



## SCHOLARLY LEGACY AND INTELLECTUAL FORMATION OF MUHAMMAD ABID AL-SINDI: A BIOGRAPHICAL AND ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT

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**Abstract.** *This article explores the intellectual trajectory and scholarly contributions of Muhammad Abid al-Sindi al-Ayyubi, a 13th-century AH hadith master and jurist whose genealogy traces back to the Companion Abu Ayyub al-Ansari. Attention is given to the formative role of his family environment, the breadth of disciplines he mastered, and the enduring significance of his written legacy. His network of teachers and students – spread across the Hijaz, Yemen, Egypt, and India – is examined to situate him within the broader scholarly tradition of his era. The article further highlights his personal qualities of resilience and moral integrity through documented episodes from his life, and surveys his extensive bibliography across hadith, fiqh, Sufism, grammar, medicine, and Quranic commentary.*

**Keywords:** *Muhammad Abid al-Sindi, Sindh, hadith sciences, scholarly networks, Islamic jurisprudence, sanad, narrators, jarh wa ta'dil, Ottoman era, Medina.*

### INTRODUCTION

Among the scholars who emerged from the Indian subcontinent and achieved distinction in the central lands of Islam during the early 19th century, Muhammad Abid ibn Ahmad Ali ibn Muhammad al-Sindi al-Ayyubi occupies a prominent position. Born in the village of Siyvon – located in the Sind region corresponding to present-day Pakistan – around 1190/1776, he descended from the Companion Abu Ayyub al-Ansari (Said

Bektosh, 1987:61). The precise date of his birth is not recorded in most biographical sources; however, Imam al-Shawkani, who had close personal contact with al-Sindi over an extended period and reportedly asked him about his year of birth, places the date at approximately 1190/1776 – a figure considered the most credible by later biographers.

Siyvon at that time fell under the jurisdiction of the Tattah principality, which served as the political and cultural capital of the Sind region. Islam had reached this territory toward the end of the first Islamic century, and it subsequently produced numerous scholars whose influence extended across the Muslim world. Al-Sindi was one such figure: his contemporaries described him as «the delight of Imam Abu Hanifa’s eye, a rare gem whose words illuminate the beholder, and a treasury of expertise in intricate legal questions» (Mahmud ibn Abdallah al-Alusi, 1982:202).

## **MAIN PART**

### **Early formation: family, education, and intellectual environment**

Al-Sindi’s early intellectual formation took place within a household distinguished by religious learning. He received his initial instruction successively from his grandfather, Shaykh Muhammad Murad al-Ansari, his father, Shaykh Ahmad Ali al-Ansari, and his paternal uncle, Shaykh Muhammad Husayn al-Ansari. This domestic scholarly milieu shaped his orientation toward serious academic engagement from a young age – an inclination his biographers consistently note as setting him apart from his peers (Sayyid Abd al-Majid al-Ghawri, 2015:4). His uncle proved to be his most formative early teacher, from whom he acquired training in logic, hadith, and the medical sciences. His proficiency in medicine eventually led to his appointment as the personal physician of Mansur al-Sindi, the governor of Sanaa, a position he held from 1208/1793 to 1213/1798 (Said Bektosh, 1987:230).

A notable documentary record of his personal life is a waqf deed he composed upon completing his commentary on Sahih Muslim, in which he endowed the work for his own use during his lifetime and thereafter for the descendants of Arshad – a branch of his grandfather’s lineage – and in their absence for the scholars of the village of Mataro in Sind. The absence of mention of direct offspring in this document has led biographers to conclude that al-Sindi left no children.

