**Remembrances of Rashīd: life-histories as lessons in the Dēōband movement**


## Abstract

The *tazkira*, a long-established genre of life-history writing in South Asian literature, was increasingly used over the course of the twentieth century to document the lives and achievements of *'ulamā* ('learned men', or scholars of religion). This paper explores a foundational work within this genre: 'Ashīq Ilahī Mīrutī's *Tazkira't al-Rashīd* (first published 1908-1910), a life-history of the Dēōbandī scholar and Sūfī *shāykh* Rashīd Ahmad Gangōhī. It argues that such life-histories of *'ulamā* were written not merely as historical records but as 'lessons' to their readers. This paper illustrates how the *tazkira* appropriated Gangōhī's life and teachings to provide an indispensable repository of Dēōbandī understanding on issues such as *tarīqah* (the Sūfī path), *sharī'ah* (religious law), *pīrī-murīdī* (the master-disciple relationship), religious and social conduct and relations with the state. The paper thus makes a case for understanding the *tazkira* as an important vehicle for informing and shaping the religious behaviour of a Muslim public, which was employed ultimately by both the Dēōbandī and other Islamic revivalist movements.


## Introduction

> "This precious and irreplaceable devout witness of the thirteenth century, who made his appearance in the hallowed and blessed town of Gangoh, became the religious forebear for hundreds of thousands of Muslims, the leader and teacher of hundreds of *'ulamā*, and the leading light of India, a learned authority and spiritual guide… May this humble biography (*tazkira*) of Hazrat [Gangōhī] acquire blessings from God and may it be the means through which I may attain salvation… this humble servant [the author] has striven to compile this work as a memorial for his beloved *shāykh*."[1]

[1] 'Ashīq Ilahī Mīrutī, *Tazkira't al-Rashīd* (Saharanpur, 1977), Vol.I, pp.11-12. While this work was first published in 1908-10, I have used this identical, more widely available version throughout, except where indicated.

After the death of the Sūfī *shāykh* and founder of the Dēōband movement Rashīd Ahmad Gangōhī (1829-1905), the elders of the *dar-al-'ulūm* (religious school) at Deoband approached his disciple 'Ashīq Ilahi Mīrutī (1880-1941).[2] Three of Gangōhī's *khalīfa*s (appointed successors) – Khalīl Ahmad Sahāranpūrī, Mahmūd al-Hasan and 'Abd al-Rahīm Rā'īpūrī – had decided that an authoritative life-history of their late master was needed. And they had identified Mīrutī – a close affiliate of Gangōhī's *silsila* (Sūfī lineage) who had pledged *bay'a* (oath of allegiance) to Gangōhī at age seventeen – as the right figure to undertake the task. As Mīrutī writes in his account, he agonised over the heavy burden of producing a life-history for his *shāykh*, describing himself as an "unworthy servant" (*nang khādim, bandah*) and often declaring himself worthless or inadequate (*nā-kārah*, nā-*chīz*) to the task. Nevertheless, he undertook it out of duty to Gangōhī's *tarīqah* (Sūfī order), and his deceased *shāykh*'s appearances to him in dreams offered him guidance as he did so.[3]

*Tazkira't al-Rashīd*, the final product of Mīrutī's labours, was published in Meerut in 1908-10, over two volumes and hundreds of pages. This comprehensive work combined an array of sources: the author's own recollections; tales and testimonies gathered from Gangōhī's associates within his Sūfī order; Gangōhī's written correspondence (*maktūbāt*) with his followers and other *shāykh*s; his legal opinions (*fatāwa*)[4]; and his sayings as recalled by

---

[2] Muhammad 'Ashīq Ilahī Mīrutī was typical of the Urdu author-publishers who built up profile through small-town printing presses in north India around this time. Educated in both government and Islamic schools in Meerut and Lahore, he briefly attached himself to the Nadva't al-'Ulamā organisation in Kanpur in the 1890s, after which he established a small publishing house in Meerut, *Khāyr al-Matābi'*, around 1900/1. Along with *Tazkira't al-Rashīd*, his various works included translations of the Qur'ān and several Sūfī texts (see below, footnotes 34-35). After Gangōhi's death, he became a disciple of Khalīl Ahmad Sahāranpūrī, and had a lifelong relationship with the Mazāhir al-'Ulūm *madrasa* in Saharanpur. For a short biography, see 'Ashīq Ilahī Mīrutī, *Tazkira't al-Khalīl* (Karachi, n.d.), pp.16-20.

[3] Mīrutī, *Tazkira't al-Rashīd*, Vol.I, pp.5-8.

[4] Interestingly, both Rashīd Ahmad's correspondence and *fatāwa* were compiled and first published at a similar time to Mīrutī's *Tazkira*, around 1905-6 respectively, and have been republished several times since. See Rashīd Ahmad Gangōhī, *Makākīb-i-Rashīdīyya*

disciples (*malfūzāt*).[5] With the support of Deoband's elders, the text was also destined for a wide audience among a reading public: the first edition came with a mission statement that copies of the work would be distributed without cost for those who could not afford it, and with requests to readers to spread the message "across the whole world" and "for all times."[6]

As a *tazkira* (lit: 'remembrance/memorial'), Mīrutī's work was placed in a well-established genre of hagiographical life-writing in South Asian Muslim literature. The *tazkira* as an Islamic biographical genre traced back to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries onwards, and was initially used primarily to narrate posthumous memorials for Muslim nobles and poets; but the genre became particularly notable as a form of hagiographical writing which preserved the lives of Sūfī saints.[7] In more recent times, the *tazkira* has been expanded beyond these traditional subjects to others, and in particular, to the *'ulamā*. Honorific life-histories of key learned, individual or collective, became a prevalent, widely-available sub-genre of Urdu biographical writing in India in the twentieth century, especially around its middle decades, and have been central to how the *'ulamā* have been interpreted and remembered since.[8]

---

(Saharanpur, n.d.), which contains approximately thirty letters to fellow *shāykh*s and disciples; and *Kāmil fatāwa-i-Rashīdīyya* (Karachi, 1987).

[5] *Malfūzāt*, or the preserved sayings of a *shāykh*, has been an important literary genre within South Asian Chishtī Sufism: Amina Steinfels, 'His master's voice: the genre of *malfūzāt* in South Asian Sufism', *History of Religions* 44, 1 (2004), pp.56-69; Carl Ernst, *Eternal garden: mysticism, history and politics at a South Asian Sufi center* (Albany NY, 1992), pp.62-84. In Mīrutī's *tazkira*, Gangōhī's unarranged *malfūzāt* are compiled into one chapter: Mīrutī, *Tazkira't al-Rashīd*, Vol.II, pp.277-291.

[6] Mīrutī, *Tazkira't al-Rashīd,* Vol.I, p.12.

[7] On the classic form of the Sūfī *tazkira*, see e.g. Marcia Hermansen, 'Religious literature and the inscription of identity: the Sufi tazkira tradition in Muslim South Asia', *The Muslim World* 87, 3/4 (1997), pp.315-329; on later shifts in this literary tradition, see Frances Pritchett, *Nets of awareness: Urdu poetry and its critics* (Berkeley, 1994), pp.63-76.

[8] Celebrated examples of twentieth-century collective *'ulamā*-biographies/dictionaries include Rahman 'Alī, *Tazkira-i-'ulamā-i-Hind* (Lahore, 1914), Muhammad 'Ināyat-Ullah, *Tazkira-i-Farāngī Mehel* (Lucknow, 1928), 'Azīz al-Rahman, *Tazkira-i-mashā'īkh-i-*

The work discussed in this paper, *Tazkira't al-Rashīd,* was one of the first and most influential of these modern *'ulamā*-biographies. In a sense, it stands as one of the clearest 'bridging' texts between the more traditional Sūfī *tazkira* and the plethora of later *'ulamā*-biographies that arose out of the enhanced efforts of the *'ulamā* to reach out to a public readership during the colonial period. Focusing upon this single work, this paper seeks to understand the importance of such a *tazkira* within this project of Islamic renewal, arguing that life-histories played a critical role within the Dēōbandī reformist movement in its attempts to cultivate rightful conduct among the Muslim public.

