

AN OVERVIEW OF 'ABD AL-WAHHAB AL-SHA'RANI'S BIOGRAPHY AND THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT

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Abstract

This study explores the intellectual and theological contributions of 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī (d. 973/1565), a towering figure in post-Mamluk Egypt who bridged the realms of Sufism, Sunni orthodoxy, and legal scholarship. Moving beyond conventional portrayals of al-Sha'rānī as merely a Sufi or jurist, the research highlights his role as a serious theologian. Through a critical analysis of his key works, *al-Yawāqūt wa al-Jawāhir fī Bayān 'Aqā'id al-Akābir* and *al-Qawā'id al-Kashfiyyah al-Muwaddiḥah li Ma'ānī al-Ṣifāt al-Ilāhiyyah*, the article demonstrates al-Sha'rānī's innovative synthesis of Ash'arī-Māturīdī theology with spiritual insight. His theology articulates a delicate balance between *tanzīh* (divine transcendence) and *tafwīd* (textual fidelity), addressing complex issues such as the ambiguous Qur'anic verses, anthropomorphism, divine attributes, and concepts like *ḥulūl*, *ittiḥād*, and *waḥdat al-wujūd*. The study argues that al-Sha'rānī's theological architecture not only reaffirmed Sunni orthodoxy but offered a compassionate intellectual framework capable of engaging both elite and popular religiosity. By situating al-Sha'rānī within the broader canon of Sunni thought, this work calls for renewed scholarly attention to his contributions, particularly regarding the integration of theology, law, and mysticism in early modern Islam.

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Khulasah

Kajian ini meneliti sumbangan intelektual dan teologi 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī (w. 973H/1565M), seorang tokoh terkemuka dalam era pasca-Mamluk di Mesir yang merentasi bidang tasawuf, ortodoksi Sunni, dan keilmuan fiqh. Berbeza daripada gambaran konvensional yang sering memosisikan al-Sha'rānī sebagai sekadar seorang sufi atau ahli fikah, kajian ini menonjolkan peranannya sebagai seorang ahli teologi yang serius. Melalui analisis kritikal terhadap karya-karya utamanya iaitu *al-Yawāqīt wa al-Jawāhir fī Bayān 'Aqā'id al-Akābir* dan *al-Qawā'id al-Kashfiyyah al-Muwaddīhah li Ma'ānī al-Ṣifāt al-Ilāhiyyah*, artikel ini membuktikan usaha inovatif al-Sha'rānī dalam menyatukan teologi Ash'arī-Māturīdī dengan dimensi kerohanian. Teologi beliau menampilkan keseimbangan halus antara *tanzīh* (menyucikan Allah SWT daripada penyerupaan dengan makhluk) dan *tafwīd* (mentakwil secara ijmal dan memasrahkan makna sebenar kepada Allah SWT tanpa menentukan makna lain), khususnya dalam menangani persoalan rumit seperti ayat-ayat *mutashābihāt*, antropomorfisme, sifat-sifat Ketuhanan, serta konsep seperti *hulūl*, *ittiḥād*, dan *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Kajian ini berhujah bahawa kerangka teologi al-Sha'rānī bukan sahaja memperkukuh ortodoksi Sunni, malah menawarkan kerangka intelektual penuh ihsan yang mampu mendekati golongan ilmuwan mahupun masyarakat awam. Dengan meletakkan al-Sha'rānī dalam kanun pemikiran Sunni yang lebih luas, kajian ini menggesa agar perhatian ilmiah yang baharu diberikan terhadap sumbangan beliau, khususnya dalam mengintegrasikan teologi, fikah dan tasawuf dalam Islam pada zaman awal kemodenan.

Kata kunci: 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī; Biografi; Pemikiran akidah; Ash'arī-Māturīdī.

Introduction

The study of 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī (d. 973/1565)¹ offers a fertile vantage point for examining the intellectual and spiritual dynamics of post-Mamluk Egypt, particularly as they pertain to the synthesis of Sufism and normative Sunni theology. As a prolific writer, legal scholar, Sufi theorist, and institutional reformer, al-Sha'rānī occupies a liminal space between tradition and reform, law and mysticism, textual authority and spiritual inspiration.

