

The Excellence of Imam Ahmad Ridha Khan

(My Addition to Imam Zahid al-Kawthari's list of Hanafi Hadith Huffaz and masters in his epistle entitled Fiqhu Ahl al-Iraq wa hadeethuhum)

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Al-Imam Ahmad Ridha Khan al-Kandahari al-Brelvi (d.1921), called “the absolute Shaykh of all teachers” by Al-Shaykh Isma’il al-Makki, “the leader of Hadith masters” by Al-Shaykh Yaseen Ahmad al-Khiyari al-Madani, “the encyclopaedia of all sciences” by Al-Shaykh Ali bin Hassan al-Maliki, “the commander of believers in hadith (ameer al-mu’mineen) of our era” by the pillar of hadith masters Al-Shaykh Wasi Ahmad al-Surti, “a giant Imam and well learned man who is an expert in the sciences” by Al-Shaykh Yusuf al-Nibhani, “the erudite and absolute imam” by the Shafi’i Mufti of Makkah Muhammad Sa’eed bin Muhammad Babusayl, “the well learned erudite, perceptive and gallant pillar” by the Hanafi Mufti of Makkah Abdullah bin Abd al-Rahman al-Siraj, “the scrupulous and conscientious Alim” by the Hanbali Mufti of Makkah Abdullah bin Hameed, “the giant teacher and skilled Imam” by Hanafi Mufti of Makkah also teaching Imam of Masjid al-Haram Muhammad bin Salih, “The fourteenth night moon of glowing sciences...author of many dazzling and shimmering books that light the faces of the deluding ambiguities, and writer of numerous works which illustrate his all-embracing knowledge, breadth of understanding of materials and depth in knowledge-acquaintance. The Imam who left no closed door save he unlocked its padlock and neither any vague issue save he exposed its hidden meanings. Honourable teacher, the well learned, gallant and absolute; my Shaykh and my pillar, the most learned of his era, father of cognitions, exponent of the solid proof, my master and my teacher, Ahmad Ridha Khan” by Abdullah bin al-Imam al-Muhaddith Zaiyni Duhlan al-Makki and he was praised lavishly by his contemporaries from Makkah, Madinah, Egypt, Shaam, Morocco and other countries.[1]

He took hadith from his father Mufti Naqiyy Ali Khan, his major hadith teacher al-Sayyid Aal al-Rasul, the Shafi’i jurist of Makkah Al-Shaykh Zaiyni Duhlan al-Shafi’i, Hanafi Mufti of Makkah Abd al-Rahman al-Siraj and Imam of al-Haram al-Makki al-Shaykh Hussain Jamal al-Layl.

Large crowds of scholars from Makkah and Madinah took hadith from him in 1905. These authorizations (ijazaat) are documented in two major hadith-transmission collections of Imam Ahmad Ridha, al-Ijazaat al-Mateenah and al-Ijazat al-Ridhwiyyah. The first among the scholars to take ijazaha from Imam Ahmad Ridha in hadith all hadiths, successively corroborated chains [musalsalat] and the Sufi pathways [salasil al-Awliya] was the Muhadith of Morocco, famous hadith master and teacher, author of sixty books in hadith sciences and textual corpus, al-Sayyid Abd al-Hayy al-Kitani al-Fasi, may Allah have mercy on him.

Imam Ahmad Ridha combined between all; fiqh and hadith with all of their sub-topics, tasawwuf, aqeedah and liberal arts in his extensively large twelve volume fatawa entitled: al-Ataaya al-Nabawiyyah fi al-Fataawa al-Ridhwiyyah. His works such as Madarij Tabaqat al-Hadeeth, Muneer al-Ayn and al-Nujuwm al-Thawaqib show his mastery in hadith. He commentated on twenty two hadith books which yet remain as manuscripts. See my all-inclusive article on ‘Imam Ahmad Ridha’s

Mastery in Hadith Sciences' for a detailed answer to the following comment in Nuzhat al-Khawahir[2] added by Mauwlanah Ali Miyah al-Nadawi 'he i.e. Imam Ahmad Ridha, had no expertise in hadith and tafseer'. May Allah destroy their injustice, and He Most High alone gives guidance.

Among his major hadith students was Al-Shaykh Al-Muhaddith Dhiya al-Din Ahmad al-Madani. Dhiya al-Din Ahmad al-Madani was of Indian origin and studied under Imam Ahmad Ridha for numerous years. Upon receiving absolute permission [ijazah] to teach hadith and other sciences, Imam Ahmad ordered him to settle in the holy sanctuary of Madinah where he dwelled for over twenty five years [confirm or 40?]. Many scholars took hadith from him from among all was the prominent Sayyid from the Idrisi sharifs, teacher of the Mekkan Haram, Sayyid Alawi son of Sayyid Abbas al-Maliki, May Allah have mercy on them all. See GF Haddad.

The late Sayyid, Muhammad son of Alawi Maliki, student of Sayyid Muhammad Amin Qutbi and Sayyid Hassan Fad'aaq, had strong connections with Shaykh Dhiya al-Din Ahmad al-Madani. Sayyid Muhammad visited Dhiya al-Din's abode many times and Shaykh Dhiya was his mentor in compiling a book on the Sunni doctrine and beliefs to preserve the beliefs of the people of Haramain. Dhiya al-Din Ahmad once told Sayyid Muhammad that he saw Sayyiduna Ameer Hamzah, the Prophet's uncle, behind him with two swords to defend him and support him, hence he must write a book in which he brings together the beliefs of the earlier scholars of the Haramain and those before the Wahabi heresy in the Hijaz. Whereupon, Sayyid Muhammad wrote his first book 'al-Dhakah'ir al-Muhammadiyah' [The Muhammadan Treasures] which received great popularity and was the beginning point of a new era between the Saudi government and the Maliki family.[3]

Suffice to mention his connections with the students of Imam Ahmad Ridha and high esteem for him, Sayyid Muhammad al-Maliki narrates hadith from al-Shaykh Mustafa son of Imam Ahmad Ridha, the Hanafi jurist, and mentions him among his teachers in his teachers and hadith chains compilation entitled: 'al-Iqd al-Fareed al-Mukhtasar min al-Athbat wa al-Asaneed' [The Peerless Necklace, epitome of transmission collections and hadith pathways]. [4]

Sayyidi Fakhrudin Owaisi told me that Sayyid Muhammad Alawi al-Maliki studied Imam Ahmad Ridha's legendary book on the vastness of the Muhammadan Knowledge entitled: 'al-Dawlah al-Makkiyah bi al-Maadah al-Ghabiyyah' under Shaykh Mustafa during his visit in the Hijaz.

[1] See al-Dawlah al-Makkiyah.

[2] Nuzhat al-Khawahir is an excellent biographies collection of the Indian scholars by Sayyid Abd al-Hayy al-Lakhnawi al-Hasani. It is acclaimed in the Arab world and held with high esteem among Arab sages. Suffice to say it is among major references in universities and colleges yet consists of interpolations and false statements. These are additions by Mawlana Ali Miyah al-Nadawi and not the views of Sayyid Abd al-Hayy, May Allah have mercy on him, so beware of this.

[3] This is what Sayyidi Fakhrudin Owaisi told me, a student of Sayyid Alawi Maliki who accompanied him for seven years and resided in the company of many Medinian Shuyukh for eighteen years. May Allah preserve him.

[4] Al-Iqd al-Fareed, p16, 1st Ed. Matba'ah Kulliyat al-Da'wah al-Islamiyah, Beirut