## Life-histories and lessons in *dēōbandīyyat*

While the investment in writing *'ulamā* life-histories is not exclusive to any particular reformist school, it has been especially pronounced within the Dēōband movement.[9] As was shown above, the elders of Deoband invested great effort in ensuring the production of an authoritative *tazkira* of Gangōhī, assigning the task to a trusted disciple and carefully supervising its publication. Indeed, while most academic studies of the Dēōband movement have emphasised its contributions to the religious sciences (Hadīth, *fiqh* and *tasawwūf*, for example), more recognition needs to be given to the energy its scholars invested in the writing of biography, and how the life-histories of *shāykh*s have been appropriated as literary vehicles of Dēōbandī pietism. Well-known life-histories of the movement's founders and scions have abounded within the Dēōband movement since Mīrutī's study of Rashīd Ahmad

*Dēōband* (Bijnor, 1958), Muhammad Mīyān, *'Ulamā-i-Hind kā shāndār māzī* (Delhi, 1960 [4 vols]).

[9] While the phrase 'Dēōband movement' is imperfect and misleadingly monolithic, I use it to describe the combined efforts of the Chishtī Sabrī *shāykh*s and their associates who were linked with the *dar-al-'ulum*s in the towns of Deoband and Saharanpur (both founded in 1867). Barbara Metcalf, in her classic work *Islamic revival in British India* (Berkeley, 1982), foregrounded the *madrasa* at Deoband; while Brannon Ingram's recent *Revival from below: the Deoband movement and global Islam* (Oakland, 2018) emphasises instead the leadership of the Dēōband movement by individual *shāykh*s who inculcated pietism in a nascent Dēōbandī 'public' in India and globally.

Gangōhī, including subsequent remembrances of Khalīl Ahmad Sahāranpūrī, Mahmūd al-Hasan, Ashraf ʻAlī Thānawī, Husāyn Ahmad Madanī and Muhammad Zakarīyya Kāndhlawī.[10] Like the *tazkira* discussed in this paper, these later biographies were also most often written by close relatives or associates of their subjects, often very senior figures within the Dēōband movement, and their production received the institutional support of Dēōbandī networks.[11] Dēōbandī elders have thus carefully safeguarded the life-histories of Islam's great spiritual guides, just as they have safeguarded the sciences of religion.

Why should Dēōbandī scholars in particular have invested so much energy in producing life-histories? The reason, this paper argues, is that that life-histories have been understood within the Dēōband movement not simply as biographical or autobiographical records, but as crucial lessons in the particular brand of *shāykh*-centred piety that has come to be known as *dēōbandīyyat*. We can see this, for instance, in the teachings of Tāqī ʻUsmānī, one of the most influential contemporary figures of the Dēōband movement. ʻUsmānī has promoted the life-histories of key *shāykh*s as themselves sources of moral excellence (*ehsān*) for their readers. Indeed, he has even proposed that the biographies of founding Dēōbandīs should be incorporated into *madrasa* teaching, with "teachers and students… meet[ing] together even once a week to study the sayings and lives of the great elders of the religion… to yield their benefits."[12]

[10] Examples of such biographies include Manāzir Ahsān Jīlānī, *Sawāneh-i-Qāsimī* (Dēōband, 1953-4) on Muhammad Qāsim Nanaūtawī; Asghar Husāyn, *Hayyāt-i-Shāykh al-Hind* (Dēōband, c.1960) on Mahmūd al-Hasan; and ʻAshīq Elahī Mīrutī, *Tazkira't al-Khalīl* (Saharanpur, 1969) on Khalīl Ahmad Sahāranpūrī, which includes additional commentaries on other *ʻulamā*. Co-extensive with this genre are a large number of autobiographies by major *shāykh*s: Ashraf ʻAlī Thānawī, *Ashraf al-Sawāneh* (Bolton, 2006) written in c.1935; Husāyn Ahmad Madanī, *Naqsh-i-hayyāt* (Dēōband, 1953 [2 vols]); Muhammad Zakarīyya Kāndhlawī, *Hazrat Shāykh kī Āp Bītī* (Delhi, 1969).

[11] This is true for many authors of works referenced above, footnotes 8, 10.

[12] Muhammad Tāqī ʻUsmānī, *Hamārā taʻlimī nizām* (Dēōband, 1998), p.99, quoted in Ingram, *Revival from below* p.146.

In line with Tāqī 'Usmānī's claims noted above, Mīrutī's early contribution to this literary tradition was clearly intended to be not simply a historical account of Gangōhī's life but an instructive text that might cultivate a similar kind of moral excellence within its readers. In his final chapter, Mīrutī reflects that, while Gangōhī "during his lifetime attracted people towards him through his knowledge", the dissemination of his wisdom following his death must happen through his "*bāqīyāt-i-sālihāt*", or his "enduring good works".[13] These *bāqīyāt-i-sālihāt* according to Mīrutī include Gangōhī's *risālē* (writings), *fatāwa* (legal opinions) and sayings to followers; his descendants and disciples; and finally, his *tazkira*, which Mīrutī hopes "will be named and understood as one of these *bāqīyāt-i-sālihāt*" itself.[14] Mīrutī thus claimed Gangōhī's life to be co-extensive with the life-history that preserved it, positioning the *tazkira* as one of Gangōhī's "enduring good works".

To explore the fundamental importance accorded to life-writing within the Dēōband movement, we can look to some of the existing scholarship on the *tazkira* literary tradition. *Tazkira*s have long been understood as more than just historical records, but in a sense, as participatory religious texts that instigate pious engagement from the reader. As Hermansen and Lawrence have argued, *tazkira*s comprise "memorative communications", or attempts to embed their readers within the religious worlds and traditions inhabited by the historical personalities recorded within.[15] This article extends this conceptualisation further by interpreting *tazkira*s as not merely participatory religious texts but as instructive ones, striving to guide their readers to perform their own good deeds by emulating the lives of the subjects of these works. Exploring just one of these *tazkira*s, this article shows how its author used the *tazkira* format to expound the specific constructions of Dēōbandī pietism, with detailed commentaries on interpretations of the Sūfī path, correct religious practice and related questions. By narrating in intimate detail the lifestyle and practices of a perfect

[13] This alludes to *al-baqīyat us-salihat* in Qur'ān 18:46.

[14] Mīrutī, *Tazkira't al-Rashīd*, Vol.II, pp.336-343.

[15] Marcia Hermansen and Bruce Lawrence, 'Indo-Persian *tazkira*s as memorative communications', in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: rethinking religious identities in Islamicate South Asia* (eds.) David Gilmartin and Bruce Lawrence (Gainesville, 2010), pp.149-175.

*shāykh*, *Tazkira't al-Rashīd* presented a holistic account of Dēōbandī pietism to a formative "public" of lay Muslim readers.[16]

Following an introduction to Rashīd Ahmad Gangōhī himself, this article examines now just two subjects on which this *tazkira* attempted to provide lessons in *dēōbandīyyat* for its readers: Sufism and the Sūfī path; and normative conduct and avoidance of *bid'ah*. A final section briefly discusses a further 'lesson' from which later Dēōbandīs subsequently distanced themselves, namely that of disengagement from politics and matters of state, focusing particularly upon the *tazkira*'s narration of the events of 1857.