### **Scholarly travels and principal teachers**

The defining feature of al-Sindi's intellectual biography is his sustained commitment to traveling in pursuit of knowledge. Having left Sind at an early age, he journeyed to the Hijaz, Yemen, and eventually Egypt, drawing from the scholarship of each region. His account of the Yemeni scholars whom he encountered reveals the depth of his admiration: he wrote in several of his works that despite visiting many lands, he never encountered scholars who investigated hadith with the same rigour and acted upon transmitted rulings with the same thoroughness as the scholars of Sanaa (Said Bektosh, 1987:230). He spent most of his time in Yemen between the two provinces of Zabid and al-Hudayda.

Among his most consequential teachers, the following deserve particular mention:

**Shaykh Salih ibn Muhammad al-Umari al-Fullani (d. 1218/1804).** A leading authority of his era in fiqh, hadith, and the elevated chains of hadith transmission, al-Fullani was among the most influential figures in al-Sindi's formation. From him, al-Sindi studied both jurisprudence and the hadith sciences. Al-Fullani is also the author of the notable works *Qatf al-thamar fi asanid al-musannafat* and *Iyqaz himam al-absar* (Abd al-Hayy ibn Abd al-Karim al-Kattani, 2003:901).

**Shaykh Siddiq ibn Ali al-Mizjaji al-Hanafi (d. 1209/1795).** A recognized authority in kalam, fiqh, logic, and hadith in Yemen, al-Mizjaji transmitted to al-Sindi comprehensive training across these disciplines (Imam al-Shawkani, 2006:332).

**Shaykh Abd Allah ibn Muhammad ibn Ismail al-San'ani (d. 1242/1827).** The son of Amir al-San'ani, author of *Subul al-salam sharh bulugh al-maram*, this scholar granted al-Sindi a specific license (ijaza khassa) for transmission of the work *Udda hashiyatu sharh al-'umda*.

**Shaykh Muhammad ibn Ali al-Shawkani (d. 1250/1835).** Author of numerous works, including the celebrated *Nayl al-awtar* in jurisprudence, al-Shawkani was al-Sindi's most eminent teacher and described him as his closest disciple, noting his mastery across all fields of knowledge (Said Bektosh, 1987:230). Al-Shawkani's own assessment of al-Sindi – recorded in *al-Badr al-tali'* – praises his rapid comprehension, his command of Arabic grammar, Hanafi jurisprudence, and the principles of legal methodology, as well as his expertise in medicine (Imam al-Shawkani, 2006:227).

**Shaykh Muhammad Zaman al-Thani ibn Mahbub al-Samad al-Sindi (d. 1247/1832).** A leading scholar and spiritual authority of Sind, from whom al-Sindi received instruction in the path of spiritual discipline (suluk) and ethical conduct (adab).

In 1232/1817, al-Sindi undertook a journey to Egypt, where he spent approximately one year in direct scholarly exchange with the learned community of Cairo. During this visit, Muhammad Ali Pasha – the Ottoman governor of Egypt – who had been informed of al-Sindi’s scholarly distinction, personally paid him visits in recognition of his stature. The mobility that characterized al-Sindi’s career was facilitated in part by the political coherence of the Ottoman Empire, which encompassed the major centers of Islamic learning within a single administrative framework and thus allowed scholars to travel between them without significant impediment (Said Bektosh, 1987:280).

### **Pedagogical activity and principal students**

Al-Sindi’s commitment to transmitting knowledge was as intense as his pursuit of it. He is reported to have copied, within a span of two hundred days, the six canonical hadith collections – *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, *Sunan al-Nasa’i*, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, and *al-Muwatta’* – as well as *Fath al-Bari* and *Majma’ al-zawa’id* (Taqiyuddin al-Nadawi, 2012:16). His student al-Khatib Sayyid Abu Jiyda ibn Abd al-Kabir al-Fasi recorded in his work *al-Naharir* that their shaykh lectured through and explained all six canonical collections within six months – a pace that later biographers characterized as exceptional even by the standards of pre-modern scholars (Abd al-Hayy ibn Abd al-Karim al-Kattani, 2003:722).

