

**Yousuf Dadoo & Auwais Rafudeen**

Yousuf Dadoo is Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of South Africa.

Email: [dadooy@unisa.ac.za](mailto:dadooy@unisa.ac.za)

Auwais Rafudeen is a Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of South Africa.

Email: [rafudma@unisa.ac.za](mailto:rafudma@unisa.ac.za)

## Building the Islamic moral self: Sufi Abed's *Bustān Fāṭimah ma'a Bustān 'Ā'ishah*

### **Building the Islamic moral self: Sufi Abed's *Bustān Fāṭimah ma'a Bustān 'Ā'ishah***

Sufi Abed Mian Usmani (1898–1945) of Ladysmith, KwaZulu-Natal, authored some ten religious books in Urdu and Gujarati, which appeared to have a considerable impact on the local community there, as well as more broadly for South African Muslims of Indian descent, and even for some Muslims of India. However, apart from two academic contributions, his work and legacy remain largely unexplored. This essay aims to build upon those contributions by analysing another of his hitherto unexamined Urdu works, namely, *Bustān Fāṭimah* and *Bustān 'Ā'ishah* (The garden of Fāṭimah with the garden of 'Ā'ishah). It argues that these two works, when seen as a totality, seek to build the moral self. **Keywords:** *Bustān Fāṭimah*; *Bustān 'Ā'ishah*; moral self; remembering God; South Africa; Sufi Abed; Urdu literature.

#### **Introduction**

The Urdu language has played a prominent part in the *zeitgeist* of South African Muslims of Indian origin since their arrival in this country from 1859 onward. Muslims came from a variety of regions in India, each with their local languages and so Urdu acted as a *lingua franca* for this community as well as a symbol of religious identity (Aziz 22–9). In particular, with the arrival in Durban during 1895 of Hazrat Haji Shah Ghulam Muhammad Sufi Siddiqui (d. 1911) who was popularly known as Soofie Saheb—a prominent Muslim educationist and spiritual guide—the language was institutionalized as the medium of Islamic instruction for the Indian Muslim community, particularly it appears for Muslim residents in KwaZulu-Natal but also more generally for Indian Muslims in other parts of South Africa (Aziz 26–7; Green 192; Vahed 72). This institutionalization was reinforced by the flow of religious functionaries from India who were brought to teach the local Muslim community the tenets of their faith and they did so by employing Urdu. Such processes also meant that Urdu became a language of aspiration for many South African Indian Muslims (Green 176). The result has been that this community has, despite its relatively small number, produced a noteworthy output of Urdu literature, particularly, it seems, in the field of poetry (Mahomed 97–124). But the history of the development of Urdu in South Africa still needs to be fully mapped. The main reason for this is simply that all

the source materials for compiling such a history are still to be collected and collated. It is striking, for example, that three significant works for tracing the development of Urdu in South Africa—that of Aziz, Mahomed and Green—make no reference to the considerable output of Sufi Abed Mian Usmani. This is not an indictment, or indeed even gentle criticism, of their important interventions but simply reflects the very nascent nature of this field.

Abed Mian Usmani (also “Uthmānī”) (1898–1945), who certainly was a spiritual guide to his admirers and devoted followers even though no evidence exists that indicated that he was a guide (that is, a *murshid*) in the formal sense (Karim 82), was a prolific South African author of texts on Islam’s spiritual aspects and works that also included various *tafāsīr* (commentaries) of various short Quranic chapters. Sufi Abed’s prolific nature can additionally be seen by the fact, noted by Karim (22), that two of these texts are more than a thousand pages each. A scion of the Usmani family of Dabhel, India, Sufi Abed—as he was popularly known—found his way to Ladysmith, KwaZulu-Natal, where he was not only a productive writer but an Imam (that is, someone leading the daily ritual prayers) to its Muslim community, a spiritual guide in the Naqshbandi tradition—one of the significant Sufi orders in the house of Islam, and an apothecary whose medicines achieved a fair degree of local renown (Mayet 38–49; Karim 82–3). Upon Sufi Abed’s passing at a fairly young age, a mausoleum (*darīḥah*) was constructed in his honour in Ladysmith’s Muslim graveyard—a testimony to his esteem as a spiritual master. Mayet (42–4) and Karim (22–3) as well as the blurb at the back of *Bustān Fāṭimah* ma’a *Bustān ‘Ā’ishah* record that Sufi Abed was known to have authored the following books (in Urdu unless stated otherwise):

- *Bustān ul ‘Ārifīn* (The garden of the gnostics) (1922);
- *Rahmatul lil ‘Ālamīn* (The mercy unto the worlds) (1924);
- *Bustān Fāṭimah ma’a Bustān ‘Ā’ishah* (The garden of Fāṭimah with the garden of ‘Ā’ishah) (1924–5);
- *Gulzāre Yūsuf* (The blossoms of Yūsuf) (Gujarati) (1925);
- *Sharāb Tahūr* (A pure drink) (Gujarati) (1925);
- *Najāṭ ul Mu’min* (The salvation of the believer) (1926);
- *Firdawse Fāṭimah* (The paradise of Fāṭimah) (1929);
- *Anwār ul ‘Ārifīn* (The lights of the gnostics) (1936);
- *Mi’rāj ul Mu’minīn* (The spiritual ascent of the believers) (1940); and
- *Bustāne Āsiyah* (The garden of Āsiyah).

Sufi Abed’s books were widely read both in South Africa and India; the *Mirāj ul Mu’minīn* in particular, achieved considerable acclaim. For example, the Muslim Board Association of Ahmedabad in India selected this particular book as one of three, presumably published in that year, that it considered would most benefit the *Ummah* (that is, the Muslim community) (Mayet 41; Karim ii) and during the 1960s

the Cape Town-based monthly, *Muslim News*, serialized it; this work has, in fact, also been translated into English, together with a commentary, by Goolam Karim, a Bethal born medical doctor (Banoobhai). A full appreciation of the life and teachings of Sufi Abed is still very much in an exploratory phase. Apart from academic treatment by Zuleikha Mayet, who is a renowned South African Muslim activist known especially for her path-breaking widely used *Indian Delights* (Govinden), and Goolam Karim, there is no other study on his life or work.