## The Shining Light of Gangoh

Since the *tazkira* cannot be separated from its own subject, we must begin with a quick introduction to Rashīd Ahmad Gangōhī himself as presented in Mīrutī's account. The text refers to Gangōhī chiefly by his honorific title Imām Rabbānī (Servant of God), as well as others including Qutb al-Irshād (Guiding Star), Mujaddīd-al-Zamān (Reviver of the Era), Mujāz-al-Mashā'īkh (Highest Among Shāykhs), and Gangōhī Mish'al Chamakdar (Shining Light of Gangoh).[17] Likewise, in line with the laudatory tones of the *tazkira* genre, Mīrutī's work devotes much space to revering his qualities. Several chapters consider Gangōhī's temperament, especially his qualities of "steadfastness (*istiqāmat*)", "serenity (*itminān*)" and "trust in God (*tawakkul*)". Others discuss his personal qualities such as generosity, affection, patience and tolerance.[18] Equally, there are frequent allusions to his physical presence: his handsome looks, deep eyes, melodious voice and eloquent speech, for instance. Yet, the work

[16] My understanding here is influenced by Ingram's work on the Dēōbandī construct of the 'public' (*'ām-va-khwās*: literally, commoners and nobles) as both the basis for creating a rightful Islamic normative order but also the site through which this order may be corrupted through *bid'ah*. Ingram, *Revival from below*, pp.55-115. Mīrutī himself sometimes evokes this concept of *'ām-va-khwās* directly: e.g. *Tazkira't al-Khalīl*, pp.23-25.

[17] For representative lists of honorifics, see e.g. Mīrutī, *Tazkira't al-Rashīd*, Vol.I, p.93; Vol.II, p.102.

[18] Ibid, Vol.II, pp.60-83, 201.

(especially the first volume) also offers an all-embracing biography, which is worth summarising here.

Gangōhī was born into an established Sūfī family, descended on both sides from ‘Abd-al Quddūs Gangōhī (d.1538), a Chishtī Sābrī *shāykh* of the small town of Gangoh in India’s Saharanpur district.[19] Following the standard tropes of the *tazkira* genre, the text also offers a clear genealogical tracing (*shajra*) which, as for many South Asian Sūfīs, placed him within four *tarīqah*s: the Chishtīyya, Qādīriyya, Naqshabandīyya and Suhrawardīyya, all by virtue of the Quddūsī lineage.[20] Losing his father as a child, he moved to Delhi at around age fifteen, where he studied Arabic and the traditional *dars-i-nizāmī* curriculum under the renowned scholar Mamlūk ‘Alī Dehlawī and other *‘ulamā*. During these studies, he met his fellow student and future collaborator Muhammad Qāsim Nanaūtawī (Mīrutī describes the pair as “like the sun and moon” in their companionship), as well as Imdād-Ullah, a charismatic Sūfī inducted in the line of Shāh Walī-Ullah and his successors.[21] Along with Nanaūtawī, Gangōhī identified Imdād-Ullah as a suitable *shāykh* in his own quest to follow the Sūfī path.[22] In the late-1840s, Gangōhī pledged *bay‘a* to Imdād-Ullah, joining his *khānaqāh* (lodge) in the *qasbah* (town) of Thana Bhavan.[23] Subsequently, Gangōhī was appointed as *khalīfa* with the authority to carry Imdād-Ullah’s Sūfī lineage, and he started accepting *bay‘a* from his own followers.

While maintaining frequent visits to Imdād-Ullah’s *khānaqāh*, Rashīd Ahmad resettled around 1850 in his ancestral town of Gangoh. Here, he quickly established a clinic in Unānī

---

[19] For discussion of the Chishtī Sābrīs (one of the two main sub-lineages of the Chishtīyya, along with the Nizāmīs) before and after Gangōhī’s generation, see respectively Moin Nizami, *Reform and renewal in South Asian Islam: the Chishti-Sabris in 18th-19th century north India* (Delhi, 2017); Robert Rozehnal, *Islamic Sufism unbound: politics and piety in twenty-first century Pakistan* (Basingstoke, 2007).

[20] Especially Mīrutī, *Tazkira’t al-Rashīd*, Vol.II, pp.105-110.

[21] Ibid, Vol.I, pp.25-37.

[22] On Imdād-Ullah, see Nizami, *Reform and renewal*, pp.196-241; Seema Alavi, *Muslim cosmopolitanism in the age of empire* (Cambridge MA, 2015), pp.222-266.

[23] Mīrutī, *Tazkira’t al-Rashīd*, Vol.I, pp.40-62.

medicine (offering treatment to all local residents including women, children, the poor and Hindus[24]), and set about reviving the deteriorated *khānaqāh* of 'Abd-al Quddūs. Gangōhī gradually built up this "*durbār* (court) of Qutb Gangōhī" into a significant centre of learning in the sciences of Islam and Sufism, largely delivered in a sheltered courtyard (*sehdārī*) adjacent to the old lodge building.[25] Gangōhī ran classes in Hadīth and *sharī'āh*, consciously shifting away from the rationalist emphasis of the traditional *dars-i-nizāmī*.[26] Each year, he received *tālib*s (students) in Gangoh from all parts of the subcontinent as well as Afghanistan, Anatolia and elsewhere in the Muslim world.[27] Simultaneously with teaching the Islamic sciences, he accepted growing numbers of disciples (mostly referred to as *khuddām*, *sālik*s, *murīd*s) who followed his guidance in their journeys on the Sufi path (*tarīqah*). By the 1880s, this small town hosted dozens of his students, disciples and other followers at any one time.

Aside from a few interruptions – a spell of imprisonment after 1857 (discussed below) and three *hajj* pilgrimages – Gangōhī's 'court' ran for several decades from c.1849 until c.1895, when his age and deteriorating eyesight curtailed his endeavours. Over these five decades, Gangōhī built relationships with more than 50,000 trusted "affiliates (*mutawassilīn*)" attached in different ways to his court.[28] These included large numbers who pledged *bay'a* to him, ranging from local villagers to famed personalities such as Sultan Jahan, the Begum of Bhopal.[29] His webs of associates also included over 300 *'ulamā* who graduated under him, and a large number of attendants dedicated to the service of his *khānaqāh*.[30] Further still,

---

[24] Ibid, pp.62-72.

[25] Ibid, pp.96-98.

[26] "During his studying days, [Gangōhī] had studied all current subjects such as logic, philosophy, dialectic, the natural sciences… and completed the *dars-i-nizāmī* syllabus." However, "during his [later] teaching, he taught nothing but the religious sciences, since philosophy and other subjects were considered to be unlawful and against *sharī'ah*." Ibid pp.93-94. Rich commentary on his means of teaching is available in ibid, pp.88-96.

[27] Mīrutī, *Tazkira't al-Rashīd*, Vol.I, p.88; Vol.II, pp.96-102.

[28] Ibid, Vol.II, pp.101-103.

[29] Ibid, Vol.II, pp.103-105, 338-339.

[30] Ibid, Vol.I, pp.196-198.

Gangōhī ultimately appointed around thirty *khalīfa*s trusted to continue the succession of his Sūfī lineage, establishing Gangōhī's centrality in the wide educational and Sūfī networks out of which the Dēōband movement emerged.[31]

Given Gangōhī's latter-day fame as a founder of the Dēōband movement, one of the most noticeable features of the *tazkira* is the relative infrequency of reference to the *dar-ul-'ulūm* at Deoband itself. There is one relatively brief chapter dedicated to Gangōhī's role as *sarparast* (principal) and *mudarris* (teacher) in the *dar-al-'ulūm*, where he superintended the teaching curriculum and presided over *dastārbandī* (graduation ceremonials).[32] However, the *tazkira*'s overwhelming focus is Gangōhī's *khānaqāh* and the circles of his followers and students in his home town. While many academic studies have written on the Dēōband movement from the perspective of its *madrasa*, this *tazkira* foregrounds the life of the *shāykh* in the expansion of Dēōbandī pietism; and as such, it frames the town of Gangoh rather than Deoband as the court (*darbār*), orchard, rose-garden and epicentre (*qutb*) of the Islamic world.