His teaching was not confined to hadith. He also gave instruction in Quranic commentary and jurisprudence, as attested by his own note in the conclusion of his jurisprudential compendium that he would lecture from that text to his students.

Among his most distinguished students were the following:

**Shaykh Qadi Irtada Ali Khan ibn Ahmad al-Umari al-Hindi (d. 1270/1854).** A jurist, hadith scholar, and judge who authored the celebrated *Madarij al-isnad* in hadith studies – a work he completed specifically after receiving al-Sindi’s authorization.

**Shaykh Jamal al-Din ibn Abd Allah al-Makki (d. 1284/1868).** A jurist, hadith transmitter, and Quranic commentator who served as the Hanafi mufti of Mecca in his era, and authored the well-known juridical compendium *al-Fatawa al-Jamaliyya*.

**Shaykh Hasan ibn Ahmad al-Zamadi (d. 1289/1872).** A hafiz, judge, and historian who accompanied al-Sindi on journeys through Yemen, Mecca, and Medina, and authored works on Quranic recitation including *'Uqud al-durar* and *Hada'iq al-zuhr*.

**Shaykh 'Arif Allah ibn Hikmat Allah al-Turki (d. 1275/1859), known as Arif Hikmat.** He served as the Shaykh al-Islam of Istanbul under the Ottoman state and established the endowed library in Medina that still bears his name. He is regarded as one of al-Sindi's most intellectually accomplished students.

The breadth of al-Sindi's student network, spanning India, the Hijaz, Yemen, and Ottoman centers, reflects the geographic reach of his scholarly influence. His student Shaykh Abd al-Rahman ibn Mansur offered a concise characterization of his teacher: «He was possessed of the most scrupulous modesty, firmness of purpose, and patient endurance in the face of adversity» (Abd al-Rahman ibn Mansur, 2003:52).

### **Resilience in the face of adversity: an illustrative episode**

The biographical sources document a remarkable episode that illustrates al-Sindi's capacity for restraint under persecution. In the city of al-Hudayda in Yemen, the local qadi – a follower of the Zaydi school – ordered the muezzins to substitute the phrase *hayya 'ala khayr al-'amal* for *al-salatu khayrun min al-nawm* in the dawn call to prayer, invoking a narration in Imam Malik's *al-Muwatta'* in support of this practice. When the Sunni scholars refused to comply, the qadi arrested forty Hanafi scholars, placing them in chains. Al-Sindi was among those imprisoned and was singled out for physical punishment before being expelled from the city, with a public pronouncement that his blood and property were permissible (**Muhammad Abid al-Sindi, 2013:432**). Despite the severity of this treatment, al-Sindi's biographers note that he recorded the episode with composure and without expressing personal hostility toward his persecutor – a restraint that his contemporaries regarded as evidence of the elevated ethical character he had cultivated.

### **Written legacy: scope and thematic range**

Al-Sindi produced works across an unusually broad range of Islamic disciplines. The following survey organizes his output by field. A significant portion of his writings remains in manuscript, held in libraries including the Azhariyya collection in Cairo; his jurisprudential compendium *Tawali' al-anwar* alone is estimated by researchers who have examined the manuscript to extend to approximately fifty to sixty volumes (Said Bektosh, 1987:215).

**Jurisprudence and legal methodology (fiqh and usul al-fiqh):** (1) *Tawali' al-anwar sharh durr al-mukhtar*, his magnum opus, composed in Medina toward the end of his life; (2) *Abhas fi masa'il al-thalatha*; (3) *Risala fi ikhraj zakat al-habb bi-l-qiyma*; (4) *Ilzam 'askar al-Islam bi-l-iqtisar 'ala l-qalansuwa al-ta'atan li-l-imam*; (5) *Taghayyur al-raghibfi tajdid al-waqf al-kharib*; (6) *Hazz al-awfar li-man ataqsa sa'ima fi l-safar*; (7) *Risala fi hukm it'am al-ta'am fi munasabat al-farah aw al-tarah*; (8) *Khayr al-'amm fi ahkam al-hammam*; (9) *Shifa' qalb kull sa'il fi jawaz man tasamma bi-'Abd al-Nabi wa-'Abd al-Rasul*; (10) *Ghunyal al-zakiyy fi mas'alat al-wasiyy*; (11) *Waqf al-jamil wa-ibana al-farq bayna ta'liq al-tazwij wa-ta'liq al-wakil*; (12) *Kaff al-amani 'an sama' al-aghani*; (13) *Manal al-raja' fi shurut al-istinja'*.

