, the Shaykh al-Islām offered his allegiance of tasawwuf (bayʿah) at the blessed hands of the imām of his age, dubbed ‘the Abū Ḥanīfah of the era’, Shaykh al-Mashāyikh Mawlānā Rashīd Āḥmad Gongohī (1244-1323 AH/1829-1905 CE). In 1316 AH (1898 CE) he travelled with his parents and siblings to the radiant city of Madīnah al-Munawwarah, where his father, Sayyid Ḥabībullāḥ, settled permanently in fulfilment of his yearning to undertake ḥijrah. On their way to Madīnah al-Munawwarah, the family spent some days in the blessed company of the master of all the Indian mashāyikh of his age, the shaykh of Shaykh al-Mashāyikh Mawlānā Rashīd Āḥmad Gongohī, Ḥāji Imādullāḥ Muḥājir Makkī (1233-1317 AH/1817-1899 CE) in the Holy city of Makkah al-Mukarramah, who prescribed the litany (wird/wazīfah) of Pās anfās to the Shaykh al-Islām. In 1318 AH (1900 CE) the Shaykh al-Islām and his eldest brother, Mawlānā Sayyid Muḥammad Ṣiddīq (1288-1331 AH/1871-1913 CE), were summoned to India by Shaykh al-Mashāyikh Mawlānā Rashīd Āḥmad Gongohī. Shortly after arrival, Imām Gongohī wrapped imāmahs (turbans) around their heads and granted them formal khilāfah (or ījāzah) in tasawwuf. They both remained in India for two years before returning to Madīnah al-Munawwarah with a group of ḥajīs.

When the Shaykh al-Islām and his family embarked on their very long and perilous journey to Madīnah al-Munawwarah, his beloved teacher, Shaykh al-Hind Mawlānā Muḥammad al-Ḥasan, walked with them to the train station. He advised the Shaykh al-Islām never to give up teaching the Islāmic sciences, wherever he may be and whatever the circumstances. He held fast to this advice. Once settled in Madīnah al-Munawwarah, despite the severe tribulations that he and his family underwent, the Shaykh al-Islām began teaching some books of the Islāmic sciences in the Masjid of the Beloved Messenger of Allāh (may the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him). In the sections of his autobiography detailing his academic pursuits in Madīnah al-Munawwarah, he describes his surprise at the relatively poor academic abilities of those who were lecturing in the Holy Masjid at the time, compared with what he
had been accustomed to in India. No sooner had he commenced his lectures on the various Islamic sciences that his fame spread far and wide. Students began to desert the other lecturers and flocked to his lectures. They would marvel at the depth and richness of his oceanic knowledge of all the Islamic sciences and his grounding in the fiqh of all four schools of sacred law. Consequently, he found himself the target of much envy and malice. Students – many of them of Madīnīan, Turkīsh, Bukhārī, Qāzānī, Kazakhī, Egyptian and Afghānī origins - would find themselves mesmerized by his lectures on a wide spectrum of texts, many of which he himself had not studied previously, including in Ḣilm al-Nahw (grammar) the Ājrumīyyah, Hallān, Kafrāwī, Alfiyyah, Sharḥ Ibn 'Aqlī, Sharḥ Alfiyyah Ibn Ḥishām; in Ḣilm al-Ma‘ānī wa-l-Bayān (the science of Arabic eloquence) Sharḥ Ḥūṣūd al-Jumān, Risālah Istī‘ārāt, Risālah Waḍ’iyah li ‘l-Qādī, ‘Adud etc; in Ḣilm al-Badī (another branch of Arabic eloquence) Badī‘iyat Ibn Ḥajar; in Hanafī fiqh Nūr al-Īḍāh, Multaqa ‘l-Abhur, Durar etc; in the jurisprudence of the Shāfī‘ī and Mālikī schools Sharḥ Jam’ al-Jawāmī li ‘l-Subkī, Sharḥ Muṣṭafā ‘l-Usūl, Waraqāt, Sharḥ Muntahā ‘l-Usūl etc; in ‘aqā’īd (Islamic creed) Musāmaraḥ Sharḥ Musāyarah, Sharḥ Fawā’il al-Anwār, Jawharah etc; in muṣṭalāḥ al-ḥadīth (principles and technicalities of Ḥadīth) Alfiyyah Usūl al-Ḥadīth, Bayānīyyah etc and many other texts in the sciences of šarā‘īd (law of inheritance), mantiq (logic), tafsīr (exegesis of the Holy Qur’ān), Ḥadīth (Prophetic traditions) and kalām (theology). Due to the ever increasing insistence of students, he would deliver fourteen lectures a day – five in the morning, three or four after Zuhr prayers, two after ‘Asr prayers, two after Maghrib prayers and one after ‘Ishā prayers. He would only sleep for three to three and a half hours, sometimes suspending all lectures and sleeping for six to seven hours, thereby refreshing himself for a full week. All this he did without any form of remuneration, upon the guidance of his spiritual mentor, Shaykh al-Mashāyikh Mawlānā Rashīd Ahmad Gangohī.

Circumstances of the Muslims of India compelled the Shaykh al-Īslām to return to India. There, under the leadership of his illustrious teacher, Shaykh al-Hind Mawlānā Mahmūd al-Ḥasan, he dedicated himself to the nationwide movement for freedom from the British Raj. In 1335 AH (1917 CE) he and Shaykh al-Hind were arrested in the Hijāz (in modern day Saudi Arabia) and incarcerated by the British in Malta. After his release in 1338 AH (1920 CE), he became even more dedicated to the fight for India’s freedom from colonialism. When Shaykh al-Hind passed away that same year, the Shaykh al-Īslām continued his illustrious teacher’s struggle for India’s independence and in 1360 AH (1941 CE) was appointed president of the Jam‘īyyat al-‘Ulāmā of India, a role in which he served until his demise in 1377 AH (1957 CE).

Upon the final instruction of his beloved teacher, Shaykh al-Hind, the Shaykh al-Īslām taught Ḥadīth at a madrasah in Calcutta for a short period before moving to Sylhet (in modern day Bangladesh), where, during the six years that he lived there, he taught Ḥadīth, served as the prime and unparalleled spiritual mentor of the Muslims of the region and carried on his mission to see an independent India. In 1346 AH (1927 CE), he accepted the post of grand Shaykh of the Dār al-‘Ulūm at Deoband – Shaykh al-Ḥadīth. An estimated 3,856 students studied Ḥadīth under him. Many thousands of Muslims pledged the allegiance of taṣawwuf (bay’ah) at his hands, from whom a total of 166 were granted formal khilāfah (or ijāzah) in taṣawwuf by the Shaykh al-Īslām.

After the independence of India, the Shaykh al-Īslām distanced himself from politics and devoted all his time and energy on the teaching of Ḥadīth, spiritually reforming the Muslims and da‘wah. In recognition of his sacrifices for India, in 1373 AH (1954 CE) the government wished to confer the Shaykh al-Īslām an honorary official title. He declined, saying that the acceptance of such an award was contrary to the way of his pious predecessors (the Salaf and Akābīr). His sacrifices and selflessness for the people of India generally, and for the Muslims of India specifically, remain till this day unparalleled. His legacy remains alive today throughout the breadth and width of not just south Asia, but the world.
Sayyid Ḥusayn Āḥmad Madāni exclaimed, ‘Ṣafdar⁴ is coming’. All my fellow students smiled at this. Shaykh al-ʿArab wa ʿl-ʿAjam continued, ‘This is the ṣafdar who will, inshā Allāh, separate the ṣaff (row) of [the people of] truth (ḥaqq) from that of [the people of] falsehood (bāṭil).’⁵ A statement that had been made by the blessed tongue of a wali of Allāh, Most Majestic, later proved its acceptance by the Divine Grace before the eyes of the entire world. Such is His treatment of His awliyā’.

**Humble possessor of a mighty pen**

Describing Imām Mawlānā Ṣafdar, ‘Allāmah Muftī Muḥammad Taqi Usmānī⁶ writes:

This legendary master passed away in 1377 AH (1957 CE) at his home in Deoband. His funeral prayer was led by the great Shaykh al-Ḥadīth Mawlānā Muhammad Zakariyyā Kāndhlawī (1315-1402 AH/1898-1982 CE). He was laid to rest beside his teacher Shaykh al-Ḥind Mawlānā Ṭāhir al-Ḥasan and Imām Ḥūjjat al-İslām Mawlānā Muḥammad Qāsim Nānowī (1248-1297 AH/1833-1880 CE), the founder of the Dār al-ʿUlūm, within its precincts in Deoband.


⁴ A Persian word meaning the one who cuts through, or separates, rows.
⁵ Born in the town of Deoband (U.P., India) in 1362 AH (1943 CE), ‘Allāmah Muftī Muḥammad Taqi Usmānī is one of the most eminent scholars of İslām alive today. He was brought up and trained over a period of thirty years by his illustrious father, the legendary Imām ‘Allāmah Muftī Muḥammad Shaftī, the grand muftī of India and Pakistan consecutively, and the renowned author of Tafsīr Ma‘ārif al-Qur’ān (see: Lamḥāt min Ḥayāt al-Qādī Muḥammad Taqi al-‘Uṭmānī, Karachi: Maktabah al-Ḥikmah, 1420 AH, pp. 11). Muftī Muḥammad Taqi Usmānī studied under some of the greatest ‘ulamā and mashhāyik of the last century, all of whom granted him formal jāzāt in the sciences of İslām. The depth of his knowledge of fiqh and its application can be gauged from the fact that one of his first formal published fatawā was issued whilst he was still a student of the Dārs-e-Nizāmī course (before commencing the final Dawra-e-ḥadīth year) during 1378 AH (1959 CE) at the astonishing age of sixteen, which was checked and endorsed by his illustrious father who expressed his surprise and satisfaction at this in a written note added to the fatawā (see: Fiqhi Maqālāt, Karachi: Memon İslāmıc Publishers, 1994, 2:33). Since then, he has been writing and lecturing extensively in Arabic, Urdu, [Persian] and English. His currently published works number to more than sixty, the largest and most splendid being his Takmilah Fatḥ al-Mulhim bi Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-İmām Muslim in six large volumes, written over a period of eighteen years.