We hope that this analysis of Sufi Abed's *Bustān Fāṭimah ma'a Bustān 'Ā'ishah* (hereafter BFBA) acts as a further building block towards such appreciation. The BFBA is in actual fact two books that were published as one volume. As the name indicates, the books are *Bustān Fāṭimah* (The garden of Fāṭimah) and *Bustān 'Ā'ishah* (The garden of 'Ā'ishah); as we shall argue, there is, however, a clear inter-relationship between the books. We can glean the following from the inscriptions in the book: the author's name is given as Mawlānā Sufi Sayyid Muhammad 'Ābid Mian Uthmānī Ṣāhib Ḥanafī Naqshbandī Mujaddidī Dhabelī. The book was published by Matba'e Mustafa of Bombay during 1924/1925 (or 1343 after *hijra*, that is, after the Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina in 610). This work was published at the request of a benefactor, one Ahmed Qasim Moola (of Ladysmith). A pious hope is expressed that any spiritual rewards ensuing from the publication be gifted to the soul of the Prophet and to the souls of all Muslims (who passed away). It was also hoped that the book provides benefit in this world as well as the next. The back cover advertises some books written by Sufi Abed that were distributed by the Ladysmith based M. M. Amod's Kutubkhana.

There is naturally a wealth of material that can be excavated from these brief references, particularly with regard to the development of Islam in Ladysmith and, more generally, in KwaZulu-Natal. For our purposes here, though, we wish to note the following: that Sufi Abed Mian was a Muslim scholar as the title "Mawlānā" indicates. According to Mayet, he received his *ijāzah* (teaching certificate) in the Islamic sciences from an institute in Delhi (Mayet 40). His scholarly status can be gleaned from the endorsements he received for this particular work. Among the noted scholars who endorsed BFBA was the President of Jam 'īyyat al- 'Ulamā-e-Hind, Mufti Muhammad Kifayatullah (1875–1952), the Vice-Principal of Deoband, Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān, and the celebrated Mawlānā Anwar Shah Kashmīrī (1875–1933) (Mayet 41). The family surname "Uthmānī" or "Usmani" is connected to their eponymous ancestor, the third Caliph of Islam, Uthmān (Mayet 38). Sufi Abed's title also indicates that he was located in the Naqshbandī Mujaddidī tradition; a term that refers to the Indian Sufi master, Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī (1564–1624), who was seen as a "Renewer" (Mujaddid) of Islam (Ansari). This is a tradition Sufi Abed possibly received from his father Mawlānā Ḥabībullah, also a Sufi of repute, whom he also describes in his writings as Naqshbandī Mujaddidī (BFBA 2; Mayet 40). The explicit mention of his

attachment to the Ḥanafī madhhab, one of the Muslim jurisprudential schools, is significant in that, as will be seen, his spiritual writings veer towards a more profound understanding of religious obligations rather than constituting spirituality or Sufism as a separate discipline. And like many Indian immigrants of the period, he maintains a strong connection to his land of origin. We also glean from the preface to the book that *Bustān Fāṭimah* was so-named in honour of the wife of Sufi Abed's "esteemed friend", Ahmed Qasim Moola, namely, "Fāṭimah daughter of 'Abdul Wahīd". And *Bustān Ā'ishah* was named thus as a tribute to his own deceased sister "Āi'shah daughter of Ḥabībullāh" (BFBA 3).

The preface also provides a summary of the topics that will be discussed in the two books: the knowledge that is required by a Muslim with regard to faith (*imān*) and Prophethood (*risālah*), the mysteries of ritual prayer (*ṣalāh*), the wisdom underlying its postures, the treatment for dispelling base promptings (during prayer), and a comprehensive commentary of certain chapters of the Qur'an (ones that are applicable especially to ritual prayer). The afore-mentioned topics are covered in *Bustān Fāṭimah*. The *Bustān Ā'ishah* deals with the following topics: the benefits of remembering (*dhikr*) Allah (that is, the Arabic word for "God") that will be employed throughout this essay, the virtues of its gatherings, verbal, and bodily *dhikr* as well as the *dhikr* of the heart, the virtues of certain formulae such as *Lā ilā ha illāh* (There is no god but Allah), the love and veneration due to the Prophet as well as the virtues and forms of sending salutations (*ṣalawāt* [Arabic]/*durūd* [Urdu]) upon him. The author also mentions that he has gathered his information from "reliable sources". Its intention, the preface reiterates, is that any spiritual reward (*thawāb*) for the work be conveyed upon the soul of the Prophet as well as upon the souls of all Muslims (who passed away). But it expresses the hope that it will benefit the people "traversing this worldly path" (3–4).

The latter, though, should not be seen as incidental. In the spiritual topography of Islam, the ability to do anything is regarded as pure Divine favour and so it is crucial and logical to maintain links with the spiritual world associated with such favour (the soul of the Prophet and Muslim souls in general). Sufi Abed himself is quite explicit about this (9). But it is quite clear, as will hopefully be gleaned from our analysis, that a primary goal of the book is that of teaching and nurturing: to instil in the reader a greater awareness of the realities underlying the form of Islamic beliefs and some of its rituals, and in that way cultivate a *living* (as opposed to formal) *practice* of the religion. One, in other words, has to be sincere (*mukhlis*) in one's relationship with Allah; and sincerity (*ikhlas*), according to Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī (3), is traditionally seen as the bedrock of religious morality. The argument is that all good deeds must be predicated on sincerity, namely doing all acts purely for the sake of obtaining proximity to Allah. In other words, a fundamental goal of this particular text is to build the moral self.

