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Exploring Qāsim Nānotwī's Engagement with the Akbarian Tradition: Interpreting *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*

This paper proposes to delve into the profound legacy of the Akbarian tradition, an intellectual tradition rooted in the works of Ibn 'Arabī, which extensively contemplates the central doctrine of *tawḥīd* (the oneness of God) and has exerted a lasting influence on subsequent Islamic theological discourse. However, the reception of this tradition within Muslim scholarship has engendered multifarious responses, sparking contentious debates primarily revolving around the perceived incompatibility of distinguishing between the Creator and the created. These ongoing debates have seen scholars either championing Ibn 'Arabī as the "The Greatest Saint" (Shaykh al-Akbar) or denouncing him as a heretic.

Within this context, Qāsim Nānotwī, a pivotal figure in the formation of the Deobandi school of thought, emerges as a noteworthy scholar who engages with the Akbarian tradition. His scholarly pursuits are steeped in the *kalām* tradition, where he seeks to reconcile apparent theological inconsistencies in revealed texts, the Quran and hadith literature, employing the methodology of *burhān* (demonstrative logical knowledge) while also incorporating a mystical perspective.

Nānotwī's writings unveil not only his profound reverence for Ibn 'Arabī but also his intimate familiarity with the conceptual paradigms of the Akbarian tradition. It is this reverence for Ibn 'Arabī that motivates Nānotwī to offer a rejoinder to prevalent misconceptions surrounding the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (oneness of being) and to clarify its differentiation from *waḥdat al-mawjūd* (oneness of existents).

This presentation aims to explore Nānotwī's writings, not only in terms of his comprehension of *waḥdat al-wujūd* but also in his innovative use of this concept to establish the existence of God, elucidating how all facets of creation are inherently ontologically dependent on their Creator and derive their reality from the Divine existence. As a scholar hailing from the Indian subcontinent during the late Mughal and early British Raj era, this paper endeavours to illuminate the interpretation and integration of the Akbarian tradition within the corpus of Sunni Muslim literature, particularly through the lens of one of the founding figures of the Deoband school of thought.



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Shazad Khan currently serves as an English for Academic Purposes Teaching Fellow at the University of Birmingham. He is also doctoral researcher, pursuing a PhD in Islamic Theology, where his research is based on the rational theology of Qasim Nanotwi. Shazad is a graduate of an Islamic seminary where he studied traditional Islamic Sciences. He holds a B.A. (Hons) in Applied Theological Studies from the University of Birmingham; an MA in Sociology from the University of Warwick; an MA in Academic Practice from Birmingham City University, and is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. His research interests include *kalam* theology, Sufism and ethics.