Beside his unparalleled grounding in the esoteric sciences of İslām, he is a leading master in the esoteric science of taṣawwuf, in which he has jāzāh from two of the leading masters of the last century, Shaykh Mawlānā Muḥammad Mạṣīḥullāḥ Kháñ Sherwànī (Jalālábād, India) and Dr. ‘Abd al-Ḥayy ‘Arīfī (Karāchī, Pakistan), both of whom were khūlaṣ of the legendary Imām Ḥakīm al-ʿUmmah Mawlānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thānwī (see: Lamḥāt min Ḥayāt al-Qādī Muḥammad Taqi al-ʿUṭmānī, pp. 22-23, pp.53).
‘Some personalities are endowed by Allāh, Most High and Glorious, with such love in the hearts of others and common acceptance that just the thought of them brings tranquility to the heart. Even if personal interaction with them be scarce, their mere existence is a means of great comfort. Our revered elder, the teacher of all, Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā Muḥammad Sarfarāz Khān Ṣafdar sahib (may Allāh sanctify his soul) was such a personality, whom we have now lost. Indeed we are for Allāh, and to Him is our return.

He had been bedridden for a long time and this had effectively restrained him from an active life. Opportunities to visit him and benefit from his company had been rare for distant ones like us, but his mere existence felt like a cool shade upon me in a very unique way; I knew that whenever the hustle and bustle of life would allow the opportunity, this blessed tree was there, extending its cool shade. Now, this shade is no longer upon us.

There now remain very few individuals in the world who had directly benefited from, and were honoured with, the blessed company of the great ‘ulamā of Deoband and then spread their blessed legacies throughout the world. Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā Muḥammad Sarfarāz Khān Ṣafdar sahib (may Allāh sanctify his soul) was from amongst those fortunate men of learning who had gained the blessings of Shaykh al-Islām Mawlānā Sayyid Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madani, Shaykh al-Adab Mawlānā Iʿzāz ‘Ali sahib and other great ‘ulamā of that period (may Allāh sanctify their souls).

He has given accounts in his autobiography of the hardship he and his parents endured in gaining his primary [Islāmic] education, and how, after seeking knowledge in various parts of the Punjab, he set off for the Dār al-ʿUlūm at Deoband (India). Once there, he enrolled in the final year (Dawra-e-ḥadīth) class and was honoured to be taught by Shaykh al-Islām Mawlānā Sayyid Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madani (may Allāh sanctify his soul). However, the Shaykh al-Islām was arrested and incarcerated later during that year for his role in the Indian liberation movement against British colonialism. In his absence, Shaykh al-Adab Mawlānā Iʿzāz ‘Ali sahib (may Allāh sanctify his soul) taught the remainder of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī.’

Recalling how, as a young boy, he first became acquainted with the name of Imām Mawlānā Ṣafdar, ‘Allāmāh Muftī Muḥammad Taqī Usmānī writes:

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'I first came across the name of Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā Muḥammad Sarfarāz Khān Ṣafdar sahib (may Allāh sanctify his soul) when I was a student of the final two volumes of al-Hidāyah⁸ and other books at the Dār al-ʿUlūm in Karachi. During those days, the Dār al-ʿUlūm had been relocated from the city to a location in the desert near a village called Sharāfī Got.⁹ We resided in the Dār al-ʿUlūm throughout the week and would return to our homes in the city [for the Islamic weekend] on Thursday evenings. My revered father, Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā Muftī Muḥammad Shafīʿ sahib¹⁰ (may Allāh sanctify his soul), had his personal

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⁸ Written by Imām Burhān al-Dīn ‘Alī ibn Abī Bakr al-Marghīnānī (d. 593 AH/1197 CE), this is the most advanced text in Ḥanafī fiqh taught in the traditional Dārs-e-Nizāmī course. The handwritten lithographic edition of the book taught in Islamic madāris throughout the world is split into four very large volumes. In most institutions, the first two volumes are taught separately in two years while the third and fourth volumes are taught in a single year. Modern computer typed editions of the book have been published in many volumes, the edition containing the splendid commentary of Imām Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahīd, better known as ‘Ībn al-Humāmī, (d. 861 AH/1457 CE) being in ten large volumes.

⁹ Later, when the city of Karachi expanded, this and far more remote areas became part of the city. Covering approximately fifty-six acres of land within its boundary walls, the Dār al-ʿUlūm is without doubt one of the most splendid and exemplary completely independent Islamic institutions in the world today. It was founded by Imām ‘Allāmah Muftī Muḥammad Shafīʿ (d. 1396 AH/1976 CE) and over the decades it has seen great imāms of knowledge and piety teach there, including the likes of Shaykh Muftī Wāli Ḥasan Tonkī, Shaykh Muftī Rashīd Aḥmad Ludhyānī, Shaykh Muftī ‘Ashiq-e-Ilāhī Bulandshehī Madānī, Shaykh al-Ḥadīth Mawlānā Salīmullāh Khān, ‘Arif billāh Dr. ‘Abd al-Ḥayy ‘Arifī (as president and mentor), Shaykh al-Ḥadīth Mawlānā Saḥbān Māhmod and Shaykh Mawlānā Shams al-Haq (may Allāh grant them all the highest Paradise). Today the president and chief muftī of the Dār al-ʿUlūm is Shaykh Muftī Muḥammad Raḥī Usmānī (grand muftī of Pakistan) and the vice-president and Shaykh al-Ḥadīth is ‘Allāmah Muftī Muḥammad Taqī Usmānī, both illustrious sons of Imām ‘Allāmah Muftī Muḥammad Shafīʿ. The deputy muftīs are Shaykh Muftī Māhmod Ashraf Usmānī (grandson of Imām ‘Allāmah Muftī Muḥammad Shafīʿ), Shaykh Muftī ‘Abd al-Raʿūf Sakhkharwī and Mawlānā Muftī ‘Abd al-Mannān Sylhetī.

¹⁰ The first grand muftī of Pakistan and a khulafāʾ of Imām Ḥakīm al-Ummah Mawlānā Ashraf ‘Āli Thānwi, Imām Muftī Muḥammad Shafīʿ was one of the most eminent scholars who lectured and served as grand muftī at the Dār al-ʿUlūm in Deoband (India).

Born in Deoband in 1314 AH (1897 CE), he commenced Qur’ānic studies at the age of five. He studied Persian under his father, Mawlānā Muhammad Yāsīn Deobandī (1282-1355AH/1865-1936 CE), and secular subjects under his uncle. He graduated at the age of twenty-two and was appointed to teach the lower levels of the Dārs-e-Nizāmī course at the Dār al-ʿUlūm, soon progressing to the higher levels. He taught at Deoband for twenty-seven years and served as the grand muftī of India prior to partition.

In 1943 CE, Imām Muftī Muḥammad Shafīʿ resigned from the Dār al-ʿUlūm due to his involvement in the Pakistan movement. When Pakistan came into existence, he migrated to Karachi, where in 1951 CE he established Dār al-ʿUlūm Karachi on the pattern of the Dār al-ʿUlūm at Deoband. The Dār al-ʿUlūm at Karachi is regarded today as the largest private institute of higher Islamic education in Pakistan. His two sons, Shaykh Muftī Muḥammad Raḥī Usmānī and ‘Allāmah Muftī Muḥammad Taqī Usmānī are
library at home and it was my custom during the Friday weekend to browse through every book in the library. I would at least endeavour to look at the subject matter, details of the author and the literary style of each book. During one of these perusals, I came across three new books, the name of whose author was Mawlānā Muḥammad Sarfarāz Khān Ṣafdar. These books were written as refutation of various customary practices of bid‘ah and heresy. I found the pages of these books replete with references from the books of tafsīr, fiqh, ḥadīth and ‘aqā’id. Many references were from books that I had never heard of before. I instantly knew that this was a highly proficient research scholar who did not write anything without proper evidence and reference. This was the beginning of my love, reverence and admiration for [Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā Muḥammad Sarfarāz sahib].’

Exegete of the Book of Allāh

During his annual Dawra-e-tafsīr, which would take place during the annual Ramaḍān – Shawwāl holidays of the Islāmic madāris, and which would be

currently rectors, chief muftīs and senior professors of ḥadīth and Ḥanafī fiqh at the institute.

A prolific writer, Imām Muftī Muḥammad Shaḍī authored approximately three hundred books on various Islāmic and literary subjects, his last being the immensely popular Urdu exegesis of the Holy Qur’ān entitled Maʿārif al-Qur’ān, which was completed four years before his demise and subsequently translated fully into Bengali and English. Besides his literary masterpieces, Imām Muftī Muḥammad Shaḍī broadcasted the exegesis of the Holy Qur’ān on Radio Pakistan for a number of years.