## Analysis of Book One: *Bustān Fāṭimah*

### *Faith and Prophethood*

BFBA uses the famous *Hadith Jibrīl* (that is, a particular prophetic statement associated with Angel Gabriel) as the basis for its discussion on the nature of faith. This *ḥadīth* appears in several collections (such as Bukhārī and Muslim that are the two most famous collections of prophetic statements); and it states, among other things, the various components of faith (*imān*), namely, belief in Allah, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers, the Day of Judgment and Destiny. For Sufi Abed, these beliefs are not mere formal ones but are rather acts of cognition that require the application of understanding. Already here, we discern Sufi Abed encouraging his readers to reflect on these articles of faith as existential realities and so open themselves up to a living relationship with their belief system. And so, turning to the first article, “faith in Allah” (like other articles) must be based on certainty (*ilm al-yaqīn*). But such certainty is not attained via the senses, nor is this information available *a priori*. Rather, for the author, such knowledge is teleological, to be acquired after studying creation (BFBA 10). Thus the author strives to build the capacity of reflection within his reader.

The knowledge (as distinct from formal acceptance) of Allah’s (God’s) eternity and oneness is derived from such reflection. So: had He not been eternal, the argument runs, He would have taken recourse to another creative agency and that one to another *ad infinitum*, leading to circularity and absurdity. Allah, in other words, is by definition eternal. Here Sufi Abed repeats a classical argument found in Muslim theological texts (Sanūsī). The argument for oneness runs: having more than one creator will cause so much friction and rivalry among the entities that nothing will ever be created. This argument is derived from the Quranic verse which says: “If there were, in the heavens and the earth, other gods besides Allah, there would have been confusion in both!” (Qur’an 21:22 [Yusuf Ali translation]) (BFBA 10). But the author also urges the reader to reflect on four further divine qualities: existence, power, intention and knowledge. The author states that everything in creation conclusively points to the Divine Being’s eternity, unity and the four qualities mentioned. The reason is that human intellect only acknowledges the presence of attributes based on their effects on things. And so, one can surmise, we see the effects of the Divine Being’s power, intention, and knowledge by the very existence of things, as well as, of course, the fact that the Divine Being Himself must then exist. But where this situation does not arise, as is the case with the Divine Being’s attributes of sight, sound or speech, then the existence of this latter may be predicated either on intellect or on reportage from other sources.

Intellectually, it is predicated on the fact that it is impossible for Allah to be dumb, deaf and blind. Therefore Allah must possess perfect sight, hearing, and speech. The fact that Allah indeed possesses these attributes is, of course, confirmed by the *Sharī’ah* (that is, Islamic Law) on the basis of (divine) reportage; the one being the *Qur’ān*,

and the other being *Ḥadīth*. Thus it is mandatory to be certain about their being. In this case, Sufi Abed tells us, the latter approach (that of reports) is superior to the earlier one because divine actions by themselves cannot prove the existence of the attributes of sight, speech and hearing (BFBA 11). Reportage, rather than intellectual proof, is also required to affirm belief in the rest of the articles of faith. Thus, with regard to angels, the author informs us that there is a scholarly consensus (*ijmā'*) regarding belief in them in addition to the fact that divine scripture makes mention of them. They possess subtle, luminous bodies and execute numerous intricate tasks. He further describes them as being capable of changing form, being non-gendered, constantly occupied in divine worship and so forth (11–2).

Reportage is also the basis of obligatory belief in Allah's Books, His Prophets, the Day of Judgment and Destiny (12–20). Sufi Abed launches into a fairly detailed and generally well-known description of phenomena associated with these articles. So with regard to belief in the Day of Judgment, for example, he mentions that this incorporates belief in the life of the grave as the first phase of the afterlife. He continues, stating among other things, that the inhabitants of the grave experience interrogation by two horrifying angels; and that the successful candidates will then find their graves as one of the gardens of Paradise while the failures will find their graves converted into pits of Hell. Then comes the actual Day of Judgment, which encompasses the divine reckoning and the weighing of deeds on the scales and that the guilty ones who owe outstanding duties to Allah (*Ḥuqūq Allah*) will be distinguished from those who owe outstanding duties to the creation (*Ḥuqūq al-'ibād*) (14–9). Sufi Abed's comments on the final article of faith, belief in destiny (*qadā* and *qadar*), is worthy of a separate reflection. He explains the two key terms that encompass its meaning as follows: *Qadā* refers to the summarized knowledge of the fate of all creation that is recorded in the Divine, sacred tablet (*lauḥ mahfūz*) while *qadar* refers to the detailed unfolding of this knowledge after they are created. He adds that some have explained that *qadā* refers to the primordial Divine will or Divine purpose preceding the actual manifestation of beings in the universe while *qadar* refers to the link of all entities to their specific times of appearance in creation (19).

Sufi Abed further elaborates on this article of faith by drawing on the section on "Thanksgiving" that appears in Imam Al-Ghazālī's (d. 1111)—one of the most famous scholars who played a key role in bridging understandings between jurists and mystics in Islam—the *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (Revival of Religious Sciences in Islam). According to Sufi Abed, Al-Ghazālī has explained that we, as believers in Allah, have been ordered to worship Allah; otherwise, we will be punished. At the same time, both obedience and disobedience are qualities given to us by Allah. Sufi Abed goes on and says that he (Al-Ghazālī) then states that this Divine threat is intended to strengthen our belief in Allah. Once this is achieved, the individual fears adverse outcomes and refrains from evil desires, and he/she thus draws closer to Allah. Allah

is the effective cause of everything. Anyone who has been ordained to be happy will find the means to make him/her happy. This causal chain will ultimately lead him/her towards virtue. On the other hand, the fate of the sinner will be the opposite (19–20). Al-Ghazālī's view (as well as, of course, Sufi Abed's) preserves the notion of choice since the human being himself or herself does not know their destiny. It is only Allah who does. And so a human being, given this freedom that derives from what may be termed "a welcome ignorance," becomes accountable for not adopting the measures that lead him/her closer to God, even though he/she may have been "written" as one of the unfortunate ones.