**Sufism and spiritual doctrine:** (14) *Risala fi karamat al-awliya' wa-l-tasdiq biha*; (15) *Risala fi taqbil sahaba yad Rasul Allah wa-ra'sihi al-sharif wa-hukm al-taqbil 'ummatan*; (16) *Risala fi l-tawassul wa-anwa'ih wa-ahkamih*.

**Hadith and hadith commentary:** (17) *Minhat al-Bari fi jam' riwayat Sahih al-Bukhari*; (18) *Tartib musnad Imam Abi Hanifa*; (19) *Mawahib al-latifa fi sharh musnad Abi Hanifa*; (20) *Tartib musnad Imam al-Shafi'i*; (21) *Mu'tamad al-alma'i al-muhadhdhab fi hall musnad al-imam al-Shafi'i murattab*; (22) *Sharh taysir al-wusul*; (23) *Sharh Bulugh al-maram*; (24) *Kashf al-libas 'amma rawahu Ibn 'Abbas mushafahan 'an Sayyid al-nas*; (25) *Ijaz al-alfaz li-'ianat al-huffaz*; (26) *Sulafat al-alfaz fi masalik al-huffaz*; (27) *Majalis al-abrar*.

**Hadith terminology (mustalah al-hadith):** (28) *Sharh alfiyyat al-Suyuti fi l-mustalah*; (29) *Hasr al-sharid min asanid Muhammad Abid*; (30) *Rawdal al-nazirin fi akhbar al-salihin*.

**Arabic grammar and morphology:** (31) *Manahij al-sarfiyyin*.

**Medical sciences:** (32) *Fakk al-mihna bi-mu'alajat al-huqna*; (33) *Nafi' al-khalq fi l-tibb*.

**Quranic commentary:** (34) *Sharh 'ala tafsir al-Baydawi* – left incomplete at the time of his death.

### Contemporary reception and scholarly assessments

The scholarly community that interacted with al-Sindi in his lifetime was consistent in recognizing his exceptional standing. Ibrahim ibn Abd Allah al-Husayy, who wrote an endorsement for *Minhat al-Bari*, described al-Sindi as «the guardian of the Prophetic

Sunnah» and recalled that during the pilgrimage of 1216/1801, Imam Salih Muhammad al-Fullani – who served as the imam of the two sanctuaries – after observing al-Sindi's dedication to hadith, singled him out for a special transmission license, even though al-Sindi was only around 26 years old at the time (Said Bektosh, 1987:280).

Abd Allah ibn Abd al-Rahman Siraj al-Hanafi, who served as the head of Mecca's scholarly community, wrote in his endorsement of *Tawali' al-anwar*: «Al-Sindi is the seal of the verifying scholars, the erudite authority of his era, the reference point of researchers, the pride of the learned community, a consummate teacher, a great jurist, and a master of hadith» (Said Bektosh, 1987:151).

The hadith scholar Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Sanbawi, writing in his endorsement of *Minhat al-Bari*, observed: «Beyond doubt, the author of this work has produced the most excellent contribution in its subject, leaving nothing unaddressed. He has sailed the divine sea and illuminated lordly knowledge – this eternally praised and devout Muhammad Abid al-Sindi» (Abd al-Hayy ibn Abd al-Karim al-Kattani, 2003:736).