Imām Muftī Muḥammad Shaḍī attained a high rank in the science of taṣawwuf. He initially took the bayʿah at the hands of Imām Shaykh al-Hind Mawlānā Maḥmūd al-Ḥasan in 1920 CE. After Imām Shaykh al-Hind’s demise, Imām Muftī Muḥammad Shaḍī continued the spiritual path for twenty-years under the latter’s famous student, Imām Ḥakīm al-Ummah Mawlānā Ashraf ‘Ali Thānwī, who granted him ijāzah. Under Imām Ḥakīm al-Ummah’s supervision, he produced a number of outstanding works. Mawlānā Jamīl Ahmad Thānwī states that Imām Ḥakīm al-Ummah had such reliance on Imām Muftī Muḥammad Shaḍī’s juristic acumen that he would even consult him in his personal matters. Imām Ḥakīm al-Ummah once said, “May Allāh lengthen the life of Muftī sahib, for, I achieve two joys due to him. Firstly, I acquire knowledge from him and, secondly, I have the satisfaction of knowing that after me there are people who will continue my work.”

Imām Muftī Muḥammad Shaḍī died in 1396 AH (1976 CE). It is estimated that over 100,000 people attended his funeral, which was led by Dr. ‘Abd al-Ḥayy ‘Ārifī, also a senior khalifah of Imām Ḥakīm al-Ummah.

(Mawlānā Ismaeel Nakhuda)

attended exclusively by ‘ulamā (many of them from Īrān, Afghānistān, China, India, Bangladesh and other countries), Imām Mawlānā Ṣafdar would often say to his ‘ulamā students, “I do not say anything without reference.” His lectures in this Dawra-e-tafsīr would be replete with references from the books of tafsīr, ḥadīth, fiqh, ‘aqā‘id, kalām, adab, lughah and tārīkh. Addressing his ‘ulamā students, he once said, “By the grace of Allāh, there is perhaps no one more read and researched than I in Pakistan today”12 – and indeed this was the case. The depth of his reading and research was absolutely astounding. In explaining verses of the Holy Qur‘ān, he would always cite the major books of tafsīr. In particular, he would mention Tafsīr Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabari, Tafsīr Ibn Kathir, Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī, Rāḥ al-Ma‘ānī, Al-Durr al-Manthūr, Tafsīr Bayān al-Qur‘ān (Urdu), Tafsīr Abī ‘l-Ṣa‘ūd, Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr (Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb), Al-Tafsīr al-Kashshāf, Ma‘ālim al-Tanzīl, Tafsīr al-Madārik, Tafsīr al-Khāṣīn, Sabq al-Ghāyāb, Bulghat al-Ḥayarān, Al-Bahr al-Muḥīr, Tafsīr al-Bayḍāwī, Tafsīr-e-Uthmānī (Fawā‘id-e-Uthmānī - Urdu), Ḥāshiyat al-Jamāl al-Ṣālīmī, Ḥāshiyat al-Ṣāwī, Ḥāshiyat al-Kāmālī, Mawāhib al-Ḥāṣibī, Tafsīr-e-Nasrī (Urdu), Al-Tafsīr al-Mazharī and Ahkām al-Qur‘ān li ‘l-Jaṣṣās. He would sometimes quote from the famous tafsīr of Imāms Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Mahālī, Tafsīr al-Jalālīn, verbatim from memory. He would then ask any student who had a copy of Tafsīr al-Jalālīn to check whether what he had cited was correct. The student would refer to the book and confirm that it was indeed correct. He would often say to the ‘ulamā, “What I am teaching you now is all from memory. I do not have the time or the health nowadays to study the books of tafsīr as I used to. Inshā Allāh, if you were to refer to the books of tafsīr, you will find very little discrepancy in what I am saying to you. During my youth days, I would spend entire days and nights studying all the major books of tafsīr.”13 Similar was the case with his lectures on the major books of ḥadīth, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī being his speciality during the latter part of his life. Transcripts of his invaluable lectures in Urdu on the major books of ḥadīth have seen repeated publications during his lifetime and serve as treasure-troves for students of ḥadīth. His academic exegesis of the Holy Qur‘ān, taken from the annual Dawra-e-tafsīr, which used to be delivered in Urdu, is currently being prepared for publication. His exegesis of the Holy Qur‘ān to laymen, which used to be delivered in Punjabī at his masjid in Gakhar, are currently undergoing

12 Audio recording of the annual Dawra-e-tafsīr.
13 Audio recordings of the annual Dawra-e-tafsīr.
publication, entitled *Dhakhīrat al-Jinān*. When completed, it is anticipated to be in some twenty-five to thirty-five volumes.

**Absolute trust in the Akābir**

Despite his oceanic knowledge of all the Islamic sciences, he always adhered to, and fully relied upon, the opinions of the great ‘ulamā of Deoband and their predecessors – the Akābir. He always gave preference to the opinions of the Akābir over his own. He often said, “I have studied and engaged in research for sixty five years. There is hardly a matter or mas’ūlah that has escaped my research and study, but I have always given preference to the opinions of the Akābir over my own knowledge and opinion.” He once said, “I have never issued a fatwā based on my own opinion. In whatever I have ever stated or written, I have always followed the research and opinions of the Akābir.” Once, advising his students, he said, “Never leave the way of the Akābir. I have studied for sixteen years and taught for fifty two years, but never have I desired to leave the way of the Akābir. Whenever questions have arisen regarding any matter, I have referred to the works of the Akābir. By the grace of Allāh, I have spent more than half a century in teaching tafsīr, hadīth, fiqh and other sciences. Not once have I given preference to my own research and findings; I have always given preference to the opinions of the Akābir. Dear students, do not attempt your own ijtihād in matters; rely upon the opinions of the Akābir. Do not leave their way.”

**Immaculate self-discipline of an incomparable master**

Imām Mawlānā Ṣafdar’s respect toward knowledge, the books of knowledge and the imparting of knowledge was absolutely profound. During the annual Dawra-e-tafsīr, the session would begin at precisely eight o’clock each morning and end at twelve noon. During these four hours, he would lecture on approximately a juz’ (one thirtieth) of the Holy Qur’ān without interruption.

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14 At the time of typing this (March 2010), I am informed by Imām Ṣafdar’s grandson, Mawlānā ‘Ammār Khān Nāṣir, that so far work on nine volumes has been completed, covering the tafsīr of sūrah al-Fātiḥah to al-Tawbah.


He would not even change his posture during this time, let alone get up and leave the room. As for the students, mesmerised by the eloquent, in-depth, thoroughly referenced lecture of Imām Ṣafdar, they would not notice how these four hours flew by.  

‘Allāmah Muftī Muḥammad Taqī Usmānī continues:

‘Works of [Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā Muḥammad Sarfarāz Khān Ṣafdar sahib] continued to arrive regularly. The deep insight and thorough research of the author were manifest in each one of them. Whichever subject he wrote on, Ḥaḍrat presented to the reader satisfying and thorough research, which left no stone unturned. These works were mainly on contentious issues that have for long been the cause of serious tensions between the Deobandi and Barelwi 19 ‘ulamā, or between the Deobandi and Ahl-e-Ḥadīth 20 ‘ulamā. The entire society had been engulfed in these tensions, and many a scholar had adopted an unpleasant and hostile style in these debates and refutations. The works of Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā generally remained free of such unpleasantness and hostility and his style was highly academic. May Allāh reward him well.

Although I was familiar with Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā through his works and had much love and reverence for him, it was not until 1968 CE, when I had visited Gujranwāla for the very first time, that I had the honour of actually meeting him. The Institute of Islāmic Research (Idārah-e-Taḥqīqāt-e-Islāmī) in Rāwalpindī had organised an international conference, which my revered father was also to attend. I went with him. After the conference, foreign guests were taken to Lahore by road. I was included in the entourage as an interpreter for some of the notables. This entourage stopped on the way at Gujranwāla. In the honour of these guests, a conference was held by Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā in Madrasah Nuṣrāt al-ʿUlūm. It was on this occasion that I first had the honour of seeing him. I found him to be completely different to the image that I had sketched in my mind from reading his works. He was extremely

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18 Ibid.
19 Referred to as the ‘Barelwis’ and very misleadingly ‘Sunnis’ in India and Pakistan, and the variants found in Bangladesh as ‘Rezvis’ and ‘Fultolis’, these are Muslims who follow mainly the Ḥanafi school of sacred law but engage in acts of deviancy and heresy on certain matters and hold such beliefs, primarily on the issue of how a Muslim should love and venerate the blessed Messenger of Allāh (may the infinite peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him).
20 Usually referred to as the ‘Salafis’ here in the West, these are Muslims who do not follow, or usually deem unlawful, the exclusive following of any of the established schools of sacred law, namely, the Ḥanafi, Māliki, Shāfi’i and Ḥanbali schools of the Ahl al-Sunnah wa ‘l-Jamā’ah.
simple, humble and spoke little. Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā presented certificates of gratitude to all the honourable guests. I was a twenty five year old student at the time\textsuperscript{21}, but due to my revered father (may Allāh sanctify his soul) he treated me with tremendous affection.

Thereafter, by the grace of Allāh, I was able to satisfy myself by meeting Ḥaḍrat and expressing my love and reverence on many occasions. I even had the opportunity to visit him at his home. Ḥaḍrat visited Dār al-ʿUlūm [Karachi] and granted its teachers ijāzah in ḥadīth\textsuperscript{22}. When Ḥaḍrat’s health deteriorated, Mawlānā Muftī Muḥammad Jamīl Khān Shāhīd sahib brought him to Karachi for treatment and earned the good fortune of serving him. On this occasion too, I visited him and he showered his affection upon me.