This section on faith in the BFBA, with regard to Allah, calls for rational reflection on the attributes, especially the attributes of unity, eternity, power, existence, knowledge and will. We are to intuit these attributes and the certainty of Allah by tracing His effects in creation. Sufi Abed is by no means a pure rationalist, though, and, as we saw, he prefers the affirmation of the attributes of sight, hearing, and speech through reportage, even though the logical extension is possible even in these cases. In all of this, he is simply enunciating arguments well known in the theological traditions of Islam which call for knowing Allah through proof while also recognizing the limits of rational discourse about the attributes. In this same tradition, the verities of angels, Holy Books, Prophets, the Day of Judgment and Destiny are primarily established through reportage rather than through reason. It is for this reason that Sufi Abed appears content in communicating these in a standardized way without detailed argument for their truths. Rather, they need to be accepted. As such, his purpose in narrating these verities in this way primarily performs an instructive function: having awakened the reader to the need to exert the intellect in contemplating Allah's reality, the goal is now to awaken the emotions of awe and fear connected with these realities, as well as simply communicating the basic need to know them. Yet, as we see with his discussion on destiny, he again brings in an intellectual dimension, answering underlying questions about its enigmatic character.

The author, then, is involved in various ways of goading, urging, and awakening the conscience of the reader. The reflections on the mysteries of destiny perhaps lead the author to a more philosophical consideration of Divine Unity or *Tawhīd* in his next section. The crux of this analysis is encapsulated by the verse: "And your Lord is one. There is none worthy of worship besides Him, the Most Kind and the Most Merciful" (Qur'ān 2:163). According to the author, this refutes all notions about multiplicity of divinity. Obedience is due to Him and only Him. For this reason, as adduced by Sufi Abed, the Qur'ān likens the deeds of anyone who has disbelieved in Him to sand being blown about violently and who is unable to benefit from his/her earnings in any way (Qur'ān 14:18). For Sufi Abed, the status of Divine Unity vis-à-vis other forms of obedience can be compared to the position of the heart in a human body. Due to its importance it has been repeatedly emphasised across time.

While all souls confessed to acknowledging the oneness of God prior to their physical manifestation (Qur'ān 7:172), Prophet Adam's act of forgetfulness (Qur'ān 7:22) became a characteristic common to human beings to the extent that many of them have forgotten the primordial pledge. In order to remain focused on the oneness of Allah, they have been endowed with faculties of comprehension and reflection. This constitutes the innate disposition on which He has fashioned everyone (Qur'ān 30:30). Besides the innate faculties given to people, Allah also sent numerous prophets to remind them about that pledge (Qur'ān 5:7). And so, given all of this, if people still reject Allah they justifiably qualify for damnation while, if they respond positively, they are entitled to eternal bliss (BFBA 21–31). Ultimately, then, the matter turns on remembrance of Allah. Sufi Abed further mines the work of Al-Ghazālī to consolidate his argument, but this time especially in relation to *Tawhīd*.

He says that, according to Al-Ghazālī, belief in Divine Unity occurs at four levels: firstly, mere utterance of the formula "There is no deity besides Allah". Here the heart remains either ignorant of or disbelieves in Allah. This is the stage of hypocrites. Secondly, the heart affirms what the tongue utters. This is the stage of all ordinary believers. Thirdly, the person witnesses the oneness of Allah by means of the light of truth. This is the stage of those who have been drawn close to Allah. He observes multiplicity in creation but ascribes it to a single Divine source. He only perceives a single active agent and accepts the creed of belief in simple terms. Fourthly, the person observes singularity in creation. He interprets all things in terms of their unity, not their differentiation. This is the stage of the Truthful (*ṣiddīqīn*). The Sufis define this stage as being lost in the oneness of Allah (*fanā fi l-tawhīd*) where the person is oblivious to even him/herself (34–6). The argument in this section drives home the effect of *Tawhīd*, or the attestation of God's unity. This effect is to cultivate the remembrance of God as far as one is able and to the extent that the "rememberer" may even lose him/herself in this remembrance. Remembrance is the goal of worship and worship is the purpose of creation. Remembrance of God then is at the very core of existence.

*Tawhīd*, if properly attested, tapers into remembrance. Here Sufi Abed, having awakened the moral self in the previous section, now sets its goal. Because the ultimate goal is to lose one's self in such remembrance, such a self can never become self-satisfied with its acts of worship. But the human being is prone to neglect Allah and the devil's ultimate objective is to promote idolatry (which is really a form of forgetfulness of Allah). For this purpose, the devil incites excessive veneration for pious figures through their representation in images and sculptures. Over time, the pseudo-divine status accorded to such figures is symbolically shown in people's adoration for those idols. But objects of worship can assume other forms, too, such as celestial bodies or natural forces. It is thus forgotten that all people are Allah's slaves and property; for they have been created solely to serve Him (Qur'an 51:56). And they need to be reminded of this fundamental and basic duty by an eminent



person, namely, a Prophet (BFBA 36–41). The Prophets and Messengers are archetypes of virtue, and for that reason they have been invested with conveying the Divine message (43–50). And it is necessary to obey them in order to attain paradise as Allah Himself has commanded such obedience to them. Thus the hallmark of a Muslim (that is, someone who submits and believes) is that he/she makes his/her desires subservient to the message that the Prophet Muhammad brought (65–8).

Further, by following the interpretation of the ‘ulamā (scholarly community) one is actually obeying the Prophet. They are, according to Sufi Abed, simply disseminating his teachings which are incumbent upon every Muslim. Nonetheless, it has to be understood that the Prophet taught some of his lessons in summary form (*mujmal*). It becomes the scholars’ task to expound upon them (*mufaṣṣal*). In other cases, his teachings were subtle (*khafī*) which scholars have to make conspicuous (*jalī*). There are yet other cases where analogy (*qiyās*) has to be used where there is no concrete ruling to be found in the Qur’an or Sunnah (that is, the prophetic practice). Many of the Prophet’s companions were jurists in their own right. In the generation that followed them, Abū Ḥanīfa, Shāfi‘ī, Mālik and Ibn Ḥanbal were the leading jurists. Sufi Abed regards following any one of them as laudable (81). After having awakened the moral self and having set its goal, the Prophet, as the archetype of virtue, now acts as the model for that self. Sufi Abed is quite explicit that, while one should not neglect that model, one should not exceed it as well. And quoting the great Shaykh ibn ‘Arabi (d. 1240), who was associated with the concept *Waḥdat ul Wujūd* (that is, unity of existence) that focused on Allah’s immanence in the world, Sufi Abed says that the saint that claims to have reached a state where the *Sharī‘ah* is no longer applicable—that is, a saint that operates outside this model—such a “saint” needs to be opposed, and, indeed, Sufi Abed calls such a one a “fake” (78). But the Prophet, he continues, is also a multi-faceted model whose various aspects require interpretation by authoritative scholarly tradition. And so it is through following patterns within this tradition that one accesses the Prophetic model. Following the Prophet and the scholarly tradition which was borne in the wake of his teachings is then the gauge by which the actions of the self are measured and without which it may fall into self-delusion. And so, by extension, spiritual sincerity is in accordance with one’s following of this Prophetic model.