Recent scholarly research on 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī focuses on his mystical philosophy, legal harmonisation across Sunni schools, and social theory. Scholars study how his writings bridge the gap between elite and public Sufi practices, as well as how he dealt with legalism, politics, and spiritual authority in the early modern Islamic world. However, there is little modern study (post-2010) that focuses entirely on him², but several pertinent recent publications investigate related themes in broader studies of Islamic mysticism and early Ottoman Egypt. Yet these valuable contributions, while illuminating, have inadvertently neglected his theological architecture; his discourse on God, prophethood, and the Hereafter, the ambiguous verses of Qur'an and the notion of *ḥulūl* (incarnation), *ittiḥād* (union), and *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the Unity of Being).

¹ The author acknowledges Assoc. Prof. Dr. Muhammad Khairi Mahyuddin (Islamic Science University of Malaysia, USIM) for introducing him to the thought of 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha'rānī during undergraduate study, and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Megawati Moris (International Islamic University Malaysia, IIUM) for supervising his Master dissertation entitled "'Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha'rānī's Synthesis of the Ahl al-Fikr and Ahl al-Kashf on Ilāhiyyāt."

² See Mohamad Razif bin Mohamad Fuad, "'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī's Synthesis of The Ahl al-Fikr and Ahl al-Kashf on Ilāhiyyah,'" (MA diss., International Islamic University Malaysia, 2019), 10-15.

This study differs from previous research by focusing on al-Sha'rānī as a theologian rather than just a Sufi or jurist. This study aims to illuminate his intellectual biography and the systematic contours of his theological thought through a critical analysis of his key theological texts, *al-Yawāqūt wa al-Jawāhīr fī Bayān 'Aqā'id al-Akābir* and *al-Qawā'id al-Kashfiyyah al-Muwaddīhah li Ma'ānī al-Ṣifāt al-Ilāhiyyah*. In doing so, the researcher contends that al-Sha'rānī offers not merely a reiteration of inherited Ash'arī-Māturīdī positions, but an innovative re-articulation of classical theology that attempts to mediate between textual fidelity and rational coherence, between inherited doctrine and popular piety.

This article seeks to answer two critical questions. First, how the development of al-Sha'rānī's theological outlook was influenced by his biography, and how his work addresses important ideas about God, prophethood, and the Hereafter, especially considering the ambiguous Qur'anic verses (*mutashābihāt*) and contentious ideas like *ḥulūl* (incarnation), *ittiḥād* (union), and *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being). By addressing these questions, this research aspires to reposition al-Sha'rānī not merely as a jurist-Sufi or social critic, but as a serious theological thinker whose contributions merit reintegration into the canon of Sunni intellectual history.

His Biography

i. Name and Lineage

His full name is 'Abd al-Wahhāb ibn Aḥmad ibn 'Alī al-Ḥanafī al-Sha'rānī, also known as 'Abd al-Wahhāb ibn Aḥmad ibn Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī al-Anṣārī ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Zarfā³ ibn Mūsā ibn al-Sulṭān Aḥmad al-Zughlī ibn al-Sulṭān Sa'īd ibn al-Sulṭān Fāshīn ibn al-

³ 'Alī Pāshā Mubārak, *al-Khiṭaṭ al-Tawfīqīyah li Miṣr al-Qāhīrah* (Cairo: Al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-'Āmmah li al-Kitāb, 1969), 14: 109.

Sultān Muḥayya ibn al-Sultān Zarqā ibn al-Sultān Rayyān ibn al-Sultān Muḥammad ibn al-Sultān Mūsā ibn al-Sayyid Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīyyah, the son of Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.⁴

'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī was born according to the most reliable reports on the 27th of the blessed month of Ramaḍān in the year 898 AH⁵, in the house of his maternal grandfather in the village of Qalqanshada, located in the province of al-Qalyūbiyyah, Egypt. Forty days after his birth, he was taken to his father's village, Sāqiyat Abī Sha'rah, from which he derived the name "al-Sha'rānī".⁶