With regard to his children too, Allāh, Most Majestic, had blessed him to an enviable degree. His sons are worthy inheritors of his knowledge, particularly Mawlānā Zāhid al-Rāshidi (may Allāh protect him) who, beside knowledge and virtue, has been gifted with an immense fervour to serve Islām, possessing deep and meaningful thought, a serious and perceptive approach to matters. He is well-read on Western thoughts and ideologies. His fervent analysis on this is a guiding torch for the younger generations.

By his temperament, Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā Muḥammad Sarfarāz Khān Ṣafdar sahib (may Allāh sanctify his soul) was a man of study, research and teaching, but

\textsuperscript{21} Needless to point out, ‘Allāmah Muftī Muḥammad Taqī Usmānī is referring to himself as a “student” only out of humility and practice of true Islāmic adab, for, he is a recognised master in the Islāmic sciences who had issued his first written fatwā at the tender age of sixteen (see footnote 5).

\textsuperscript{22} One such visit was on 24 Šafar 1423 AH (8 May 2002 CE) when Imām Mawlānā Muḥammad Sarfarāz Khān Ṣafdar paid what was to us an unannounced visit to the Dār al-ʿUlūm. We were students in the seventh year of the Dars-e-Niẓāmī course, studying the Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ and other books. All classes in the Dār al-ʿUlūm were suspended and all students and staff congregated in the old masjid. The Shaykh was requested to deliver a short lecture on Ṣahīḥ al-Bukhārī as way of blessing for the final year students of the Dawra-e-ḥadīth class. The Shaykh was very frail and ill at the time. He was seated at the front of the masjid and to the amazement of all present, instead of one of the students of the Dawra-e-ḥadīth class reading the text of Ṣahīḥ al-Bukhārī to the Shaykh (as is the norm on such occasions), the grand shaykh of the Dār al-ʿUlūm, ‘Allāmah Muftī Muḥammad Taqī Usmānī, humbled himself in front of the Shaykh and asked if he could read the text! To this the Shaykh smiled and said “Jazākallāh”. ‘Allāmah Muftī Muḥammad Taqī Usmānī read a portion of the text which was then explained by the Shaykh. This was an excellent illustration of the extraordinary adab and humility of the noble ‘ulamā of Islām. The Shaykh then granted ijāzah in ḥadīth to all the teachers and students of the Dawra-e-ḥadīth class. One of our teachers who taught us Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ repeatedly asked that the Shaykh also grant us, the students of the Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ, ijāzah in ḥadīth, but he refused, saying that this would be against his principle.
whenever the need arose for the [Islamic] nation to engage in physical struggle, he sacrificed this academic temperament and was at the forefront. Thus, during the *Khatm-e-Nubuwat* campaign of 1953 CE, he took a very active role, bearing the hardship of imprisonment. Even in prison, his *da’wah* and *tabligh* activities continued unhampered.*

### Unparalleled works

Author of tens of highly academic works, Imām Ṣafdar is considered one of the most prolific research scholars of the last century. A striking feature of all his works is the originality and in-depth analysis that is absent in the works of many a scholar today. Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Haq Khan Bashīr lists forty-six such works of Imām Ṣafdar with brief synopses. They include:

*Al-Kalām al-Ḥāwī fi Taḥqīq ‘Ibārat al-Ṭahāwī* (first impression: 1364 AH/1944 CE): This is Imām Ṣafdar’s very first work. Some eminent *ʿulamā* had misunderstood certain texts in Imām Abū Ja’far al-Ṭahāwī’s famous *Sharḥ Ma’ānī al-Āthār* to imply that the acceptance of zakāh by those belonging to the sādāt (sayyids) and Banū Hāshim is permissible. Such a ruling would be in opposition to the opinion held by the *ʿulamā* of the Ahl al-Sunnah wa ‘l-Jamā’ah. In this work, Imām Ṣafdar establishes with many evidences that such an implication was never the intention of Imām al-Ṭahāwī, and to infer such an opinion from his work is incorrect. In fact, Imām al-Ṭahāwī held exactly the same view as that of the rest of the Ahl al-Sunnah wa ‘l-Jamā’ah – that of impermissibility. This

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23 Meaning the finality of prophethood of the last Messenger of Allāh, our most noble master Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdillāh of the Quraysh of Makkah (d. 11 AH/632 CE – may the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him). Whoever believes in any prophet to come after our master Muḥammad (may the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) is, by consensus of the entire Muslim *Ummah*, a non-Muslim. The campaign being referred to by ‘Allāmah Muftī Muḥammad Taqī Usmani here is the nationwide campaign by the Muslims of Pakistan, pioneered by some of the greatest *ʿulamā* ever born in south Asia, to successfully lobby the then government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to officially declare the followers of Mirza Ghulām Ahmad Qādiyānī (d. 1908 CE), varyingly known as the ‘Qadiyanis’, ‘Ahmadis’, ‘Mirza’s’ and ‘Ahmadiyyah Muslim Community/Jamā’at’ (depending on which part of the world they are operating in). After much sacrifice by the Muslims of Pakistan and their illustrious *ʿulamā*, followers of the Qādiyānī religion were eventually declared a non-Muslim minority in Pakistan. Other major Muslim countries of the world followed suit, including Saudi Arabia, where they remain banned from entering the sacred cities of Makkah and Madīnah, just like all other non-Muslims.


work received the praise and comments of some of the Akābir ʿulamā of Deoband.

**Ḍawʿ al-Sirāj fi Tahqīq al-Miʿrāj** (first impression: 1368 AH/1948 CE): In this 48-page treatise, citing the Holy Qurʾān, aḥādīth and sayings of the Salaf, Imām Ṣafdar establishes that the Beloved Messenger of Allāh (may the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) had physically ascended the heavens during the Miʿrāj – and not just a spiritual journey, as is claimed by some.

**Ṭabrīd al-Nawāzīr fi Tahqīq al-Ḥādir wa ʿl-Nāzīr** (also known as Ānkhon ki Thandak – first impression: 1368 AH/1949 CE): Omnipresence is an attribute of only Allāh, Most Magnificent, and none share in this attribute. This is a fundamental belief of the Ahl al-Sunnah wa ʿl-Jamāʿah. However, certain heretic groups believe that the Noble Prophets and awliyāʾ of Allāh enjoy a share of this Divine attribute. In its most recent edition, comprising 200 pages, Imām Ṣafdar proves with irrefutable evidences from the Holy Qurʾān and aḥādīth that such a belief is fundamentally contrary to Islām.

**Dil ka Surūr** (first impression: 1370 AH/1951 CE): In this work, citing evidences from the Holy Qurʾān, aḥādīth, the creed of the noble Companions and the imams of this Ummah, Imām Ṣafdar proves that only Allāh has absolute sovereignty and control over all things. It is only He who has the right to legislate (the Sharīʿah). No creation shares in this Divine attribute nor is the same conferred upon any creation by Allāh, Most Magnificent.

**Masʿala-e-Qurbānī** (first impression: 1374 AH/1954 CE): This work was written in response to the heretic rejecters of ḥadīth (the self-labelled ‘Ahl al-Qurʾān’) who maintain that the sacrificing of animals during the tenth, eleventh and twelfth day of the month of Dhu ʿl-Ḥijjah is unislāmic and a wastage. Using irrefutable evidences, Imām Ṣafdar also rebuts the claim by the so-called ‘Ahl al-Ḥadīth’ that the days of this sacrifice extend to the thirteenth day of the month of Dhu ʿl-Ḥijjah.

**Aḥsan al-Kalām fi Tark al-Qirāʿat Khalf al-Imām** (first impression: 1375 AH/1955 CE): The issue of whether one who prays behind an imām ought to recite Sūrat al-Fātiḥa has always been one based on sound ʾijtihād, with both sides (those schools of sacred law that maintain the recitation of Sūrat al-Fātiḥa by even the one who prays behind an imām is a requirement for the validity of his prayer and those that oppose this view) producing valid evidences. However, due to
its *ijtihādi* nature the issue has never been treated as a divisive contention. Indeed this is the case with all the legal differences that exist within, and between, the four established schools of sacred law. Sadly, some quarters of the Indian ‘Ahl al-Ḥadīth’ (or ‘Salafis’) launched a campaign, publishing and distributing literature condemning all those Muslims who do not recite *Sūrat al-Fātiha* when praying behind an imām and claiming that the prayers of such Muslims were invalid. This implied that the prayers of all those great imāms of the Holy Qurʾān and Sunnah, who have passed in the history of Islām, and who were of the opinion that the one who prays behind an imām must not (or may not) recite *Sūrat al-Fātiha* were null. Tens of books were written by the leading Ḥanafī *ʻulamā* of the Indian subcontinent in response to this. Imām Ṣafdar wrote this unparalleled two-volume rebuttal of the false ‘Ahl al-Ḥadīth’ propagandists. In the first volume he establishes the firm evidences of the Ḥanafī school of sacred law and in the second volume he rebuts the deception of the propagandists one by one.

**Ṣirf Ėk Islām - ba Jawāb-e-Dō Islām** (first impression: 1375 AH/1955 CE): Dr. Ghulām Jilānī Barq had joined the heretic movement of the rejecters of Ḥadīth and had written two books entitled *Dō Islām* and *Dō Qurʾān*. The former book was received by Imām Ṣafdar during his incarceration in Multan Central Jail for his involvement in the *Khatm-e-Nubuwwat* campaign. He read the book and wrote this rebuttal in prison, which was published upon his release. After reading this book Dr. Ghulām Jilānī Barq realised the fallacy of his views and repented. He later wrote a book exposing the heresy of those who reject the authority of Ḥadīth.