### *The Ritual Prayer (Ṣalāh)*

Sufi Abed introduces this section by noting that the importance of *ṣalāh* is outlined in the Qur’an (29:45). This word has five meanings: prayer for oneself, glorifying Allah, burning one’s heart with the intense desire of Allah’s love, melting away of a person’s sins, and rectification of evil habits. Already we see here his desire to go beyond its formal aspects. He also notes that the likelihood of sincere repentance by a person who performs *ṣalāh* always exists implying that one has to continually

perform it even if its “taste” is not yet there. He also mentions that Sufis have said that the pivot of all carnal desires is the mind while the pivot of all Divine love and faith is the heart. Within the one who performs *ṣalāh* resides conflicting passions, notes Sufi Abed. If his/her prayer is meritorious the Divine passion overcomes carnal desires. Further, *ṣalāh* is an act considered superior to all others in Islamic law.

While all other duties were mandated while the Prophet was on earth, *ṣalāh* was mandated to him on the night of *mi'rāj* (ascension)—a theme was taken up more specifically in Sufi Abed's *Miraj ul Mu'minīn* (Karim 22), when he had travelled beyond the seven heavens. And thus those who firmly believe in Allah, His Prophet, and the Day of Judgement need to firmly grasp the inner and outer meanings of *ṣalāh* (BFBA 82–4). He then enumerates the specific virtues associated with the ritual prayer. These include the call to prayer (where Allah spreads His Hand over the caller's head), the virtues of mandatory *ṣalāh* (a performance that can only lead to profit), the virtues that flow from fulfilling the requirements of prayer (virtues such as humility and punctuality), as well as the virtues of congregational prayer, of prostration and of the mosques. He further wants to clarify a misconception among some people that following the *Sunnah* (in this case with regard to the ritual prayers) is not important. He makes the analogy that while a person who simply performs the bare obligatory may still have life, he/she is like a body without limbs or eyes and so forth (85–104). These matters are generally well-known and widely found in the literature. Sufi Abed's aim again appears to be mainly instruction: he wants to *inform* and so is keen to keep in mind readers who may have very little familiarity in this area. This basic instruction, as we noted with regard to the articles of faith, is also a function of BFBA—one that permeates the book's contents.

But the main function of the section still remains to vivify the heart of his reader with the deeper realities of Islam, and he begins alluding to some of these. So, for example, he comments on the Quranic verse “O those who believe! Do not approach *ṣalāh* while you are intoxicated until you know what you are saying” (4:43) as follows, namely, that there are three views on the meaning of “intoxication” in this verse”: for some it means to be steeped in worldly anguish; for other scholars it refers to the intoxication of worldly love, and a third group have interpreted this verse literally. This author himself prefers the second view (BFBA 93–8). And it is really this type of below surface exploration that is at the heart of the author's discussion on *ṣalāh* as seen in its description of its inner conditions. In this regard, the author proceeds to first discuss issues relating to the presence of the heart, and the humility during prayer. Secondly, he probes inner aspects that perfect *ṣalāh*. Thirdly, he expounds upon their limits, rationale and strategies. Fourthly, he outlines things that are indispensable in every posture (105). With regard to the presence of the heart and humility, for Sufi Abed this is connected to the rationale of prayer as expressed in the following Quranic verse: “and establish *ṣalāh* for My remembrance” (20:14). It

is given in the form of a command. He says that it is obvious that heedlessness is the direct opposite of remembrance. So any person with a wandering mind cannot achieve the objectives of *ṣalāh*. This verse is also stressed by highlighting its opposite: “And do not be one of those who are negligent” (7:205).

In the verse quoted earlier about not performing prayer in a state of intoxication, among the types of people who could also be covered by the prohibition are those immersed in worldly concerns. According to Sufi Abed, the Prophet emphasized that he/she whose *ṣalāh* cannot restrain him/her from committing evil will be distanced from Allah by his/her prayer. Sufi Abed notes that it is obvious that a neglectful person does not abstain from evil talk and improper conduct. He also refers to another statement of the Prophet where it is stated that many are those who stand in prayer for long hours but only acquire difficulty and inconvenience. Similarly, he notes, it is abundantly clear that every supplicant addresses his/her plea to Allah. In that state, if a person is absent-minded then his/her plea is worthless. The same applies to postures of reverence like bowing and prostration. The purely physical effort made to accomplish them cannot in any way be the distinguishing criterion between faith and disbelief (BFBA 105–8).

Here Sufi Abed also takes aim at jurists, who confine their verdicts to external actions, claim that presence of heart is a prerequisite only when uttering the formula “Allah is the Greatest” at the beginning of the prayer. His response to them is twofold. Firstly, they confine their jurisdiction to outward actions. Secondly, their silence on this matter is no indication of any juristic consensus in favour of an alternative view. There are several utterances from noble scholars about this (BFBA 109). But, the crucial question remains: How does one accomplish such presence of heart and humility? It is here that Sufi Abed steps in as a spiritual doctor, providing both a description of the state that the Muslim worshipper should strive to attain, as well as more specific guidelines against factors that induce this forgetfulness. According to Sufi Abed, the inner features that contribute to the accomplishment of *ṣalāh* are: presence of heart, understanding, reverence, awe, hope and bashfulness (110). The presence of heart is based on thoughtfulness. Thoughtfulness, in turn, is based on conviction about the transience of this world in contrast to the permanence of the hereafter. *Salāh* enables us to attain the joy of that life. Presenting our plea before the Supreme Being has thus to be done with full consciousness. Understanding is tied to sustaining this belief and making the mind understand the purport of what is recited and performed. In this way negative inner promptings that are created by love for entities besides Allah is abolished.