In the year 907 AH, his father, Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Sha'rānī, passed away. His mother had predeceased his father, and thus he grew up as an orphan. God, however, provided for him through his elder brother, Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Sha'rānī, who undertook his guardianship and upbringing following the death of their

⁴ 'Abd al-Ḥāfiẓ Faraghli 'Alī al-Qarani, *'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī Imām al-Qarn al-Āshir* (Cairo: Al-Hay'ah al-Āmah li al-Kitāb, 1985), 21; 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī, *Laṭā'if al-Minan wa al-Akhlāq* (Damascus: Dār al-Taqwā, 2004), 66; Muḥammad Ibn Abd al-Raḥmān al-Malījī, *Tadhkirah Uli al-Albāb* (Cairo: Dār Jūdah, 2000), 48; Al-Ghizzī, Najm al-Dīn, *al-Kawākib al-Sā'irah bi A'yān al-Mi'ah al-Āshirah*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah), 3: 186.

⁵ Al-Munāwī's account is regarded as the most accurate, as he is recognised as one of the earliest and most prominent disciples of al-Sha'rānī, possessing an intimate knowledge of his teacher's life. In addition to this close relationship, al-Munāwī was himself a distinguished historian and a leading Sufi scholar in the period following al-Sha'rānī. See Al-Kattānī, 'Abd al-Ḥayy. *Fihris al-Fahāris wa al-Athbāt wa Mu'jam al-Ma'ājim wa al-Mashaykhāt wa al-Musalsalāt*, (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1982) 2: 1079; Al-Ziriqlī, Khayr al-Dīn. *Al-A'lām Qāmūs Tarājim li Ashhar al-Rijāl wa al-Nisā' min al-'Arab wa al-Musta'ribīn wa al-Mustashriqīn*. (Lebanon: Dār al-'Ilm li al-Malāyīn, 2002), 4: 180.

⁶ 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah fī Tarājim al-Sādah al-Ṣūfiyyah* (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Azhariyyah li al-Turāth, n.d.), 3: 69; al-Malījī, *Tadhkirah Uli al-Albāb*, 48

father. He proved to be the most attentive to his needs and the most compassionate among his relatives.⁷

ii. Family

'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī was born into the lineage of Banī Zaghlāt, deeply rooted in Sufi spirituality and religious devotion. His father, Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad, was a learned scholar who had studied under some of the most influential teachers of his time, including Ṣāliḥ al-Bulqīnī, Yaḥyā al-Munāwī, and Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī. Al-Sha'rānī recalled how his father once fainted while listening to a Qur'anic verse describing Hell. His father authored several books in *ḥadīth*, grammar, *uṣūl*, and rhetoric, which were later lost. He remained content, saying, "We wrote them for God; attribution is irrelevant."⁸

Al-Sha'rānī had a full brother, 'Abd al-Qādir, who assumed responsibility for his care after their father's death. He was known for his asceticism and generosity to guests, widows, and the poor. His influence on al-Sha'rānī's religious and scholarly development was profound. He died in 956 AH and was buried in Sāqiyat Abī Sha'rah.⁹

Al-Sha'rānī remained celibate until 30, focusing on his studies and unable to afford marriage earlier. He later married 4 wives and had a daughter and a son, 'Abd al-Raḥmān, who became known for his piety and led the Zāwiyyah al-Sha'rāniyyah. 'Abd al-Raḥmān died in 1011 AH, leaving two sons, Ibrāhīm and Yaḥyā.¹⁰ Al-Sha'rānī

⁷ See al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah*, 693; al-Malījī, *Tadhkirah Uli al-Albāb*, 5; Ibn 'Imād al-Hanbalī, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab* (Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1985), 8: 372.

⁸ Al-Qarani, *'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī*, 25-28.

⁹ Al-Qarani, *'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī*, 25-28.