**Lessons on the Sūfī path**

As argued above, Mīrutī's *tazkira* was intended to be both an authentic remembrance of Gangōhī and an instructive text, offering comprehensive religious guidance to a nascent Dēōbandī-influenced 'public' of pious readers and cultivating their moral excellence. The most-discussed aspect of this multidimensional project of *dēōbandīyyat* in Mīrutī's text is the Sūfī path (*tarīqah*), and specifically, the Dēōbandī teaching that the individual must only follow the Sūfī path under a designated Sūfī *shāykh*.[33] Mīrutī himself was a specialist in the

[31] Ibid, Vol.II, pp.153-160. Most famous were the second-generation Dēōbandīs Husāyn Ahmad Madanī and Mahmūd al-Hasan.

[32] Ibid, Vol.I, pp.246-252.

[33] For background on the role of the *shāykh* in Dēōbandī Sufism, see e.g. Metcalf, *Islamic revival*, pp.157-197; Ingram, *Revival from below*, pp.116-137. For a study of another branch of South Asian Sufism which has placed great emphasis upon the charismatic authority of the *shāykh* who operates simultaneously as master, teacher, guardian of a lineage and personal

sciences of Sufism, who during his career translated several works by Sūfī masters into Urdu[34] (including, most importantly, a manuscript by Gangōhī himself[35]). As such, taken as a whole, *Tazkira't al-Rashīd* offers a comprehensive excursus of the Dēōbandī iteration of Sufism, made both directly through the works and sayings of Gangōhī, but also through the words of its author.

The clearest entry point to understanding these teachings is the opening chapter of Mīrutī's second volume: '*Tarīqah*', which begins with the publication an undated letter written by Gangōhī to an unspecified disciple. In this letter, Gangōhī offers a comprehensive vision of the Sūfī path according to Dēōbandī interpretations. He describes the "knowledge of Sufism (*'ilm al-sūfīyya*)" as equivalent to "the knowledge of Islam" itself. He then dwells on the need for "rectification of character (*tazkīya-i-nafs*) and eternal submission to Allah", arguing that "Sufism involves the inner self, outer self, and the courage of conviction" and that the accomplished Sūfī "cultivates his inner and outer character" with perfect skills of humility, generosity, compassion, and mastery over one's emotions and desires.[36] Throughout many chapters of the *tazkira*, especially its second volume, Mīrutī expounds and clarifies Gangōhī

exemplar, see Arthur Buehler, *Sufi heirs of the Prophet: the Indian Naqshabandiya and the rise of the mediating Sufi shaykh* (Columbia SC, 2008).

[34] 'Mīrutī translated multiple collections of lectures on *tasawwūf* by the Sūfī master 'Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī (d.1166) from Arabic into Urdu: e.g. 'Ashīq Ilahī Mīrutī, *Khutbāt-i-Ghaūsīyya* (Delhi, 1914/15) and *Fāyūz-i-yazdānī* (Karachi, 1965).

[35] 'Ashīq Ilahī Mīrutī, *Imdād al-sulūk.* (first published in 1918/9). This work was an Urdu translation of Rashīd Ahmad Gangōhī's unpublished Farsi treatise *Irshād al-malūk*, which in turn was based on the Arabic writings of the Sūfī master Qutb al-Dīn Dimashqī (d.1378). The themes discussed in Gangōhī's text – the Sūfī path, nature of the *shāykh* and the relationship between the spiritual master and his followers – are loyally reflected in Mīrutī's own words in *Tazkira't al-Rashīd*. See also Brannon Ingram, 'Sufis, scholars and scapegoats: Rashīd Ahmad Gangohī (d.1905) and the Deobandi critique of Sufism', *Muslim World* 99/3 (2009), p.495. Gangōhī's teachings on *tarīqah* and *tasawwūf*, which are also loyally reflected in Mīrutī's explanations, are also laid down in Gangōhī, *Kāmil fatāwa-i-Rashīdīyya* pp.204-233.

[36] Mīrutī, *Tazkira't al-Rashīd*, Vol.II, pp.11-12.

teachings regarding the Sūfī path and perfection of character, to the extent that the guidance of the Sūfī adherent becomes a major theme and purpose throughout the text.

Several aspects of Gangōhī's teachings stand out throughout the *tazkira*. First, a first major priority of Mīrutī's work as a whole is to emphasise (as expressed by Gangōhī in his letter) the Dēōbandī principle that the way to follow the Prophet's Sunnah lay in "*sharī'ah-va-tarīqah* (the law and the Sūfī path)." These two paths are described as intertwined means of perfecting the outer (*zāhirī*) and inner (*bātinī*) sides of the self respectively.[37] This more *sharī'ah*-centred Sufism both built upon the long-term legacies of Walī-Ullah and his heirs, and chimed with current global trends of Sūfī reform which were moving away from more esoteric forms of Sūfism and towards an understanding of the Sūfī path as a means to fulfilling the law rather than rejecting it.[38] As such, Mīrutī's *tazkira* offers persistent attention to Gangōhī's absolute adherence to *sharī'ah*: "his character and attributes were all modelled after the Prophet [and] his whole existence was lived in the image of the *sharī'ah*, … he did not have the ability to ever act against it".[39] He also stresses Gangōhī's expertise in both: he was "without doubt, the authority of his time among the specialists in both *sharī'ah* and *tarīqah* and was a leader in the knowledge and practice of both."[40] To prove this point, along with Gangōhī's accomplishments on the Sūfī path, *Tazkira't al-Rashīd* perpetually restates Gangōhī's knowledge of the *sharī'ah*, both as *faqīya* (jurisprudent) and *muftī* (one who offers legal opinions). Entire chapters are devoted to his legal insight and reasoning (*tafaqah*, *iftā*),

[37] Ibid, pp.1-6.

[38] Space does not allow full elaboration of these global currents here, but helpful studies on these trajectories, include Martin van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell eds., *Sufism and the 'modern' in Islam* (New York, 2012); John Voll, 'Neo-Sufism: reconsidered again', *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 42/2-3 (2008), pp.314-330.

[39] Mīrutī, *Tazkira't al-Rashīd*, Vol.II, pp.33-34; c.f. "his habits, conduct and appearance provided witnesses with a practical expression of *sharī'ah* in every way" (p.8).

[40] Ibid, p.115.

his devotion to the Hanafī legal school, and his responses to legal questions and issuing of *fatāwa* (legal opinions), of which dozens are included.[41]

A second theme from Gangōhī's letter on following the Sūfī path which Mīrutī elaborates is the "achievement of perfect character" (known as *husn-i-sulūk*, *husn-i-khulūq*)".[42] Mīrutī emphasises Gangōhī's consistent striving (*mujāhadah*) to follow God in both inner heart and outer behaviours as a model for all disciples. Equally, he notes the *shāykh*'s mastery over his own emotions, including those passions of the self (*nafs*) such as anger (*ghazabīya*), desire (*shahwat*) and quick-thinking (*'aql*): Mīrutī claims that Gangōhī had tempered these human traits so that they were sources of his brilliance and creativity rather than excess.[43] This latter theme of conquering the self is highly resonant of the teachings of both Gangōhī and those medieval masters with whose works Mīrutī was acquainted, including al-Ghazālī (d.1111) whose teachings Mīrutī references specifically.[44] Through this path of self-perfection, Gangōhī was seen to have acquired the "spiritual strength of the heart (*quwwat-i-qudsīya*)" which opens the way to illumination from God[45]; as well as the heights of both *kashf* (insight), and also *karāmāt* (spiritual perfections, or literally, "miracles", about which more is said below), both of which gave Gangōhī his cherished "closeness (*nisbat*)" with God.[46]

Following from this is the third major lesson on the Sūfī path: that the perfection of self cannot be achieved alone, but only by undertaking discipleship to a chosen, living spiritual guide. Elaborating Gangōhī's teachings, Mīrutī argues that Sūfī *shāykh*s and teachers represent "the lamps which carry the light of Prophethood [and] are present in the world even

---

[41] Space does not allow a full discussion of these chapters on Gangōhī's expertise in law here, but some of his legal skills and *fatāwa* are described in ibid, Vol.I, pp.112-113, 164-198. Many of the examples cited overlap those in with *Fatāwa-i-Rashīdīyya*.