**Al-Minhāj al-Wādīḥ (Rāh-e-Sunnat** - first impression: 1377 AH/1957 CE): After *shirk* (associating partners with Allāh) the greatest sin in Islām is *bidʿah* (innovation in matters of the Dīn in contravention of the Holy Qurʾān, Sunnah, *ijmāʿ* of the Imāms of *ijtihād* and *qiyyās* based on the Holy Qurʾān and Sunnah – see ‘Allāmah Sayyid Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī’s *Tāj al-‘Arūs*, 20:309). Considered by many *ʻulamā* as one the best books ever written on the topic, this work parallels Imām Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibi’s monumental *al-Ītīsām*. In the 311 pages of this work Imām Ṣafdar has explained the concept of *bidʿah* in light of the Holy Qurʾān and Ḥadīth in an excellent and highly comprehensive style. After establishing the principles of the Holy Qurʾān and Sunnah in this regard, he has critically analysed some prevalent practices of *bidʿah* in the Indian subcontinent. In his highly powerful style Imām Ṣafdar mentions the arguments of some of the leading promoters and preachers of *bidʿah* in the
Indian subcontinent, namely Muftī Aḥmad Yār Khān and his followers of the Barelwī sect, before exposing their misguidance and opposition to the principles of the Holy Qurʾān and Sunnah.

*Izālat al-Rayb ‘an ‘Aqidat ‘Ilm al-Ghayb* (first impression: 1379 AH/1959 CE): Just as omnipresence is an attribute of only Allāh, omniscience and possession of knowledge of the unseen is an attribute of only Allāh, Most Magnificent. Comprising 536 pages this work is another unparalleled masterpiece of Imām Ṣafdar in which he has refuted the evidence s of those who are astray and seek to lead others astray on this issue, particularly, in relation to the knowledge that was possessed by the Noble Messenger of Allāh (may the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him).

*Maqām-e-Abī Ḥanīfah* (first impression: 1381 AH/1962 CE): The imām of an estimated two thirds of the Muslim Ummah, Imām Abū Ḥanīfah has been the target of envy, malice, hatred, false propaganda and shameless character assassinations throughout the centuries. However, the so-called ‘Ahl al-Ḥadīth’ (or ‘Salafīs’) of this age seem to have surpassed all limits in this regard. In fully orchestrated and concerted ways they have spread their venom against al-Imām al-ʿAẓam (the greatest imām) Abū Ḥanīfah to all parts of the world. Using irrefutable historic evidences, Imām Ṣafdar has established the sublime status of Imām Abū Ḥanīfah in the sciences of Ḥadīth and Fiqh. He has rebutted the malicious allegations of the enemies of Imām Abū Ḥanīfah one by one. In his foreword to the book, the great muḥaddith of India, ‘Allāmah Ḥabīb al-Rahmān Aʿzamī, has described it as a monumental work. Imām Muftī Muhammad Shafī’, in his foreword to the book, states that he had been so disturbed by the false propaganda and malice against Imām Abū Ḥanīfah that he had been preparing material to author such a book himself. When Imām Ṣafdar’s work, *Maqām-e-Abī Ḥanīfah*, arrived and he read it, his wish to present such a work to the Muslim Ummah was fulfilled. He states, “Without any exaggeration, I can say that had I attempted myself, I would not have been able to produce such a comprehensive work. This book is absolutely sufficient in this topic.” Imām ‘Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Yūsuf Binnorī, in his foreword, after praising

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26 Imām Mawlānā Sayyid Muhammad Yūsuf Binnorī (1326-1397 AH/1906-1977 CE), a descendant of the Blessed Prophet of Allāh (may the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him), was born in the village of Mahabatabad near Peshāwar. An authority in Ḥadīth, Imām Binnorī studied at the Dār al-ʿUlūm at Deoband and graduated from Madrasah Taʿlīm al-Dīn at Dabhel (India), where he studied Ḥadīth under the phenomenal Imām ‘Allāmah Sayyid Anwar Shāh Kashmīrī, becoming one of his most famous students.
It was through his work and the work of a few other leading scholars that Imām Kashmīrī and Shaykh al-Islām Mawlānā Shabbīr Ahmad ‘Uthmānī, the author of Fath al-Mulhim bi Sharḥ Ṣahīḥ al-Imām Muslim, were able to declare the Qūdah under which the Quraşānīs and the Quraşānīs were obliged to declare the Qūdah when the news of the death of the Prophet reached them.

Pakistan on 3 Dhu ‘l-Qa‘dah 1397 AH.

On his return to India, Imām Binnorī remained in the service of Imām Kashmīrī. He then lived for a few years (1930–1934 CE) in his hometown of Peshāwar until requested to teach hadīth at Dabhel. He remained Shaykh al-Hadīth at Dabhel until the creation of Pakistan. He then went to the Dār al-‘Ulūm at Tando Allāh Yār and then came to Karāchi where he founded the prestigious Madrasah ‘Arabīyyah Islāmiyyah at what was later named Binnorī Town.

During his first Hajj, he offered bay‘ah to Mawlānā Shafi‘ al-Dīn Nağţnī Makkī (the Khalīfah of Ḥājī Imāduddūllāh Muhājīr Makki). After Hajj, Imām Binnorī traveled to Cairo to supervise the publication of Imām Kashmīrī’s commentary on Imām al-Bukhārī’s Sahīḥ, Fayḍ al-Bārī, and Imām al-Zaylā‘ī’s Naṣb al-Rā‘yāh. During his stay there, Imām Binnorī contributed articles about the Dār al-‘Ulūm at Deoband and its elders to Egyptian journals. It was during his stay there that Imām Binnorī developed close contacts with leading Ulūmā in Egypt, including Imām Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawthārī.

On his return to India, Imām Binnorī visited Imām Ḥakīm al-Ummah Mawlānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thānẕwī, who became very impressed by him and later included him among his mujāz-e-ṣuḥbah.

‘Allāmah Muftī Muḥammad Taqī Usmanī writes:

“Mawlānā Binnorī’s (may Allāh have mercy upon him) personage was so heart soothing, enlightening, and full of beauty and solemnity that mentioning all his particulars in a short article is difficult. His figure was the bodily memory of his Shaykh, ‘Allāmah Sayyid Anwar Shāh Kashmīrī. The science of hadith was his speciality in which it is difficult to find his comparison. Like his Shaykh, he was a treasure of information in every knowledge and science.”

His most popular work is the splendid six-volume Arabic commentary on the ‘ibādāt portion of the Jāmi‘ of Imām Abu ‘Īsā al-Tirmidhī entitled Ma‘ārif al-Sunan. Allāh Most High took great work from the Mawlānā in refuting false (bāṭil) sects, and he was fully committed to the Khutam al-Nubuwwah movement. It was through his work and the work of a few other leading Ulūmā that the Pakistani government was obliged to declare the Qāda’ānīs a non-Muslim minority.

‘Allāmah Muftī Muḥammad Taqī Usmanī writes that Imām Binnorī would never remain silent from commenting on the views of those who, in interpreting the Holy Qur‘ān and hadith, adopted an understanding that was different from that of the majority of the Umma. “The Mawlānā would remain particularly worried that the maslak (school of thought or way) of the Ulūmā of Deoband did not become contaminated by erroneous views and that in matters of politics the Ulūmā of Deoband’s solidarity and cooperation with any individual is not taken to mean they are [necessarily] in agreement with [all] the views of that individual.”

This pillar of sacred knowledge died of a heart attack while attending an Islāmic Sharī‘ah conference in Pakistan on 3 Dhu ‘l-Qa‘dah 1397 AH.
the Mawlānā (Imām Ṣafdar) for a long time now, but this book gave me the opportunity to understand [and appreciate] him.” Indeed, this is one of the many unparalleled works of Imām Ṣafdar.

‘Umdat al-Athāth fī Ḥukm al-Ṭalaqāt al-Thalāth (first impression: 1387 AH/1968 CE): In this work Imām Ṣafdar has established through conclusive evidences from the Holy Qur’ān, aḥādīth and verdicts of the majority of the great imāms of this Ummah that three ṭalāqs pronounced by a husband in one go (immediate triple ṭalāq) or without the proper interruption between each of the three does indeed effect three ṭalāqs, resulting in the absolute severance of the bond of marriage (nikāḥ). Imām Ṣafdar lists all the erroneous arguments of the so-called ‘Ahl al-Ḥadīth’ (or ‘Salafīs’) who, in opposition to the entire Muslim Ummah maintain that such a ṭalāq will only count as a single ṭalāq, and highlights the grave error of this.