¹⁰ Al-Malījī, *Tadhkirah Uli al-Albāb*, 40-48; Al-Muḥibbī, Muḥammad Amīn. *Khulāṣat al-Athar*, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), 2: 364. An extensive discussion of his family background can be found in the study by Michael Winter, "The Writings of 'Abd al-Wahhāb ash-Sha'rānī: A Sufī Source for the Social and Intellectual Life of

passed away in Cairo in 973 AH / 1565 AD and was laid to rest near his *zāwiyah*, in a tomb that had been built at his request by the granary's custodian.¹¹

iii. Education

As previously mentioned, al-Sha'rānī was raised in his hometown of Sāqiyat Abī Sha'rah, where he memorised the Qur'an during his father's lifetime at the age of eight. Although he was orphaned, signs of brilliance and leadership were evident from an early age. He then memorised classical instructional texts, such as *Matn Abī Shujā'* in Shāfi'ī jurisprudence and the *Ājurrūmiyyah* in Arabic grammar, under the instruction of his brother, Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir, who had taken him under his care. His upbringing was thoroughly immersed in the worship of God and the pursuit of knowledge. As such, he found neither time nor inclination to engage in any worldly trade or craft, be it weaving or otherwise. In the year 911 AH, he moved to Cairo and resided in the Mosque of Abū al-'Abbās al-Ghamrī, devoting himself fully to the pursuit of knowledge and the worship of God.¹²

Al-Sha'rānī devoted himself entirely to learning, constantly engaged in reading, copying, listening, and questioning. He placed great emphasis on memorisation to ensure lasting knowledge.¹³ His life in Cairo was marked

Sixteenth Century Egypt," (PhD. diss., University of California, 1972).

¹¹ Michael Winter, *Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt: Studies in the Writing of 'Abd Wahab al-Sha'rani* (New Jersey: Transaction Publisher, 2009), 55.

¹² Al-Sha'rānī, *Laṭā'if al-Minan wa al-Akhlāq*, 67.

¹³ Al-Sha'rānī memorised key texts across various disciplines, including *Minhāj al-Ṭālibīn*, *Alfiyyah* of Ibn Mālik, *Jam' al-Jawāmi'*, and *al-Shāṭibiyyah*, with remarkable precision, recalling even their ambiguous phrases like Qur'anic verses. He also memorised most of *al-Rawḍ* and reviewed it extensively. His memorised works and commentaries were presented to leading scholars for validation and feedback. See al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah*, 3: 69; al-Malījī,

by ascetic discipline and spiritual effort, including self-imposed practices such as tying a rope around his neck, striking himself, or soaking his clothes in cold water, to stay awake for worship during the last part of the night.¹⁴

During this period, he regularly attended al-Azhar Mosque and studied under its eminent teachers.¹⁵ Al-Sha'rānī also attended the gatherings of blessings upon the Prophet SAW (*majālis al-ṣalāt 'ala al-nabī*) conducted by his spiritual mentor, 'Alī al-Shūnī, at al-Azhar. Al-Shūnī loved him, drew him close, and favoured him. Al-Sha'rānī attended his sessions for 5 years. When the shaykh saw that he had matured in spiritual training at the Ghamrī Mosque, he advised him to establish his own circle there. Al-Sha'rānī followed this guidance, and the gatherings attracted large crowds.¹⁶

His stay at the Ghamrī Mosque extended over approximately seventeen years.¹⁷ He received generous support from the mosque's imam and his family, who welcomed him wholeheartedly.

Al-Sha'rānī studied under numerous leading scholars of his time, all of whom were renowned for their knowledge, piety, sound theological orientation, and

Tadhkirah Uli al-Albāb, 49-51; Ibn 'Imād al-Ḥanbalī, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab*, 8: 372.

¹⁴ 'Al-Malījī, *Tadhkirah Uli al-Albāb*, 49-51; Ibn 'Imād al-Ḥanbalī, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab*, 8: 372.

¹⁵ Al-Sha'rānī studied with several prominent scholars, including Shaykh Shams al-Dīn al-Samanūdī and Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn al-Sanhūrī at al-Azhar, as well as Amīn al-Dīn and Shaykh Shams al-Dīn al-Duwākhilī. He learned various disciplines from them, including fiqh, *ḥadīth*, *tafsīr*, *uṣūl*, grammar, and the Arabic language. See al-Sha'rānī, *Laṭā'if al-Minan wa al-Akhlāq*, 71-72; 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣughrā* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfah al-Dīniyyah, 2005), 51; al-Sha'rānī, *Laṭā'if al-Minan wa al-Akhlāq*, 60-61, 69.