Reverence, for its part, is associated with two things: firstly, recognition of Allah’s might and splendour, which is the kernel of faith. Anyone who fails to believe thus will be unable to suppress his evil self. Secondly, it is also based on recognition of the lowly status of one’s self which is constantly rebellious to Divine dictates. Such

an attitude creates humility within the person (111–3). The author elaborates on the next inner feature, awe. When a person acknowledges Divine authority, power and lack of need for everything in creation he is overwhelmed by a feeling of awe. The greater a person's knowledge about Allah's boundless power, the greater will be the feeling of awe within him/her. Hope is combined with a person's recognition of Allah's benevolence, mercy and perfection. As a result, the person will believe in the veracity of His promises and aspire to attain His mercy. This feeling creates hope (BFBA 132). Finally, bashfulness is inculcated by a feeling of inadequacy where a person feels that his acts remain imperfect despite the finest efforts. The person also feels that, notwithstanding his/her inner shortcomings, he/she remains insincere (132).

In short, for Sufi Abed, the Muslim worshipper, if he/she is to induce the state of presence of heart and humility, must make Allah real in his/her life by *reflection* on His Attributes. *Salāh* cannot be the mere formal execution of postures. And, in making Allah "real", the worshipper correspondingly realizes the lowliness of his/her own self. It is attachment to this self, reflected in attachment to the world, that obscures the individual from viewing Reality as it is. Yet there is even a more preliminary stage before this, namely, how does one create conditions for such reflection? Distraction frequently intervenes in *ṣalāh*, and one needs to fight the proclivity of the self towards such distraction. How does one do this? Sufi Abed replies that one first needs to identify the cause of distraction in *salāh*. If it is caused by the eyes, for example, he recommends performing *ṣalāh* in a dark place, and to avoid placing any items in one's vicinity that could distract one. He also recommends, in such a scenario, that one performs *ṣalāh* close to a wall to avoid shifting one's gaze excessively. He also advises refraining from praying at roadsides or in places with designs and patterns. This is why, he says, pious people choose to pray in small, dark rooms where they are only able to gaze at their prostration spots. In this way, their thoughts remain stable and coherent. Such people focus downwards when entering the mosque. They remain oblivious to people on either side of them (136).

But what happens if distraction arises from internal rather than external sources? Sufi Abed acknowledges that it is extremely difficult to treat evil promptings having an internal source because this avenue is multi-pronged. Nonetheless, he says that a useful strategy is to enforce discipline about understanding and concentrating on what is recited in *ṣalāh*. This focus must not waiver. Further, before commencing *ṣalāh*, the devotee should reflect upon the Hereafter, remain awe-struck by being in the Divine presence, and visualize the horrors of the Afterlife. If this plan is ineffective, he/she should contemplate more drastic measures. These take the form of purging oneself entirely of the cause leading to his/her inattentiveness because it is, in fact, an avowed enemy and obstacle in the path of spiritual progress. Here he mentions that the Prophet returned a bed-sheet that one of his companions had given him simply because it distracted him during his *ṣalāh*. At the same time, it should be remembered

that these evil promptings can be either weak or strong. If they are weak they need to be treated mildly, but if they are strong they need to be treated firmly. However at base, any person who is enamoured with this world cannot expect to taste the sweetness of divine supplication. But such a person must not abandon *ṣalāh* simply because he/she fails to find solace in his/her prayers. Rather, he/she should vigorously rectify his/her prayers and ultimately he/she should realize that while he/she makes the effort, only Allah grants perfection to it (136–140). These ruminations on the internal aspects of *ṣalāh* more fully bring out Sufi Abed's role as a spiritual teacher, and his care and solicitude for the inner well-being of his reader.

The reader is gently coaxed and goaded not to take his/her *ṣalāh* for granted, not to formalize the ritual but to build a living relationship with the Creator through a conscious performance. In a sense he wishes to gradually awaken the reader from his/her slumber regarding the ritual prayer, but at the same time provide measures by which he/she may create a true connection in prayer and attain its "sweetness". In so doing, the individual awakens his/her truer, more realized self—a self that is sincere in its dealing with its Creator; that is, the moral self. But here another slant should be noted: while the cultivation of the moral self in relation to *ṣalāh* also calls upon the reader to reflect upon the meaning of the act—very much like the cultivation of the moral self with regard to the articles of faith—the reader is also called upon to practise the ritual in order to master it. And so, even if he/she does not feel that ideal awareness of Allah, he/she should continue in the ritual, as well as cultivate the physical conditions for realizing such awareness, until he/she develop the necessary intensity.

Sufi Abed is, in effect, teaching techniques to discipline the body in order to realize the desired state: that is, one has to master these techniques very much like one needs to master the piano, for example, in order to produce the requisite "music." The moral self needs to be practised. In the rest of *Bustān Fāṭimah*, Sufi Abed then amplifies his discussion on the internal aspects of *ṣalāh* by providing further details on what is meant by the presence of the heart, by discussing the symbolic significance of the various postures in ritual prayer, and by providing commentaries on short Quranic chapters that are typically read in the prayer. His aim in all of this is to vivify the constant remembrance of Allah in the reader. In so doing, he is continually reminding the reader that the ritual prayer is never an end in itself, an accomplishment one may just tick off as something done, but rather it is a means to the goal—an essential, obligatory ingredient to cultivating a life-long relationship with Allah. As indicated earlier, *Bustān Fāṭimah* and *Bustān ʿĀ'ishah* are published as two distinct treatises in one book. Yet, as we will argue, a clear continuity in the nature of the treatises can be gauged.