[42] E.g. ibid Vol.II, pp.29-33.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Mīrutī refers readers to al-Ghazālī's work *Al-arba'īn fī usūl al-dīn* as a useful lesson in *sulūk* and *tasawwūf* (ibid, Vol.I, p.252); this work is a condensed version of al-Ghazālī's famed opus *Ihyā 'ulūm al-dīn*, which outlines the Sufi path for believers.

[45] Ibid, Vol.II, pp.136-138.

[46] Ibid, pp.111-115.

today", and as such, "the *mashā'īkh* (*shāykh*s) are the channels by which the spiritual instruction, virtue and cultivation of one's character may happen." As such, he urges his readers to take an oath of allegiance to a *shāykh* to strive for their rectification of character.[47]

Indeed, Mīrutī further elaborates in later chapters upon the Dēōbandī understanding of *pīrī-murīdī* (the Sūfī master-disciple relationship), providing a lesson to inform the journeys of disciples in current times. Gangōhī, Mīrutī argues, carefully selected who might be permitted to pledge allegiance to him, showing the high standards of commitment required of disciples. Gangōhī was willing to accept pledges from among the poor, villagers and women[48], but is shown rejecting them from those whose commitment or conduct fell below the desired standard.[49] Once a *murīd* had been accepted, Mīrutī shows, then they would receive committed guidance from their *shāykh*. At one point, he describes the *shāykh* with the analogy of a "spiritual physician (*rūhānī tabīb*)": since each seeker's path to self-perfection needs different guidance, the *shāykh* must guide each follower differently.[50] Different disciples had "different personalities, circumstances and levels of education" and it was the *shāykh*s task "to offer guidance to all of them according to the situation of each."[51]

The intimate relationship between the disciple and his *shāykh* is further evidenced in recurring stories in the *tazkira* of Gangōhī appearing to his disciples in dreams and visions.[52]

---

[47] Ibid, pp.3-5. Significantly, Mīrutī uses the term of "closeness (*nisbat*)" to refer to the relationship between a *murīd* and his *shāykh* as well as the *shāykh*'s relationship with God.

[48] Ibid, pp.84-100, especially pp.94-95.

[49] For instance, he usually rejected *bay'a* from "foreigners", perhaps because this would complicate the necessary person-to-person contact of the *shāykh*-disciple relationship (ibid, pp.93-94). He also rejected *bay'a* from those who were overly willing to use their induction simply to become a master themselves and recruit followers themselves: at one point, it is noted that this latter concern made Gangōhī reluctant to accept *bay'a* from "Bengalis" (pp.96-97).

[50] Ibid, pp.115-119.

[51] Ibid, pp.119-122.

[52] For helpful wider and comparative context of the importance of such divinely inspired and premonitory dreams and visions in Sufism, see Nile Green, 'The religious and cultural roles

Mīrutī relays many stories throughout the text of Gangōhī appearing to followers via such revelations and providing solace or advice.[53] In one case, for instance, Gangōhī appears in a disciple's dream saving him from a storm by collecting him in a wagon, while another follower even dreamt of marrying Gangōhī as his bride.[54] Stories of Gangōhī's appearance in dreams were obviously narrated to Mīrutī in abundance by his disciples while he was writing the *tazkira*: they were said to be "countless," and sources of comfort and contentment (*tasallī, itmīnān*) for their beholders.[55] Indeed, the frequency of such references shows how much Dēōbandī *pīrī-murīdī* drew upon the dream motif historically embedded in Chishti Sufism, and also, how far these visionary appearances comprised a major source of the reverence in which Gangōhī was held by followers.[56]

The extensive and accessible elaboration of Dēōbandī Sufism throughout the *tazkira* may also be understood as a response to contemporaneous "anti-Sufi" critique in north India. At this time, 'puritan' movements such as the Ahl-i-Hadīth were launching polemics against Sufism; in retort, Mīrutī's elaboration of a *sharī'ah*-oriented Sufism was intended to confute those who falsely alleged that Sūfīs (and especially Chishtīs) "acts against the *sharī'ah*" and thus "give Sufism a bad name".[57] But Mīrutī simultaneously took a swipe at those who were attracted towards overly mystical or esoteric Sufism. Mīrutī states that Gangōhī did not

---

of dreams and visions in Islam', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 13/3 (2003), pp.287-313; Amira Mittermaier, *Dreams that matter: Egyptian landscapes of the imagination* (Berkeley, 2010).

[53] For examples of disciples seeing or receiving messages from Gangōhī in dreams, see e.g. Mīrutī, *Tazkira't al-Rashīd*, Vol.I, pp.224-225; Vol.II, pp.308-314.

[54] Ibid, Vol.I, p.289 .

[55] Ibid, Vol.II, p.314.

[56] E.g. Katherine Ewing, 'The dream of spiritual initiation and the organisation of self-representations among Pakistani Sufis', *American Ethnologist* 17/1 (1990), pp.56-74. In other cases, Mīrutī recalls Gangōhī's accounts of his own dreams, which often entailed his receipt of inspiration from ancestors within his *silsila.* In one case, Gangōhī dreamt of Muhammad Qāsim Nanaūtāwī as his bride and the latter's *murīd*s as his own children. For Gangōhī's dreams, see Mīrutī, *Tazkira't al-Rashīd*, Vol II, pp.315-319.

[57] Ibid, vol.II, pp.32, 245.

encourage his followers to engage in "ecstatic or wild practices (*jōsh-va-kharōsh*)", or to "sever relationships with others (*tajarrud-va-tark-i-ta'luqāt*)."[58] Instead, Gangōhī compelled them to reject "ecstatic (*darwēshī*)" practices and fulfil their worldly obligations. One example was a disciple from Bulandshahr, who apparently became so immersed in *zikr* (meditative prayer) that he considered walking out on his family and retreating into the forest to devote himself to the remembrance of God. When Gangōhī heard of this, he told him to give up these thoughts of "severance and retreat (*tajarrud-va-rahbārī*)" and repair his relationships with his family, which of course he did.[59] In another instance, a police officer neglected his duties and almost resigned his job to devote himself to discipleship under Gangōhī, but Gangōhī chided him, instructing him to commit to his worldly responsibilities and resume his employment.[60]

*Tazkira't al-Rashīd* thus offers a full account of Gangōhī's teachings on the Sūfī path, the process of discipleship and the role of the *shāykh*. But while imparting these lessons through the *tazkira*, Mīrutī's work places limitations upon this same format of the published lesson. As Ingram has powerfully argued, Dēōbandī teaching on Sufism has remained consistently "anthropocentric", in that it has continued to demand a seeker's attachment to a living *shāykh* rather than resorting to lessons gained from published texts.[61] As such, as one of the closing messages of the work, Mīrutī instructs Gangōhī's disciples to attach themselves to another *shāykh* following their master's death, and follow his guidance absolutely. "The garden is full of sun", he argues: "connect yourself with this *silsila* and its leaders… follow the example [they] set for you, and do not miss the opportunity."[62] While texts such as this *tazkira* could be used to crystallise and clarify knowledge about the Sūfī path, the text's central message was to direct its readers towards the guidance of a living, human master.

---

[58] Ibid, p.131.

[59] Ibid, pp.131-2.

[60] Ibid, pp.141-2.

[61] For Ingram's argument that the Dēōband movement's "anthropocentric" model of dispensing religious knowledge has never been supplanted by a "bibliocentric" conception based on texts, see Ingram, *Revival from below*, pp.22-23, 144-146.

[62] Mīrutī, *Tazkira't al-Rashīd*, Vol.II, p.343.