¹⁶ 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Adab, 2001), 2: 800.

¹⁷ 'Alī Pāshā Mubārak, *al-Khiṭaṭ al-Tawfiqīyah*, 14: 109.

commitment to the Prophetic tradition and the methodology of the righteous predecessors. He documented his respect for these scholars extensively, particularly in his biographical compendia: *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, *al-Wuṣṭā*, and *al-Ṣuḡhrā*, in which he listed approximately 50 teachers.¹⁸

iv. His Works and Contributions

Al-Sha'rānī spent years at the Ghamrī Mosque, balancing spiritual devotion and scholarship, during which he authored *al-Mīzān al-Kubrā* to reconcile legal differences among Sunni schools.¹⁹ Due to mistreatment and envy²⁰, he

¹⁸ Among them were: Amīn al-Dīn (*muḥaddith* at the Ghamrī Mosque), Shams al-Dīn al-Duwākhilī, Shams al-Dīn al-Samanūdī, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Masīrī, Nūr al-Dīn al-Maḥallī, Nūr al-Dīn al-Jārḥī (teacher at the Ghamrī Mosque), Nūr al-Dīn al-Sanhūrī (the blind imam of al-Azhar), Mullā 'Alī al-'Ajāmī, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Ṣānī, 'Īsā al-Akhnā'ī, Shams al-Dīn al-Dīrūfī, Shams al-Dīn al-Dīmyāfī (the preacher), Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qastallānī, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Qalyūbī, Nūr al-Dīn ibn Nāṣir, Nūr al-Dīn al-Ashmūnī, Sa'd al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, Burhān al-Dīn al-Qalqashandī, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ḥanbalī, Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ramlī, Burhān al-Dīn al-Maqdīsī, Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Laqqānī, al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī al-Shūnī among others. He read a wide range of texts with them, encompassing various disciplines. In terms of his Sufi training, al-Sha'rānī was initiated into the spiritual path under Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī al-Marṣafī, Muḥammad al-Shināwī, and 'Alī al-Khawwāṣ, among others.

¹⁹ In this work, he reconciled the positions of the *mujtahid* imams, showing that their legal differences did not fall outside the bounds of the Sharī'ah. This book serves as an expansion of *al-Mīzān al-Khaḍrīyah*, which he received from al-Khiḍr (upon him be peace) in a vision while residing in the Ghamrī Mosque, a summarised version of *al-Mīzān*. See 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī, *al-Mīzān al-Khaḍriyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1999), 9.

²⁰ Al-Sha'rānī had left the Ghamrī Mosque due to severe mistreatment by certain individuals there, unknown to its imam, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ghamrī. As his renown grew, envy took root among some attendees to the point that they would beat those who joined his *dhīkr* circles. See al-Sha'rānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, 2: 749; al-Malījī, *Tadhkirah Uli al-Albāb*, 153-155.

left for the Umm Khūnd School around 930 AH, where he dedicated himself to education, spiritual reform, and trained nearly 200 disciples.²¹ There, he wrote *Kashf al-Ghummah 'an Jāmī' al-Ummah*.²² His reputation grew, and he provided care for the blind and needy.²³ Later, Qāḍī Muḥyī al-Dīn built a school that bore al-Sha'rānī's name, becoming a vibrant centre for Islamic sciences, Sufism, and *dhikr*. Residential quarters were added, and he relocated there with his family after spending seven years at the 'Umm Khūnd School.²⁴

According to Brockelmann's findings, al-Sha'rānī authored 67 works.²⁵ Winter suggests the number exceeds

²¹ Al-Sha'rānī, *Laṭā'if al-Minan wa al-Akhlāq*, 153.

²² This work is rich in prophetic traditions, arranged according to chapters of Islamic jurisprudence, making it a valuable reference on the evidence for the legal schools. See 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī, *Kashf al-Ghummah 'an Jāmī' al-Ummah* (Damascus: Dār al-Taqwā, 2008), 9.