Taskīn al-Ṣudūr fī Tahqīq Aḥwāl al-Mawtā fī ʿl-Barzakh wa ʿl-Qubūr (first impression: 1388 AH/1968 CE): In 1958 CE Mawlānā Sayyid ‘Ināyetullāh Shāh Bukharī launched his well-known campaign in which he sought to reject the belief of the Ahl al-Sunnah wa ‘l-Jamā’ah on the life of the Noble Prophets of Allāh (may the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon them) in their graves. Despite many reconciliatory attempts by the ‘ulamā, he refused to accept the fact that all the Noble Prophets of Allāh are alive in their graves. In a meeting of the Council of the Jam‘iyyat ‘Ulāmā al-Islām in 1382 AH (1962 CE) Imām Ṣafdar was tasked with preparing a comprehensive book outlining the creed of the Ahl al-Sunnah wa ‘l-Jamā’ah and the noble ‘ulamā of Deoband in this regard. Over a period of five years he prepared this work comprising 439 pages. Through conclusive evidences from the Holy Qur’ān, aḥādīth and verdicts of the great imāms of this Ummah he has established that the beloved Prophet of Allāh (may the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) is alive in his grave and replies to salutations (ṣalāt wa salām) made near his blessed grave. This is the belief of the vast majority of the ‘ulamā of the Ahl al-Sunnah wa ‘l-Jamā’ah and this is the belief of the noble ʿulamā of Deoband. In his foreword to the book, ‘Allāmah Qārī Muhammad Ṭayyīb, the legendary rector of the Dār al-ʿUlūm in Deoband, states, “The reality is that Taskīn al-Ṣudūr is taskīn al-ṣudūr (tranquillity for bosoms) on this topic. It has brought tranquillity to my heart and soul.” Similar words of praise, specifically for this work and generally for Imām Ṣafdar, have been used by the great ‘ulamā of the time in the other eighteen forewords contained in the book.
Yanābī' - Tarjama-e-Risālah-e-Tarāwīḥ (first impression: 1388 AH/1969 CE): Since the time of Sayyiduna 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (may Allāh be pleased with him), the tarāwīḥ prayer that is prayed during the holy month of Ramaḍān has always been prayed as twenty raka‘āt. This has been the unanimous fatwā of all four schools in sacred law – the Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfi‘ī and Ḥanbalī schools. In their campaign of deception and confusion the so-called ‘Ahl al-Ḥadīthh’ (or ‘Salafīs’) had rejected this consensus of the great imāms of this Ummah. Using a few ambiguous evidences, they had disregarded the overwhelming evidences from hadīth that prove twenty raka‘āt is the established sunnah in the tarāwīḥ prayer, and argued for just eight raka‘āt. Primarily an Urdu translation of Mawlānā Ghulām Rasūl’s Persian work with a 16-page introduction by Imām Ṣafdar, this book proves that twenty raka‘āt is the sunnah in the tarāwīḥ prayer and not eight.

Al-Kalām al-Mufīd fi Ithbāt al-Taqlīd (first impression: 1406 AH/1985 CE): Taqlīd or following an imām of ijtihād (that is, a fully qualified imām who has all the relevant knowledge and skills with which to derive commandments from the Holy Qur‘ān and ahādīth of the Noble Messenger of Allāh) has always been the norm for the Muslim Ummah. Since the early centuries of Islām, with the exception of perhaps a tiny minority, most of whom are unworthy of mention, Muslims have strictly followed the interpretation of any one of the four established schools of sacred law (the Sharī‘ah) in matters of their Din. These established and highly sophisticated legal schools are known as madhāhib (or madhhabs). They are the Ḥanafī, Shāfi‘ī, Mālikī and Ḥanbalī madhāhib, named after their respective founders – Imām Abū Ḥanīfah Nu‘mān ibn Thābit al-Kūfī (80-150 AH/699-767 CE), Imām Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi‘ī al-Qurashī (150-204 AH/767-819 CE), Imām Mālik ibn Anas al-Aṣbaḥī al-Madani (93-179 AH/712-795 CE), Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal al-Shaybānī al-Baghdaḍī (164-241 AH/781-855 CE) (may Allāh be pleased with all of them).

Although admittedly there have always been (usually lone) callers to the discarding of adherence to madhāhib, in recent times due to a number of reasons the movement has gained popularity in various communities of Muslims, especially amongst the more energetic and inexperienced younger generations. In reminiscence of the deceptive call of “In al-ḥukm illā lillāh” (Sovereignty is for only Allāh) by the Khawārij rebels who had rejected the authority of Amīr al-Mu‘minin Sayyiduna ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (may Allāh be pleased with him), the callers to non-madhhabism use appealing slogans like “Let us follow the Messenger of Allāh and not Abū Ḥanīfah”. In response, one can only
say what Sayyiduna ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib said when he came to hear of the slogan of the heretic Khawārijī – “Kalimatu ḥaqq, urīda bihā ‘l-bāṭil” (A word of truth, but the intention is foul). Indeed, in order to expose this foul and poisonous motive of the callers to non-madhhabism, highly regarded scholars like the contemporary Shaykh Dr. Saʿīd Ramaḍān al-Būṭi of Damascus have authored books with challenging titles such as his Al-Salafiyyah: Marḥalat Zamaniyyah, Lā Madhhāb Islāmiyy (Salafism: A Phase in History, not a school in Islāmic Law), Al-Lā Madhhabīyyah: Akhṭarū Biḍ’ah Tuhaddidu al-Sharīʿah al-Islāmiyyah (Non-Madhhabism: The Most Dangerous Bidʿah that Threatens the Islāmic Sharīʿah) and Al-Lā Madhhabīyyah: Qinṭarat al-Lā Dīniyyah (Non-Madhhabism: The Bridge to Atheism).

A ludicrous irony of the call to non-madhhabism is that all the great masters of ḥadīth to whom the entire Muslim Ummah is indebted, and without whose great works the library of ḥadīth literature would be left empty, and whom the pioneers of the non-madhhabism movement also hold as the greatest authorities in ḥadīth, were all strict adherents and promoters of their respective madhāhib. This is a fact not hidden to even the least knowledgeable student of ḥadīth and fiqh. Upon closer inspection and scrutiny it becomes evident that the callers to non-madhhabism are in reality practising taqlīd themselves. The only difference between their taqlīd and that of other Muslims is that they are following the verdicts of contemporary, or often medieval, ʿulamāʾ while the Ḥanafī, Shāfiʿī, Mālikī and Ḥanbalī Muslims follow the verdicts of Imām Abū Ḥanīfah, Imām al-Shāfiʿī, Imām Mālik, Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and their closest students who helped develop their respective madhāhib (may Allāh be pleased with all of them).

Comprising 341 pages, this work of Imām Ṣafdar is probably the most comprehensive critique and exposé of the non-madhhabism movement in any language. In his powerful style, using clear evidences from the Holy Qurʾān, aḥādīth, verdicts of the great imāms of this Ummah, works of the legendary masters in the sciences of Islām and history, Imām Ṣafdar unmasks the deception of the seemingly sincere call to the Sunnah by the non-madhhabists.

Iḥsān al-Bārī li Fahm al-Bukhārī (first impression: 1408 AH/1988 CE): This is an edited transcript of some of the extremely rich lectures of Imām Ṣafdar on the Ṣaḥīḥ of Imām al-Bukhārī.
Khazāʾin al-Sunan (first impression: 1412 AH/1992 CE): This is an edited transcript of some of the extremely rich lectures of Imām Ṣafdar on the Sunan of Imām al-Tirmidhī.

Tawḍīḥ al-Marām fi Nuzūl al-Maṣīḥ ‘Alayhi ʾl-Salām (first impression: 1417 AH/1996 CE): In this final work of his, Imām Ṣafdar has established through irrefutable and authentic aḥādīth that the noble Prophet of Allāh, Sayyiduna Īsā ibn Maryam (may the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon them both), was lifted alive to the heavens and will return to the world before the end of time. He will kill Dajjāl (the ‘Anti-Christ’) and will rule in accordance to the Sharīʿah of Sayyiduna Muḥammad (may the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) for forty years. This is the unanimously agreed belief of the Ahl al-Sunnah wa ‘l-Jamāʿah. In this work Imām Ṣafdar has also rebutted and exposed the severe misguidance of those heretic sects that reject the life and descent of Sayyiduna Īsā ibn Maryam (may the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon them both).


Mawlānā ʿAbd al-Ḥaq Khān Bashīr’s Urdu treatise may be consulted for a full list of the works of Imām Ṣafdar. In view of brevity, just the above synopses have been mentioned here in the hope that this will sufficiently serve as a sample.
Upholder of the Dīn and perfect spiritual mentor

Throughout his life, Imām Ṣafdar defended the Muslim Ummah and Islām on all fronts. In his autobiography, he gives an account of how when his beloved teacher Shaykh al-Islām Mawlānā Sayyid Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madani was arrested for a speech he gave in Murādābād, the students of the Dār al-ʿUlūm at Deoband had organised several mass protest rallies, which had to be controlled by the army and police. In one of the last such rallies, the students appointed him as their protest leader.27 During the struggle for freedom from British colonialism, he was an active member of the Jamʿiyyat al-ʿUlāmā of India. After the formation of Pakistan, he vigorously campaigned for the implementation of the Sharīʿah within its realm. For his role in the campaign to officially declare the followers of Mirzā Ghulām Aḥmad Qādiyānī’s faith a non-Muslim minority in Pakistan, he was incarcerated for many months twice - in 1953 and then again in 1973 CE.28 On an individual level, he mentored thousands of people who took the formal bayʿah of ṭasawwuf at his blessed hands and guided them through the various stages of spiritual purification. He was a khilīfah of the great Shaykh Mawlānā Ḥusayn ʿĀli.29