**Lessons on religious practice**

In addition to this exposition of Dēōbandī Sufism, a further set of lessons within *Tazkira't al-Rashīd* relate to rightful religious conduct. As much work has argued, proper lay religious and social observance was a key concern for the elders of the Dēōband movement, who showed both an unprecedented concern with correcting practice among the Muslim 'public' and a preoccupation with the possible impact of *bid'ah* (disorder) upon normative Islamic life.[63] For Mīrutī, a full and detailed description of Gangōhī's own behaviour could provide this lesson in correct conduct and offer a model of embodied *dēōbandīyyat*. As he argues, since Gangōhī was "incapable of disobedience" and "abhorred *bid'ah*", his conduct "demonstrated to the world" a model for all pious Muslims: "people can take lessons of divine guidance from his words and actions."[64]

One recurring example of Mīrutī's attempt to communicate correct guidance to his readers was his commentary on Gangōhī's attitudes to marriage conventions. The *tazkira* features accounts of several marriages, including those of Gangōhī's own daughter and son, in 1872/3 and 1874/5 respectively. According to these accounts, Gangōhī refused to accept several existing marriage customs (*rusm*): these included lavish spending, the assumption that the whole extended clan (*birādārī*) must attend, and the traditions of providing too large a dowry (*jāhēz*) and displaying it before all guests.[65] Clearly, these descriptions of proper marriage conduct were intentionally prescriptive: as is stated, Gangōhī "conducted his daughter's marriage in a perfect way and provided an example of emulating *sharī'ah* for all Muslims."[66]

---

[63] E.g. Ingram, *Revival from below*, esp. pp.55-115. Gangōhī's typically Dēōbandī concern with the avoidance of *bid'ah* is similarly visible in his published *fatwa*s: see Gangōhī, *Kāmil fatāwa-i-Rashīdīyya*, especially pp.114-169.

[64] E.g. Mīrutī, *Tazkira't al-Rashīd*, Vol.II, pp.15-17. Specifically, Mirūtī talks further of Gangōhī offering an "example" (*namūna*) to all Muslims, and as demonstrating the "active embodiment" (*'amalī mujassam*) of "right knowledge" (*'ilmī muzāmīn*): p.15.

[65] Ibid, Vol.I, pp.226-229.

[66] Ibid, Vol.I, pp.223-224. On another occasion, he angrily admonished a wedding party for the presence of dancing women: ibid, Vol.II, p.8.

The *tazkira* also offers prescriptions on various matter of Dēōbandī religious practice, with a key example being discomfort with the risks of idolatrous behaviour latent in some forms of Sufism. One theme that emerges on several occasions in the text is Gangōhī's disapproval of *'urs*: celebrations of the death-anniversaries of Sūfī *shāykh*s, held at their graves. The *tazkira* expresses Gangōhī's despair at the network of descendants (the maligned "*pīr-zādē*") of 'Abd al-Quddūs, who apparently observed *'urs* assemblies at their ancestor's grave in Gangoh with music and festivities. Gangōhī apparently "hated these behaviours" and "gave advice and took action to get people to adhere to the *sharī'ah*". Sometimes, he would even depart Gangoh for the duration of the *'urs*.[67]

The question of the *'urs,* moreover, reveals how far the fear of *bid'ah* shaped even what Gangōhī considered appropriate practice. The *tazkira* claims that, in earlier times, Gangōhī would visit 'Abd al-Quddūs's grave, since there was no intrinsic harm in doing so. However, he ceased doing this "on account of [the actions of] the innovators" who continued to advocate attending *'urs*: he feared that, if he did visit the grave, "the local *pīr-zādē* will say that I am yielding to them and will commit this *bid'ah*."[68] In other words, according to this account, even lawful acts such as visiting graves should be avoided if they might be misconstrued by ordinary Muslims as affirming wrongful practice: "Hazrat [Gangōhī] separated himself even from permissible (*mubāh*) actions which observers may see as permitting *bid'ah*, or which could enable others to issue commands to do so."[69]

A comparable debate developed around the custom of *mawlīd*: celebratory gatherings held on the death-anniversary of the Prophet, which were maligned by Dēōbandīs. The *tazkira* includes an extensive written correspondence dated 1897 between Gangōhī and Ashraf 'Alī Thānawī: a *shāykh* of the next generation, and ultimately, a figure of comparably towering influence within the Dēōband movement. In this exchange of letters, Thānawī confesses to having offered *zikr* (meditative prayer) before the crowd at some recent *mawlīd* gatherings. While Thānawī in his letters accepted that celebrating *mawlīd* comprised *bid'ah*, he reasoned that reciting *zikr* (itself a meritorious action) at pre-arranged *mawlīd* gatherings was

[67] Ibid, Vol.I, p.58; Vol.II, pp.8-9, 204-205.

[68] Ibid, Vol.II, p.176.

[69] Ibid.

permissible, so long as this did not imply approval of the *mawlīd*s themselves. He justified his act by saying that the large gathering offered an unrivalled opportunity to "speak before and advise thousands of people" and to "correct the[ir] beliefs" through a demonstration of correct prayer.[70] Gangōhī, however, reprimanded Thānawī. He argued that people were attending the *mawlīd* only for "singing and dancing… and to enjoy the gatherings", and "show no respect for true worship and the Sunnah."[71] As such, he continued, Thānawī's performance of *zikr* at a *mawlīd* was "causing others to stray [from the Sunnah], so how can you deem it permissible?"[72] As with visits to graves, Gangōhī was arguing that pious Muslims should take great care to shun even permissible practices if they may unwittingly draw laypersons towards *bid'ah*.

Yet, on the flipside, the *tazkira* also hints at an apparent recognition on Gangōhī's part that there may be advantages to partaking in "popular", if fallacious, customary religious acts, if doing so might allow some improvements to be enacted in public practice. A clear example is a late chapter which deals with popular or superstitious practices (termed "*'amallīyāt*") among Muslims. The *tazkira* indicates the everyday prevalence of customs such as keeping hold of amulets (*ta'wīdhāt*), pictures (*nuqūsh*), threads or written prayers and blessings, in order to seek God's protection or cures from misfortunes.[73] Representing Gangōhī's opinions, Mīrutī castigates these practices as disingenuous, believing that "Shāytān (Satan) attacks from behind the veil of *'amallīyat*, and diverts [Muslims] from their true objectives".[74] However, while the text argues that Gangōhī denigrated these superstitions and tried to avoid them, it also narrates numerous examples of Gangōhī engaging in them. Many pages, for example, document Gangōhī writing prayers on strips of paper and handing them to petitioners, whether for curing illnesses, conquering infertility, or warding off evil spirits. Gangōhī is also depicted tying threads onto the limbs of ailing persons to seek God's

[70] Ibid, Vol.I, pp.116-19. He also notes that reciting *zikr* was a way of dispelling allegations that he was a 'Wahhabi'.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid, pp.127-128.

[73] Ibid, Vol.II, pp.292-305.

[74] Ibid, pp.301-303.

protection for them.[75] The justification given in the text is that "Hazrat [Gangōhī] was able [through these actions] to attract his followers, to provide them with internal tranquillity and comfort, and to earn their affection. He was, thereafter, able to attend to their spiritual correction".[76] In other words, Mīrutī explains that Gangōhī's compassion and wish to guide people towards God led him to participate on occasion in popular customs – accepting that such material objects served as reminders of God for ordinary Muslims – without himself assigning them divine significance. Yet, we see here a tension between Gangōhī's own occasional willingness to engage in *'amallīyāt*, which was justified as a means of attending to the spiritual rectification of lay followers, and his castigation of Thānawī for involvement in the *mawlīd* narrated above, which Thānawī had justified on similar grounds.