²³ Al-Munāwī stated: "There were around 100 blind individuals and others residing in his *zawiyah*. He provided for them in terms of food and clothing. The *zawiyah* resounded like a hive of bees, filled night and day with the sound of a hive of bees, filled night and day with the sound of *dhikr*, Qur'ānic recitation, night prayers, reading, and study." See al-Qarānī, *'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī*, 59; Ṭāha 'Abd al-Bāqī Surūr, *al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmi wa al-Imām al-Sharānī* (Cairo: Dār al-Nahḍah, n.d.), 59; al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah*, 3: 72.

²⁴ The founding of al-Sha'rānī's madrasah stemmed from his intercession on behalf of 'Abd al-Qādir al-Razmakī, who had angered Sultan Selim I and faced execution. After al-Sha'rānī's successful plea for his pardon, al-Razmakī honoured his vow by building a comprehensive institution that included a mosque, Friday prayer space, school, and *zāwiyah*, along with providing meals for its residents. See al-Malījī, *Tadhkirah Uli al-Albāb*, 168.

²⁵ See Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1943-1949), 2: 336-338; Supplement to *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur* (Leiden, 1937-1942), 2: 464-467; Schacht, J. "Al-Sha'rānī", *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), 4: 3180-319; Schmidt, A.E., *'Abd al-Vakhkhāb ash-Sha'rānī i Ego Kniga Razispanykh Zhemchuzhin* (St. Petersburg: n.pb., 1914).

70, most of which are still extant today.²⁶ However, other scholars believe the actual number to be significantly higher. Yūsuf Riḍwān al-Kūd lists 87 works, both published and unpublished.²⁷ Some reports even suggest that he authored over 300 titles²⁸, though such accounts remain imprecise. Al-Malījī managed to identify approximately 110 works attributed to him.²⁹ At the very least, it can be confidently stated that over 80 of his writings have been reliably documented.

His authorship primarily focused on *'aqīdah*, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), and Sufism. As one of the most important proponents of Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī, he also authored several works that either defended or were inspired by Ibn al-'Arabī's thought.³⁰ In addition, al-Sha'rānī wrote a work in the field of medicine entitled *Mukhtaṣar Tadkhirah al-Suwaydī fī al-Ṭibb*. This treatise presents remedies for various illnesses, arranged systematically from head to toe according to the affected area of the body.

Comprehensive Summary of 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī's Theology

i. On God, Prophethood, and The Hereafter

'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī explicitly articulated his creed in his own writings, affirming that every believer should declare their theological position publicly, both as a

²⁶ Winter, *Society and Religion*, 7.

²⁷ 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī, *Minhāj al-Wuṣūl ilā Maqāsid 'Ilm al-Uṣūl*, ed. Yūsuf Riḍwān al-Kūd (Amman: Dār al-Fath, 2013), 186-200.

²⁸ 'Umar bin Riḍā Kaḥḥālāh, *Mu'jam al-Muallifīn* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1987), 6: 218.

²⁹ Al-Malījī, Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn. *Al-Manāqib al-Kubrā*, (Cairo: n.p., 1932), 67-71.

³⁰ Endo Haruka, "A Preliminary Outlook on al-Sha'rānī's Defence of Ibn 'Arabī and the Intellectual Milieu during Early Ottoman Egypt," *Kyoto Bulletin of Islamic Area Studies* 8 (2015): 4-25.

testimony before God and as a means of correction should it contain error. His creed reflects the established doctrines of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*, deeply rooted in classical Ash'arī theology while marked by his personal spiritual insight.³¹

Al-Sha'rānī's creed centres on the absolute oneness of God, who has no partner, equal, or need of assistance. God is the eternal, self-sufficient Creator, beyond time, space, or physical form, and not subject to direction or dimension. While rejecting all anthropomorphism, al-Sha'rānī affirms the Qur'anic description of God's *istiwā'* over the Throne and His visibility in the Hereafter, in a manner befitting His majesty. God's attributes such as knowledge, will, power, life, hearing, sight, and speech are eternal and uncreated, with His knowledge encompassing all things without change or acquisition.