29 Born in the Miānwāli district of the Punjab province in 1283 AH (1866 CE), Shaykh Mawlānā Ḥusayn ʿĀli ibn Ḥāfīz Miān Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdillāh al-Ḥānafī al-Naqshbandī studied the major books of hadīth under the great Imām Shaykh al-Mašāyikh Mawlānā Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī in 1302 AH (1884 CE). He then studied tafsīr under Imām Mawlānā Maẓhar Nānūtūwī and philosophy and logic under Shaykh Mawlānā Aḥmad Ḥasan Kānpūrī. He took the bayʿah of ṭasawwuf at the hands of Shaykh Khwāja Muḥammad ʿUthmān ibn ʿAbdillāh al-Naqshbandī. After the demise of the Shaykh, he turned to Shaykh Khwāja Sirāj al-Dīn for continuation of his spiritual training in the Naqshbandī order, who granted him khilāfah. According to Shaykh Mawlānā ʿAbd al-Ḥāyy ibn Fakhir al-Dīn al-Ḥasanī, he was granted khilāfah by the former shaykh. Beside his mastery of ṭasawwuf, Shaykh Mawlānā Ḥusayn ʿĀli was also a master in the science of tafsīr al-Qurʾān. In his lectures, Imām Ṣafdar would often quote from his shaykh. He died during the month of Rajab in 1363 AH (1944 CE). (ʿAllāmā ʿAbd al-Ḥāyy ibn Fakhir al-Dīn al-Ḥasanī, al-Ḥālm bi man fi tārīkh al-Hind min al-Aʿlām (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥāzm, 1999) 8:1217, entry: 119; Ḥāfīz Muḥammad Akbar Shāh Bukhārī, Akābīr Ulamā-e-Deoband (Lahore: Idārah-e-Islāmiyyāt, 1999), pp. 148; Mawlānā Ḥāfīz Muḥammad Yūsūf, Ḥadrat Shaykh al-Ḥadīth ke asātīdīhā kā ʾimālā kā ʾārūf, in the Monthly al-Sharīʿah, special edition (Gujrānwāla, 2009).
Exemplar of sincerity and humbleness

Despite being the ocean of knowledge and tower of piety that he was, Imām Mawlānā Muḥammad Sarfarāz Khān Ṣafdar was an exemplar of sincerity and humbleness. I can recall how, on a late afternoon during his visit to Karachi for medical treatment during Ṣafar 1423 AH (May 2002 CE), while we were seated in his blessed company in the front garden of Mawlānā Muftī Muḥammad Jamīl Khān Shahīd’s residence, Imām Ṣafdar had given all Madrasah students present in this exclusive majlis the opportunity to ask questions. One of my class fellows, a very promising student, asked a question about an often misunderstood and misinterpreted subtle practice of the ṣūfīs, to which Imām Ṣafdar replied, “The people of Allāh (ahl Allāh) know the answer to this.” It was as if he was saying that this is a question the answer to which only those close to Allāh know. I am not one of them.

In recognition of his sublime status in the Muslim Ummah, he was given the grand title of ‘Imām Ahl al-Sunnah’ (the Imām of the people of Sunnah) by the ʿulamā of his time. He would often comment on this, saying, “I am the imām of a masjid in Gakhar Mandī (Gujrānwāla), which is called ‘Masjid-e-Ahl-e-Sunnat wa ‘l-Jamāʿat’, that is why I am called ‘Imām Ahl al-Sunnah’.”

He had spent his entire life serving the Dīn of Allāh and the creation of Allāh, but when toward the end of his almost century-long life, he himself was desperately in need of service, he would dislike and refrain from accepting any form of service from others. Mawlānā Saʻīd Aḥmad Jalālpūrī recalls how he and others would witness Imām Ṣafdar, when he was so ill that he could barely rise without assistance, getting up during the night to go to the lavatory. He would not wake anyone from their sleep and would attempt to make his way to the lavatory with the support of the walls. He would dislike any stranger pressing or massaging his feet. He would not accept gifts except from those whom he knew well and regarding whose income he knew there was no doubt of it being acquired through unlawful means.

Professor Dr. ‘Alī Aṣghar Chishti recalls how once, when Imām Ṣafdar was visiting their offices in Karachi, he and others tried to assist him in climbing

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the stairs. Imām Ṣafdar declined, saying, “Please do not be inconvenienced because of me. I can climb the stairs by myself.” When he had sat down in the upstairs office, he said, “I am not as old as you people think I am.” They said, “Ḥaḍrat, When Muftime sahib comes here, he has difficulty in climbing these stairs.” He replied, “Muftime Maḥmūd is old, I am not.”

Like many others in high office, during his time in office as President of Pakistan, Rafiq Tārrar was also an admirer of Imām Ṣafdar. He once sought permission to come and visit Imām Ṣafdar, but the latter asked him not to, explaining that if the President visited him, people would know that the President was an admirer of Imām Ṣafdar. They would then come to him with all forms of matters, good and bad, seeking his recommendation and good word to the President.

‘From the cradle to the grave’ - Unquenchable thirst for knowledge

Writing whilst the funeral arrangements were being made, Shaykh al-Ḥadīth Mawlānā Zāhid al-Rāshidī writes about the inspirational academic aspect of his illustrious father’s personality:

‘My revered father Mawlānā Muḥammad Sarfarāz Khān Ṣafdar had been bedridden for the last eight or nine years. Despite this, by the grace of Allāh, his memory did not fail him and his academic interests remained the same till the end. His eyesight had deteriorated severely and he had trouble in recognising people, but if a person was introduced, he would recall everything regarding that person. He would then ask that person even the most minor things. I would generally have the opportunity to visit him for a brief while on Friday evenings. Whenever he felt better, he would ask for a book to be read to him. I would read any book of ḥadīth to him. I would always fear reading to him, as the slightest of errors would not pass unnoticed or unchecked. A few months prior to his demise he asked, “Would you happen to have a reliable [Arabic] dictionary?” I asked, “What will you do with a dictionary in this condition?” He replied, “Sometimes the need for a dictionary arises.” I purchased a dictionary and presented it to him and he was very pleased with it. On another occasion he asked, “Will Al-Lu’lu’ wa Ḭ-Marjān be available in the bookshops?” I replied in the affirmative. I then purchased it for him.

32 ʿAlī Aṣghar Chishti, Chand yādgār mulāqātēn, in the Monthly al-Sharī’ah, special edition (Gujrānwāla, 2009).

33 Ibid.
Last month when I was setting off for my trip to the United Kingdom, I informed him that I intended to perform ʿumrah on the way back. He was pleased at hearing this, prayed for me and said, “I have heard that Musnad Abī Yaʿlā has now been published. If you are able to, could you get me a copy of it?” I searched for it in several bookshops in Makkah Mukarramah and Madīnah Munawwarah, but could not find it. On my way back I said to my host in Jeddah, Qāri Muḥammad Aslam Shehzād, my wife’s brother-in-law, “I do not feel like returning home without the book.” We both then visited the bookshops in Jeddah together. After visiting two or three bookshops, we managed to find it. I was overjoyed by this find, but Qāri sahib was happier than me. He prevented me from paying for it and asked that I present it to my revered father as a gift from him.

I returned home on Thursday and as per my weekly routine I visited my father on Friday. He was feeling very unwell [...]. When I showed him the book, he gestured that I place it where he had asked me to.

Only a few days ago, as per our routine, I and my brothers were by his bedside on Friday. He was feeling somewhat better. He asked me where such and such a verse was in the Holy Qur’ān. I told him where it was. I thought he would be enquiring about an issue related to that verse, but when he asked me a second question regarding it, I realised he was testing me. My younger brother, Qārin ʿAzīz al-Rahmān, who resides in Jeddah, was also there. I pushed him in front of me and hid myself. He then underwent a test. He was asked about several verses and the verses preceding them. We were extremely happy seeing our father so well and in such a good mood.

During my visits, he would usually ask about the state of the nation. In recent days, he had been very concerned about the state of Swāt [in the Afghan-Pak frontier province]. He stayed abreast of newspapers, and he would often ask questions relating to news items. He would read my regular newspaper columns and would comment on some of their contents. I once wrote in one of my columns that the Noble Messenger of Allāh (may the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) is an ‘ideal’ for his Ummah. The next time I visited him, he asked me what the word ‘ideal’ meant. I replied that this was an approximate translation of the Arabic term uswah ḥasanah.
Once, while reading a hadīth to him, I got stuck on a word. I was surprised myself that this had happened when I had in fact previously read and taught the hadīth several times. When this happened, he told me what the word was and also explained the hadīth to me. Many a time, I have struggled to recall the precise wording of a hadīth and could not locate it in the books, but when I asked him he would tell me in which chapter of which book to look. I would then find it in that precise location. This is not from the days when he was well and healthy, but rather during the days when he was so ill that he could not turn on his side in bed himself. In such a condition, his memory remained so sharp that we would be left amazed by it.\footnote{Mawlānā Zāhid al-Rāshidī, \textit{Mere wālid, mere murabbī – Ḥadrat Mawlānā Muḥammad Sarfarāz Khān Ṣafdar}, in the \textit{Weekly Wazārat} (Lahore, 5-12 May 2009).}

Despite his immaculate and unparalleled proficiency in all the sciences of Islām, and despite having spent more than half a century teaching and serving Islām and the Muslims, Imām Mawlānā Muḥammad Sarfarāz Khān Ṣafdar would often express his sorrow at not having been able to teach to his heart’s content. Mawlānā Muḥammad Aslam Shaykhūpūrī writes of how when he visited Imām Ṣafdar a year prior to his demise, he asked whether he had any unfulfilled wishes. Imām Ṣafdar replied that there were many such wishes. Upon Mawlānā Shaykhūpūrī’s request to mention one such wish, Imām Ṣafdar stated that he had not had the opportunity to teach the primary level [small] books of the \textit{Dars-e-Nizāmī} course\footnote{Mawlānā Muhammad Aslam Shaykhūpūrī, \textit{Chand muntashir yādēn}, in the \textit{Monthly al-Sharīʿah}, special edition (Gujrānwāla, 2009).}. This was the unfulfilled wish and desire of a man who had spent half a century lecturing on the major books of hadīth, including the \textit{Sunan} of Imām Ṭāhir ibn Ṭāhir, the \textit{Jāmiʿ} of Imām Ibriyāhīm ibn Alī al-Bukhārī, and the text and \textit{tafsir} of the Holy Qur‘ān to the ulamā̄ tens of times. He was, without an iota of doubt, an embodiment of the hadīth of the blessed Messenger of Allāh (may the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) narrated by Sayyidunā Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī and reported by Imām Abu ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī, in which the blessed Messenger of Allāh (may the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) said:

\begin{quote}

\textit{لَن يشّيع المؤمن من خير يسمعه حتى يكون متههاء الجنة} (رواه الترمذي 2881 وقال: هذا حديث حسن غريب)
\end{quote}
“A believer will never be content with [any amount of] good\textsuperscript{36} that he hears until he reaches his goal and final destination of Paradise.”\textsuperscript{37}