## Analysis of Book Two: *Bustān ʿĀʾishah*

### *Dhikr* (Allah's remembrance)

If *ṣalāh* results in a transformed self, and if it is recognized that such transformation happens because the goal of the ritual is immersion in the remembrance (*dhikr*) of Allah, then it is perhaps not surprising to find that the *Bustān ʿĀʾishah* begins with an exploration of this topic. The recital of the formula, “There is no god but Allah”—the most famous formula in *dhikr*—has a transformative effect on the individual. According to Sufi Abed, the logic behind this transformation is that by reciting this formula the person destroys all false deities. This leads to the forgiveness of all sins because they are caused by submitting to the base self. Now when the person recites the first part, namely “there is no god”, he/she effectively denies all false gods that include his/her own whims. Consequently, Allah removes the harmful effects of all false deities, beliefs, and actions. Once the person recites the second part, namely “besides Allah”, he/she affirms the oneness and existence of the only Almighty. Consequently, his/her deeds become truly virtuous, truly moral.

According to Sufi Abed, true existence belongs to Allah alone. Everything else lacks true existence and only has shadowy existence. When Allah granted this shadowy status to them, the world came about. And when He removes their shadow, they grow extinct. It is for this reason, says Sufi Abed, the Qurʾān says, “Allah bears testimony that there is no deity (implying any being whose existence is vital and whose death is impossible) except Him. And all angels and learned stand firm on this testimony that there is no deity, except the Almighty, the All-Wise” (Qurʾān 3:18). Any person who recites “*La ilā ha illalāh*”, then, is like one who wages a spiritual campaign against the disbeliever within him/herself (290). But even remembrance is not an end in itself. While it is the goal of *ṣalāh*, *dhikr* itself is the means to the greatest state of all: divine love. The divine love has to be generated but, once fostered, the love itself becomes an impelling force. And so, for Sufi Abed, divine remembrance (*dhikr*) has a beginning and an end. At the beginning, *dhikr* creates love and affinity for Allah. At the end the roles change; that is, that love and affinity impels the person to remember Allah (293–8). But the generation of this love again requires practice. At the first stages, the person has to make a special effort for remembering Allah with his tongue and heart. But when he exerts himself in this way for a few days, he will ultimately begin loving Allah (299).

Sufi Abed puts forward this point in another way as well: following the early strenuous attempts at remembrance to generate divine love, the practitioner then feels impelled to remember Allah abundantly—to the extent that he/she simply cannot do without this practice. And this leads to a rule: if one loves someone, one remembers him/her more regularly. What originally constituted the cause (which assumed the guise of special formal effort to remember Allah for the goal of creating divine love) now becomes the effect and fruit of love. And so while the practice might

be difficult and almost unpalatable in the beginning, Sufi Abed informs us that it is human nature for people to grow accustomed to regular practices and to finally enjoy them (300). Such practice has existential consequences: people commonly know that they will have to part with everything besides Allah at the time of death. Only the remembrance of Allah will accompany them to the next life.

Now if they love remembering Him, their separation from worldly belongings will not be traumatic at that time. They will delight in that phase because worldly priorities tend to hinder us from remembering Allah. If any person departs this world while engrossed only in divine remembrance, he/she is like a martyr because the latter also severs his/her links with all worldly attachments in the battlefield. His/her focus is solely on Allah. He/she who remembers Allah fervently has scant regard for the world and only concentrates on winning Allah's pleasure. He/she will thus enjoy a good death (302). The fruit of *dhikr* then is love—a love that is attained through the *practice* of remembrance. *Dhikr* is another cultivated technique of bodily discipline to induce a particular state. But here the state is the *summum bonum* of all states, namely, love. The moral self, in its fully realised form, operates through love, with this love itself, as we have seen, impelling remembrance. For such a self the practice of religion becomes a practice in love which results in new orientations to other-worldly verities. The realized moral self is characterized by different desires, by different orientations to time and space. In a sort of metamorphosis, it has now realised its true being.

### *The Prophet's veneration*

Thankfulness for that realization naturally goes to God—if we recall, all that is accomplished is purely through Divine favour—but the means to that realisation is through the Prophet—for if it was not for the Prophet one would not have known the Divine. And so it is natural that there is a deep sense of thankfulness to and veneration of the Prophet by those, such as Sufi Abed, who seek to engage Islam's spiritual aspects. And thus it is no surprise that BFBA has a particular section devoted to this veneration. Among the main themes in this section are the Prophet's uniqueness, the veneration that needs to be accorded to him, and the merits of sending salutations upon him. Regarding the Prophet's uniqueness, Sufi Abed clearly wants to separate him from the rest of creation, even from other Prophets. And so while he shares many qualities with the latter he is unique in some of the miracles associated with his personage. For example, he could see as clearly behind his back as he could see ahead of him. He saw clearly both during the day and in the darkness of the night. His saliva sweetened salty water. A drop of his saliva quenched the thirst of a nursing baby for an entire day. There are a number other instances of this sort recorded by Sufi Abed. But he also records the uniqueness of the Prophet's other-worldly status. For example, he will enter the plains of Judgement while riding a steed and surrounded by seventy thousand angels. He will be seated on the right

side of the Divine Throne and be honoured with a praiseworthy status (*maqām maḥmūd*). He will also be given the immense task of interceding for humanity. These are among a number of other special gifts to be given to him at that time.

Sufi Abed notes that the Prophet's uniqueness also resides in what has been given to his community. For example, his *Sharī'ah* is unique in terms of allowing him to use the spoils of war from disbelievers; declaring the entire world a place of prayer for him, permitting him to cleanse himself through dust, enjoining the five daily prayers, ablution; and so forth. But Sufi Abed also notes that the spiritual blessings he has earned—his spiritual uniqueness—are known to Allah alone. This includes topics like his inner lights, lights of divine manifestation upon his heart that continually grow, his spiritual states and stations from which his followers benefit by emulating him, as well as his spiritual knowledge and gnosis (332–6). As to veneration, this can be gauged by the exceptional respect accorded to him shown by his Companions. Sufi Abed records various instances of such veneration on their part. Examples of this are Abū Bakr's, one of the Prophet's companions, stepping back from leading the prayer when the Prophet arrived late at the mosque, and when 'Alī, another companion, refused to delete the title "Allah's Messenger" from the Treaty of Hudaibiyah—a historical event during the prophetic period, and so the Prophet then had to make this amendment himself (348–51).