A similar contrast between Dēōbandī teachings and normative understandings might be seen in the author's argument about *karāmāt*: "miracles", or inexplicable actions often attributed to leading *shāykh*s, including Gangōhī, by their followers. Mīrutī argues that there are two kinds of *karāmāt*: "spiritual (*ma'anvī*)" miracles involving achieving closeness to God, and "material (*hassī*)" miracles, which are "visible events which break natural laws and appear as miraculous", such as clairvoyance, walking on water or flying.[77] Mīrutī narrates dozens of stories reported to him of Gangōhī's interventions spurring God to enact material miracles such as these. These included curing various followers of fevers, upset stomachs, migraines, blindness, epilepsy and cholera, replenishing the empty purses of poor followers with coins, spurring barren trees to grow dates, cleansing water in a dirty well, and preventing the appearance of bubonic plague in Saharanpur district.[78] However, Mīrutī tempers his argument by saying that Gangōhī's "material *karāmāt*" are less important than his "spiritual *karāmāt*". As he writes, "I do not wish to record his worldly *karāmāt* alongside his spiritual *karāmāt*, because it stands as the lesser to the greater", like a lamp next to the sun. Nevertheless, he says somewhat begrudgingly, "in the service of a complete biography, it is necessary to present some examples of these events."[79]

[75] For many examples, see ibid, pp.298-303.

[76] Ibid, p.292.

[77] Ibid, p.200.

[78] Ibid, pp.223-230, 297-298.

[79] Ibid, vol.I, p.200.

A comparable argument could be made for *kashf*: moments of the *shaykh*'s heightened or supernatural insight, which Gangōhī's followers also attributed to him. Gangōhī's acquaintances had also narrated to Mīrutī various examples of his magical or telepathic knowledge as proof of his closeness to God, including correctly predicting in advance good fortunes for believers, the outcomes of court cases, and the imminent deaths of apparently healthy individuals.[80] However, Mīrutī applies a similar argument to that concerning *karāmāt*: that Gangōhī's "spiritual *kashf*", or his knowledge of God, towers over these tales of apparent clairvoyance. Mīrutī notes that many thousands of followers have heard examples of Gangōhī's magical knowledge, but "compared with his spiritual deliberation and attention to the heart, there is no pleasure to be found in explaining these instances of [magical] *kashf*."[81]

*Tazkira't-al-Rashīd*, therefore, is laden with lessons for the reader concerning permissible forms of religious observance and the avoidance of *bid'ah*. Yet, the text also demonstrates how these debates about appropriate Muslim observance were marked by ongoing negotiation. Gangōhī is presented as an ardent reformer of popular practice, seeking to eliminate heretical practices such as *'urs* or *mawlīd*s; yet, simultaneously, he is portrayed as having to partake in "superstitious" practices to engage followers. Likewise, Mīrutī sometimes seems torn between his pious desire to emphasise Gangōhī's spiritual insights and perfections, and his authorial duty to include dozens of reported stories of worldly miracles and magical insight, which he simultaneously tries to downplay. Despite frequent assertions in literature about the rigidity and certainty of Dēōbandī religious practice, these examples show how *dēōbandīyyat* did not have a single, fixed template, but remained a changing and discursive exercise. Mīrutī's *tazkira* reveals how, in certain cases, Gangōhī, Thānawī and even Mīrutī himself all had to find a balance between propounding proper observance on the one hand, while on the other, accepting the existence of forms of normative practice that could ensure their engagement with a nascent Dēōbandī public.

[80] E.g. ibid, pp.220-221.

[81] Ibid, Vol.II, p.230.

**Lessons [un]learned from 1857**

Most of Mīrutī's lessons for readers on Sufism and religious practice in *Tazkira't-al-Rashīd* have been maintained and furthered by later Dēōbandīs: figures such as Muhammad Zakarīyya and Tāqī 'Usmānī have praised *Tazkira't-al-Rashīd* both for its account of Gangōhī's life and for its guidance on the Sūfī path, the perfection of character, following the Sunnah and other critical teachings. However, one lesson that later Dēōbandīs have largely sought to revise is that concerning Gangōhī's role in the 1857 rebellion.

According to Mīrutī's account, Gangōhī along with Nanaūtawī and Imdād-Ullah took shelter in the latter's lodge in Thana Bhawan during the main spell of fighting in Saharanpur district. Two years later, all three were falsely accused by so-called "troublemakers" of fighting against the British in the battle of Shamli. The "rumour-mongering (*jhūtī-sachī*)" and "allegations and conspiracies (*ilzām-va-bhotān*)" against Gangōhī initially forced him into hiding, but he was ultimately arrested by British officers for alleged participation.[82] Gangōhī denied all charges in court: his only weapon, he told the jury, had been his *tasbīh* (prayer-beads). Ultimately he was jailed, but no evidence was uncovered and after six months he was released.[83] Mīrutī offers no indication in the work that Gangōhī fought against the British Raj, and instead remarks on the "compassionate nature (*raham-i-dil*)" of the British government.[84]

Thereafter, there is no reference in the *tazkira* to Gangōhī or other Dēōbandī scholars engaging in any subversive political activity. Whether due to the realities of colonial rule, or historical inclinations within Chishtī Sufism to retain distance from the state[85], Gangōhī is portrayed as shunning engagement with political matters throughout his life.[86] By contrast,

[82] Ibid, Vol.I, pp.73-79.

[83] Ibid, pp.80-85.

[84] Ibid, p.76.

[85] Raziuddin Aquil, "Music and related practices in Chishti Sufism: celebrations and contestations", *Social Scientist* March-April (2012), pp.21-22.

[86] To give some other examples from the work, Mīrutī later recalls Gangōhī accepting advice from a government inspector to turn unknown individuals who may be "spies" away from his lodge; and also, refusing a donation from Habibullah Khan, Shah of Afghanistan, lest it be

Gangōhī is seen throughout the *tazkira* as willing to engage Muslim government employees should they be genuinely pious, accepting *bay'a* from public inspectors, policemen and tax collectors.[87] This insinuation that Gangōhī kept apart from politics matches the assumptions often made in scholarship that the early Dēōband movement sought to withdraw from matters of government and protect Islamic life and learning from colonial influence.[88]

However, Mīrutī's account of 1857 differs greatly from later recollections about these early Dēōbandīs, who have often been lauded in retrospect as *jihādī* freedom fighters. According to this alternative narrative, Gangōhī, Nanaūtawī and others bravely fought at Shamli in 1857 and laid the foundations of a proto-state under Imdād-Ullah as its prospective *amīr* (leader).[89] Yet, as Metcalf has argued, this narrative of the Dēōbandī *'ulamā*'s participation in the Rebellion only really appears in printed works after around 1920, following the foundation of the nationalist Jamī'at-i-'Ulamā-i-Hind in 1919, and the *'ulamā*'s leadership of the anti-colonial *khilāfat* movement (1919-24).[90] Indeed, this narrative was accentuated especially in *'ulamā*-biographies written just before and soon after Indian independence, during which the *'ulamā*'s alleged leadership during the Rebellion may have played the useful role of confirming Muslim loyalty to the Indian nationalist cause. Muhammad Mīyān (1903-1975), a Dēōbandī *'alīm* and historian who wrote several *'ulamā*-histories in the 1950s-70s, was perhaps the leading example of this interpretation. In his well-known, multi-volume chronicle

misconstrued as evidence of political sympathy. Ibid, Vol.II, pp.171-173. This apparently benign attitude to politics was also reflected in some of his *fatwa*s, in which he refused to describe India as a *dār-al-hārb* (abode of war), which might compel Muslims to oppose the colonial state: Gangōhī, *Kāmil fatāwa-i-Rashīdīyya*, pp.505-506.

[87] Indeed, he even married his daughter to a local government official in the Irrigation Department: ibid, Vol.II, p.337.

[88] Metcalf, *Islamic revival in British India*, passim.

[89] E.g. Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: jihad in South Asia* (Massachusetts, 2008), pp.122-123; Tariq Rahman, *Interpretations of jihad in South Asia: an intellectual history* (Berlin, 2018), pp.142-143. For wider interpretations of the Rebellion as *jihad*, see Ghulām Rasūl Mehr, *1857 kē mujāhid*, passim; Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, *Indian Muslim minorities and the 1857 Rebellion: religion, rebels and jihad* (London, 2017).