This unquenchable thirst for knowledge and desire to serve Islām and the Muslims in such a selfless manner is only the lot of the true ‘ulamā of the ākhirah, the men of Allāh, described by the blessed Messenger of Allāh (may the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) as the “heirs of the Prophets”, when he said:

\begin{quote}
إن العلماء ورثة الأنبياء، إن الأنبياء لم يورثوا دينارا ولا درهما، إنما ورثوا العلم، فمن أخذ به فقد أخذ بحَظَّ وافر.
\end{quote}

(جزء من حديث رواه أبو داود 3641 والترمذي واللفظ له 2877 وابن حبان في صحيحه 88 وغيرهم)

“Indeed the ‘ulamā are the heirs of the Prophets, and indeed the Prophets do not leave behind a legacy of dīnārs and dirhams,\textsuperscript{38} but they leave behind a legacy of knowledge. He who acquires it has indeed acquired a complete\textsuperscript{39} portion.”\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{36} ‘Allāmah Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī (d. 1353 AH/1934 CE), in his Tuhfāt al-Ahwādhi bi sharḥ Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī, interprets the word ‘good’ in this ḥadīth as knowledge. Explaining this ḥadīth, Imām Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdillāh al-Iṣbīlī ( Ibn al-ʿArabī al-Mālikī – d. 543 AH/1148 CE) says in his ‘Āridat al-Ahwādhi bi sharḥ Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, no date) 10:157, “It has been reported in wisdom that there are two greedy ones who are never satiated – the seeker of knowledge and the seeker of this [material] world.”


\textsuperscript{38} That is, money or material wealth.

\textsuperscript{39} The actual Arabic word used here by the blessed Messenger of Allāh (may the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) is ‘wāfīr’, from the root wāfr, firāh or wufār. It means abundance and plenty (see Lisān al-ʿArab and al-Muḥjam al-Wṣīṭ). I have chosen to translate the word as ‘complete’, following the interpretation given by Imām ʿAllāmah Khalīl Aḥmad Sahāranpūrī (d. 1346 AH/1927 CE) in his Badhl al-Majhūd fi ḥall Sunan Abī Dāwūd, ‘Allāmah Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī (d. 1353 AH/1934 CE) in his Tuhfāt al-Ahwādhi bi sharḥ Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī, Imām ʿAllāmah ʿAlī ibn Sūltān Muḥammad al-Qārī (d. 1014 AH/1605 CE) in his Mīrāṯat al-Mafāṭīḥ sharḥ Mishkāt al-Masābīḥ and Shaykh al-Hadīth Mawlānā Naṣīr Aḥmad Khān (d. ʿṢafar 1431 AH/Feb 2010 CE) of the Dār al-ʿUlūm at Deoband (India) in his dARS of ʿṢāḥīḥ al-Bukhārī.

After describing the condition of Imām Ṣafdar’s thirst for knowledge, Mawlānā Muḥammad Aslam Shaykhūpūrī relates an incident that occurred only a few weeks prior to his demise. He says, ‘Shaykh Muftī Muḥammad Raftī Usmānī⁴¹ had come to visit Imām Ṣafdar. After greeting him, the first thing Imām Ṣafdar asked him was, “The shaykh al-ḥadīth of Jāmi’ah Ashrafiyyah (Lahore), Ṣūfī Muḥammad Sarwar sahib has related such and such a ḥadīth from your revered father (Imām ‘Allāmah Muftī Muḥammad Shaftī). I am looking for its reference. Could you please identify its source?”⁴²

The condition of Imām Ṣafdar during his final days, described by his son Shaykh Ḥadīth Mawlānā Zāhid al-Rāshidī and Mawlānā Muḥammad Aslam Shaykhūpūrī, is reminiscent of the condition of the pious ‘ulamā of the early centuries such as Imām Abū Yūsuf Ya’qūb al-Anṣārī, the senior student of Imām Abū Ḥanīfah al-Nu’mān al-Kūfī, and that of Imām Ibn Mālik, the grammarian (nahwī) on their death beds.

A student of Imām Abū Yūsuf, al-Qādī Ibrāhīm ibn al-Jarrāḥ al-Kūfī al-Miṣrī, says:

‘[Imām] Abū Yūsuf was ill. I went to visit him and found him unconscious. When he regained consciousness, he asked me, “O Ibrāhīm, What do you say regarding a certain issue in fiqh?” I said, “Even in such a condition?!” He replied, “That is not a problem at all. Let us discuss a matter of knowledge, perhaps someone will be relieved by it.” He then asked, “O Ibrāhīm, What is better when pelting the pillars [of jamarāt] in Ḥajj – to pelt on foot or mounted on a beast?” I replied, “Mounted on a beast.” He said, “Incorrect.” I then said, “On foot.” He again replied, “Incorrect.” I said, “Please tell me. May Allāh be pleased with you.” He said, “The pillar, after the pelting of which, one should stop and supplicate (say a duʿā) – it is best to pelt it on foot. As for the pillar, after the pelting of which, one should not supplicate – it is best to pelt it mounted on a beast.” I then took leave from him. I had not even reached the door of his house when I heard the sound of people crying over him. He had died. May Allāh have mercy upon him.’⁴³

⁴¹ President of the Jāmi’ah Dār al-ʿUlūm in Karachi and grand muftī of Pakistan (see footnote 8).
It is said regarding Imām Ibn Mālik, the grammarian (nahwī), author of the Alfiyyah in the science of nahw, that he committed to memory several verses of poetry on the day he died. Some have specified that they were eight verses, communicated to him by his son.44

**Father of servants of the Book of Allāh**

Allāh had blessed Imām Mawlānā Muḥammad Sarfarāz Khān Ṣafdar with many children, all of whom are huffāz45 of the Holy Qur’ān. Most of his children are also gifted ‘ulamā, serving the Din in various capacities.46 One of his daughters committed the Holy Qur’ān to memory at the age of forty.47 Imām Ṣafdar was not himself a ḥāfiz of the Holy Qur’ān, but his recollection of passages and verses, particularly those pertaining to any aspect of the Sharī‘ah, was incredible. Shaykh al-Ḥadīth Mawlānā Zāhid al-Rāshidī recalls how once, during the early days of his career, his father, Imām Ṣafdar, had to painfully explain to his congregation on the first night of Ramadān that due to not being able to find a ḥāfiz of the Holy Qur’ān he would have to lead the tarāwīḥ prayer with the shorter sūrats of the Holy Qur’ān. He says that later, there came a time during the life of his father when he and his brothers once counted the number of huffāz amongst the offspring of Imām Mawlānā Ṣafdar. They came to a total of more than forty.48

As for his students, it is estimated that Imām Mawlānā Ṣafdar had taught approximately 30,000 students either directly or indirectly throughout his academic life.49

**Journey to the Most Gracious**

On the night of 9th Jumādā ʿl-Ūlā 1430 AH, corresponding to 5th May 2009, at approximately 1 o’clock in the morning50 the great imām, the remnant of the

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45 Plural of ḥāfiz.
46 Dr. Ḥāfiz Mahmūd Akhtar, ʿEk ʿahd sāz shakhṣīyyat, in the *Monthly al-Sharī‘ah*, special edition (Gujrānwāla, 2009).
Salaf, Imām Mawlānā Muḥammad Sarfarāz Khān Ṣafdar departed from this world. It was not merely the departure of a man, but the departure of a true exemplar of piety, fear of Allāh, sincerity, steadfastness, contentment, simplicity, humbleness, affection, compassion, sympathy, empathy, service to the Dīn of Allāh and service to the creation of Allāh. It was the departure of a man the likes of whom the world seldom witnesses - one who will, perhaps, never be replaced. In the words of Shaykh Muftī Muḥammad Raftī Usmānī, “The passing of our revered teacher, the imām of the Ahl al-Sunnah, Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā Muḥammad Sarfarāz Khān Ṣafdar (may Allāh have mercy upon him), is indeed a great tragedy for the world of Islāmic academia. The departure of this sign of the great ‘ulamā of Deoband (Akābir) is indeed a terrible loss.”\(^{51}\)

The bier carrying Imām Mawlānā Muḥammad Sarfarāz Khān Ṣafdar was brought to the D.C. High School of Gakhar (Gujrānwāla) in the morning. The area was covered by a sea of people. According to some reports, no less than a hundred thousand people participated in his funeral prayer.\(^{52}\)

May Allāh, Most Gracious, have mercy on his soul, reward him with the best of rewards and grant him entrance to the most magnificent garden of Paradise, for, indeed, he lived a life of abstinence, shunning all worldly comforts and pleasures, sacrificing his almost century-long life for Islām and the Muslims.

Among the Believers are men who have been true to their covenant with Allāh; of them some have completed their vow (by sacrificing their lives in the way of Allāh), and some (still) wait, but they have never changed (their determination) in the least. (al-Qur’ān 33:23) 

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\(^{52}\) Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Qayyūm Ḥaqqānī, Wa mā kāna Qaysun hulkuhū, in the Monthly al-Sharī‘ah, special edition (Gujrānwāla, 2009).