For Sufi Abed, both these Companions refused to comply with Prophet Muḥammad's orders out of extreme reverence for his status; even though the Qur'ān had ordered all believers as follows: "Whatever the Messenger gives you, take it! And whatever he prohibits you, refrain from it!" (Qur'ān 59:7). Obviously, Sufi Abed notes had the Prophet been displeased with their demeanour he would have reprimanded them. But he did not. This shows the importance of reverence even if it appears to be in seeming conflict with an explicit Qur'ānic injunction (BFBA 348-351). But this conflict is seemingly not so. Sufi Abed quotes another Quranic verse which he sees an explicit order for such veneration to be shown: "Those who believe in him, honour him, assist him and follow the light revealed with him are the successful people" (Qur'an 7:157). Sufi Abed states that this verse proves that without venerating the Prophet it is impossible to attain salvation. People well versed in Arabic rhetoric, he notes, will confirm that the last part of the verse places a restriction on who is eligible to gain success.

Stated differently, it means that salvation is restricted to those who possess the attributes this verse has outlined. It is for this reason, according to Sufi Abed, that the hearts of his immediate associates were filled with such awe and veneration, and that some of them who were previously his ardent foes now became his passionate disciples. The transformation was so remarkable that, despite their intense love for him, they could not fix their gaze on him for any length of time. And none had the audacity to address him informally on any topic (BFBA 363). Regarding the sending



of salutations upon the Prophet, some of the points Sufi Abed makes in this regard are the following: that Allah's salutations upon the Prophet are done in a beautiful, loving manner and Muslim believers should likewise emulate this manner; salutations should also be sent out of a sense of thankfulness for the Prophet's sacrifices in regard to the community of Muslims; the salutations sent by the Muslim believer are acknowledged in the metaphysical world and parsimony with regard to sending them will be received negatively in that world as well. He also expounds upon the variety of this-worldly and other-worldly blessings that accrue from sending such salutations (398–410).

Sufi Abed again alludes to practice, in this case with regard to salutations upon the Prophet, making the point that less performed consistently is better than more performed erratically. And he finally makes the point that these salutations are not simply prayers for the Prophet's benefit; their benefits really accrue to us (428). The moral self, then, in seeing the Prophet as the model that it needs to follow needs to do so in a spirit of love, gratitude, veneration, and honouring through salutations. The Prophet is not simply the source of its spiritual journey, but esteem for the Prophet must accompany the journey itself; and it is only through such veneration that the purpose of the journey is reached. Love for Allah, which is the purpose of the journey, is inseparable from love for the Prophet.

The theme of love naturally speaks to the deep and abiding influence of Sufism on Sufi Abed's work. Sufi Abed was certainly viewed as a "Sufi" by all oral accounts and his work does contain a number of references to specifically Sufi figures. Yet, the work relatively seldom speaks of "Sufism" (or, "taṣawwuf") per se; nor does it constitute itself as a "Sufi" text. Rather, Sufi Abed speaks from an interwoven "'ulamā"/"Sufi" tradition whose deeper, post-formal reflections on the inner aspects of Islamic beliefs and rituals spring not only from an acknowledgement, but they indeed spring from a deep attachment to the formal requirements. There is, in other words, a continuum in the work that does not separate, or even distinguish, between the inner and outer aspects of Islam, between a "Sufism" and between a "*Sharī'ah*". This continuum brings to mind an insight of Talal Asad on the nature of Sufism. Asad, who made reference to Ibn Taymīyyah (d. 1328)—the well-known controversial jurist who sought to restore what he viewed as fidelity to Islamic teachings as opposed to, in his opinion, the excesses of the mystics, and Muhammed 'Abduh (d. 1905)—the famous Al-Azhar rector, writes:

the only point of spiritual discipline (the point that makes Sufism essential) is to promote a convergence between human willing and the commands of God as expressed in the *sharī'a* ... In this view, the performance of the *sharī'a*—spiritual cultivation of the self through *ibādāt*, the entire range of embodiments that define worship, together with the supererogatory exercises as well as the norms of social behaviour (called *mu'āmalāt*)—are all interdependent. (Asad 25)

It seems likely that Sufi Abed, coming from the “sober” Naqshbandi Mujaddidi tradition, would echo such a view. It is equally likely that he would echo the view of the North African scholar—Sufi Shaykh Ahmad Zarruq (d. 1493), the prominent Moroccan Sufi Shaykh on the *purpose* of this continuum; the latter, who was quoted in Anon’s *The Shadhili Tariqa: A Path to the Divine* (n. p.), stated that: “there is no Sufism except through comprehension of Sacred Law ... for the outward rules of Allah Most High are not known save through it, and there is no comprehension of Sacred Law without Sufism, for works are nothing without *sincerity* of approach” (our emphasis).

## Conclusion

This essay has attempted to pursue Sufi Abed’s BFBA thematically. We have argued that it effectively builds the moral self. It does so by awakening the self to a living, post-formal connection to Allah, and to the other articles of faith. Once awakened, the goal of that self-immersion is the remembrance of Allah; this immersion, though, takes place by following the Prophet as the model for that self. However, even this immersion and remembrance is not an end in itself but one whose further goal is the realisation of love in Allah—the *summum bonum* of the human condition—and consequently recognising one’s true place in the scheme of existence. Further, that to succeed, this journey must proceed and culminate in the reverential adoration of the Prophet as well. As we have noted, it is a moral self that is cultivated by reflection and practice. It is important to note that Sufi Abed does not purposely set out this reading in the fashion that we have. We believe that this reading can justifiably be read into his book. From his perspective, he writes it primarily as an instructional manual covering a variety of essential Islamic topics crucial to living the good Muslim life. Indeed, the work contains many byways that we have not touched upon here but which perform the function of adumbrating the key points raised; and it thus complements and rounds them off for the reader seeking such instruction.

As indicated in the introduction, the genre of Urdu literature in South Africa remains under-explored and our hope is that this essay is one further step in that exploration. Of course, it is not simply about classifying the quantity and type of literature produced—an important task—but of seriously exploring the worldviews contained in these texts. These worldviews had readers who imbibed them—worldviews that assisted such readers in interpreting and guiding them through their personal and social realities, the latter including their status as a political underclass in South Africa.

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