[90] Metcalf, *Islamic revival*, pp.82-83.

of the "glorious past" of the Indian *'ulamā* written after independence, he attests to the *'ulamā*'s valiant struggle in 1857. Mīyān even quotes *ad verbatim* Mīrutī's account of Gangōhī's arrest but frames it within a wider account that tells of the *'ulamā*'s clear participation in the uprising, and thus implies Gangōhī's participation.[91]

The differences amongst these accounts of 1857 may reveal generational political differences between earlier (more quietist) affiliates of Dēōband like Mīrutī, and later (more nationalist) Dēōbandī writers. In a later biography of the nationalist and pan-Islamist Dēōbandī figureheads Mahmūd al-Hasan and Husāyn Ahmad Madanī, Muhammad Mīyān refers to Mīrutī as having been "politically opposed" to Hasan and Madanī and to the Jamī'at al-'Ulamā-i-Hind of which they were part, revealing the existence of different attitudes among these Dēōbandīs towards the colonial state in the interwar period.[92] *Tazkira't al-Rashīd*, written before the ascendancy of this brand of Muslim nationalism and pan-Islamism, clearly intended to absolve the Dēōband movement's early *shāykh*s from suspicion after 1857; by contrast, later Dēōbandī writers were keener to celebrate those same allegations as markers of legitimacy within the Indian nationalist project.

Later Dēōbandīs have sought actively to justify these discrepancies between accounts, affirming the later interpretation as accurate without criticising Mīrutī. Muhammad Zakarīyya Kāndhlawī, a highly influential twentieth-century Dēōbandī *shāykh* and successor to Gangōhī's lineage, in 1978 wrote a direct response to "critics" of Mīrutī's account (very probably, including Mīyān). Zakarīyya argued that the true events of 1857 (i.e. that Gangōhī, Imdād-Ullah, Nanaūtawī and their supporters had waged *jihād* at Shamli) were well-known to all Dēōbandī affiliates past and present. However, he argues, Mīrutī was writing this *tazkira* in fear of government censorship or retribution, and so he simply described events as they had already been presented to the government by witnesses during Gangōhī's trial. However, Zakarīyya argued, Mīrutī's account never specifically denied Gangōhī's wider involvement in the uprising, and the truth was thus still "clear to see" for the reader, just as a curtain cannot hide the sun behind it.[93] Zakarīyya's apologia, included as an appendix to a

[91] Mīyān, *'Ulamā-i-Hind*, Vol.IV, pp.299-304.

[92] Syed Mohammad Mian, *The prisoners of Malta (Asira'n-e-Malta)* (Delhi, 2005), p.95. Mīyān's original text, of which this is a translation, was published in 1976.

[93] As published in Mīrutī, *Tazkira't al-Rashīd* (Lahore, 1986), pp.617-622.

subsequent edition to the *tazkira*, shows how important the narrative of the '*ulamā*'s role in 1857 has been for later Dēōbandīs as a validation of their commitment to nationalism.

## Conclusions

Looking at one of the genre's most influential examples, this paper has explored how the *tazkira*, a staple South Asian Muslim literary genre for writing life-history, was increasingly employed in the twentieth century to record the lives of the *'ulamā*. Insofar as *tazkira*s describe not only their subjects but the times and places in which they lived, these plentiful life-histories of *'ulamā* could be described as a form of *'ulamā*logy: an effort to write Indian Muslim history through the lives of its learned men and position them as its core agents.[94]

Indeed, an understudied facet of modern South Asia's *'ulamā* has been the extent to which these figures, traditionally understood as experts in the traditional Islamic sciences, have themselves engaged in life-writing to safeguard their own corporate entity and legacy. The scholars of religion in modern times have invested great effort in ensuring the production of these life-histories. As shown above, the senior elders of Dēōband took a strong hand in commissioning and promoting *Tazkira't-al-Rashīd*; but in other cases even senior *'ulamā* in this period wrote their own autobiographies or biographies of their own ancestors in effort to secure their own reputations or their families' ongoing relevance.[95] Perhaps the reason for such investment in the *'ulamā* life-history lay in the *'ulamā*'s aspirations to reach out to a wider readership and secure influence among the Muslim 'public' by narrating the lives of key figureheads. Conversely, perhaps this investment reflects the deterioration of the *'ulamā*'s social relevance, and a collective attempt to shore up their reputation in the face of their ongoing marginalisation.

This article has suggested a further reason for the expansion of the *tazkira* genre, which is that these life-histories became important instructive works. More than a historical record, *Tazkira't al-Rashīd* was a didactic document that outlined in detail a holistic vision of the

[94] C.f. Jamal Malik, *Islam in South Asia* (Delhi, 2012), p.61.

[95] For an example, see Justin Jones, 'Khandan-i-Ijtihad: genealogy, history and authority in a household of *'ulama* in modern South Asia', *Modern Asian Studies* 54/4 (2020), pp.1161-1168.

model of piety known as *dēōbandīyyat*. It carried prescriptions for following the Sūfī path, ways of seeking the perfection of self, standards for pledging allegiance to a Sūfī master and following his guidance, and various aspects of religious and social practice. It therefore confirmed an established Sūfī model of leaning on the written lives of past *shāykh*s as sources of self-perfection and guidance for modern followers, which was perpetuated among subsequent generations of Dēōbandīs.

Why did Dēōbandī elders in particular invest so much in the writing of life-histories? Perhaps, the origins of the Dēōband movement in Chishtī Sābrī Sufism and its emphasis on the tutelage of *shāykh*s as indispensable spiritual guides gave Dēōbandīs a particular link with the long-established early-modern *tazkira* tradition grounded in the hagiographies of saints; indeed, as noted throughout this article, this *tazkira* of Gangōhī retained a number of features resonant of the traditional Chishtī Sūfī *tazkira*.[96] In other ways, the Dēōbandī appropriation of the life-history owed not just to the genre's long-standing pedigree, but its utility. One might argue that the Dēōband movement's attempted harmonisation of *sharī'ah* and *tarīqah* as concomitant paths of praxis, and its wish to promote this model for all Muslims, was best communicated by narrating the life-history of a single pious figure who successfully amalgamated both *sharī'ah* and *tarīqah* in his own following of the Sunnah. Perhaps, too, there was the more general emphasis in Islamic reformism in this period towards more temporal, 'this-worldly' forms of Islam that emphasised personal responsibility and striving for correct living, which therefore emphasised the agency of the 'self' as the true vassal of piety.[97]

In common with some other recent scholarship, this article makes a case for refocusing our knowledge of *dēōbandīyyat*. Various established studies have considered the Dēōband movement as a largely corporate or collective enterprise, defined either by its institutions (e.g. its *dar-al-'ulūm*), its intellectual contributions (e.g. its curriculum of learning), or its mass proselytization campaigns (e.g. its preaching and printing networks). Looking to the the

[96] Many aspects of *Tazkira't al-Rashīd* discussed in this paper, such as the compilation of *malfūzāt* (preserved sayings), genealogical tracings and miracle stories, allude strongly to traditional Sūfī *tazkira*s.

[97] Francis Robinson, 'Religious change and the self in Muslim South Asia since 1800', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 20/1 (1997), pp.1-15.

*tazkira*, we see *dēōbandīyyat* from an alternative viewpoint as embodied within the lives of individual *shāykh*s and transmitted within the written records that preserved them. As shown in the introduction, the *tazkira* declared the historical life of Gangōhī to be one of his "enduring good works", and thus the *tazkira*, which meticulously preserved those good deeds for later generations, was classed as one of the life-achievements of Gangōhī himself. Ultimately, the Dēōband movement's "androcentric" worldview in which guidance could only be imparted by a particular *shāykh* to his successors and disciples still carried a "bibliocentric" dimension, in the sense that the lives of key *shāykh*s needed to be recorded in print to cultivate moral excellence in their readers. This fundamental need has ensured the ongoing importance of life-history writings at the heart of the project of Dēōbandī pietism.