Shaykh Muhammad Sabir, a contemporary, wrote in his *Qawl al-sadid*: «Shaykh Muhammad Abid al-Sindi was a sea in his knowledge of the Quran and hadith, and an ocean in his command of the opinions of the jurists» (Said Bektosh, 1987:159).

The celebrated Quranic commentator Shihab al-Din Mahmud ibn Abd Allah al-Alusi, author of *Ruh al-ma'ani*, characterized al-Sindi as «the author of numerous books, the delight of Imam Abu Hanifa's eye, a rare gem whose words illuminate the beholder, and a treasury of mastery in subtle questions» (Mahmud ibn Abdallah al-Alusi, 1982:202).

### **Political and historical context of his era**

Al-Sindi's career unfolded against the backdrop of the late Ottoman period, during which five sultans held power: Sultan Abd al-Hamid I (r. 1187–1203 AH) (Muhammad Ali Mubhiy, 1998:47), Sultan Selim III (r. 1203–1223 AH) (Shaykh Abd al-Salam al-'Isawi, 2003:184), Sultan Mustafa IV (r. 1222–1223 AH) (Shaykh Mukhtar Dira, 2011:218), Sultan Mahmud II (r. 1223–1255 AH) (Shaykh Mahmud Abu Ra's, 1987:312), and Sultan Abd al-Majid (r. 1255–1277 AH) (Shaykh Mukhtar Dira, 2011:227). The political unity of the Ottoman state facilitated al-Sindi's travels, allowing movement between Sind, Yemen, Egypt, and the Hijaz within a single political framework. The active patronage

of Muhammad Ali Pasha – who valued and honored al-Sindi and ultimately appointed him head of the scholars of Medina – created a stable institutional environment for his later scholarly productivity (Abd al-Rahman ibn Mansur, 2003:231).

During his time in the Hijaz, al-Sindi was also contemporary with several amirs of Mecca, including Sharif Sarwar ibn Musa'id al-Husayni (d. 1202/1787) (Shaykh Abd al-Salam al-'Isawi, 2003:188), Sharif Abd al-Mu'in ibn Musa'id al-Husayni, Sharif Ghalib ibn Musa'id al-Husayni – who governed Mecca from 1204/1789 to 1231/1815 and resisted the Saudi advance into the Hijaz (Shaykh Mahmud Abu Ra's, 1987:288) – followed by the three rulers of the House of Saud: Imam Abd al-'Aziz ibn Muhammad ibn Saud, Imam Saud ibn Abd al-'Aziz, and Imam Abd Allah ibn Saud. Despite these political upheavals, the scholarly environment of the two sanctuaries remained sufficiently stable to support al-Sindi's continued teaching and writing.

## CONCLUSION

Muhammad Abid al-Sindi's life and scholarly legacy offer a compelling case study in the formation, mobility, and institutional integration of an Islamic scholar in the late early modern period. His trajectory – from a learned household in Sind to a position of scholarly leadership in Medina – reflects the continued vitality of pan-Islamic scholarly networks at a time of significant political transformation. The unanimous admiration he commanded from contemporaries across juridical schools and geographical regions attests to the breadth and depth of his competence. His simultaneous mastery of hadith and fiqh, rarely achieved in combination at the level of independent scholarly authority, placed him in a category that even the biographers of pre-modern scholars considered exceptional.

His final years in Medina – where he settled in 1244/1828, served as head of the scholarly community, composed his most substantial jurisprudential work, and died on a date in Rabi' al-Awwal of 1257/November 1841 – represent the culmination of a life oriented entirely toward the acquisition and transmission of religious knowledge (Taqiyuddin al-Nadawi, 2012:19). He was buried in the cemetery of Baqi', near the dome of 'Uthman ibn 'Affan. The continuing inaccessibility of much of his manuscript legacy, particularly the large jurisprudential compendium preserved in the Azhariyya library, means that a full critical assessment of his contribution remains a task for future scholarship.

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