Regarding divine will and decree (*irādah wa qaḍā' wa qadar*), al-Sha'rānī asserts that everything occurs according to God's will. Nothing exists outside of His decree, including belief and disbelief, obedience and sin. He affirms that what God wills happens, and what He does not will occur. Human acts, including guidance and misguidance, fall under God's absolute governance. Yet, this control does not imply injustice, for God's justice is intrinsic to His actions: if He bestows, it is from grace; if He punishes, it is from justice.

God's Speech (*kalam Allāh*) is eternal and uncreated, like His other attributes. He speaks not with organs such as a tongue or vocal cords, just as His sight is not through pupils, and His hearing is not via ears. He spoke to Moses directly, and His words were revealed as scriptures, including the Qur'an, the Torah, the Gospel, the Psalms,

³¹ The theological discourse advanced by al-Sha'rānī closely resembles the treatment of creed (*'aqīdah*) as presented by al-Ghazālī in *Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id*. See al-Ghazālī, *Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id* (Labenon: Dār 'Ālim al-Kutub, 1985).

and other revelations. His speech is without sound or language, yet is real and distinct.

Al-Sha'rānī's creed also affirms the realities of eschatology, including the resurrection, judgment, the questioning in the grave, the scale (*mīzān*), the Bridge (*ṣirāṭ*), the drinking pool (*ḥawḍ*), Paradise and Hell, and intercession. He confirms the permanence of Paradise for the believers and of Hell for disbelievers and hypocrites. He believes in the intercession of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, the angels, and the righteous, and that some sinful believers will enter Hell before being saved by intercession.

Importantly, he upholds that faith at the time of death, such as that of Pharaoh, is invalid and will not be accepted, for it lies outside the period of moral responsibility (*dār al-taklīf*). Thus, he refutes the hope of salvation for those who delayed faith until facing death.

Al-Sha'rānī declares his absolute belief in everything brought by the Prophet SAW, whether known to him or not. He testifies that the Prophet faithfully conveyed God's message, fulfilled his trust, and gave sincere counsel to his community. He accepts the Prophet's final sermon as universal and binding.

He concludes by reaffirming that this creed is not unique to himself but is the creed of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* until the Day of Judgement. It is the faith upon which he lived, and with which he hoped to die. He entreats God to keep him and others firm upon it, to grant them success in the Hereafter, and to admit them among the righteous who are given their books in their right hands and saved from the horrors of that Day.³²

³² 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī, *al-Yawāqūt wa al-Jawāhir* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2012), 1: 18-22; 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī, *al-Qawā'id al-Kashfiyyah* (Damascus: Dār al-Taqwā, 2009), 82-190.

ii. On the Ambiguous Verses of the Qur'an (al-Āyāt al-Mutashābihāt)³³

The Qur'an and the authentic Sunnah contain numerous texts that ascribe to God attributes which, if interpreted literally, may suggest a resemblance between the Creator and His creation. These include references to the Divine "Hand," "Face," "Eyes," "Foot," "Fingers," and God's "Istiwa'" (establishment) upon the Throne." Such expressions, taken at face value, could lead to anthropomorphic conceptions of God, a notion categorically rejected in mainstream Islamic theology.

Al-Sha'rānī taught that believers must affirm the Qur'anic verses on God's attributes while upholding His transcendence, avoiding any likeness to creation. He viewed affirming the text without questioning its modality as the safest approach, and discouraged figurative interpretation (*ta'wīl*) except when necessary to prevent misunderstanding, and even then, only as a possible, not definitive, meaning.³⁴ Al-Sha'rānī explained the crux of the matter by presenting the spectrum of scholarly opinions:

"All the people of God (*ahl Allāh*) are unanimously agreed that one must believe in the verses of Divine attributes in a manner that is befitting of God's Majesty, as known only to Him. It is impermissible to reject any of these texts, nor to define or liken them to human attributes, for we are ignorant of God's Essence in this world and even in the Hereafter we do not comprehend His reality."

³³ Al-Rāghib al-Aṣḥānī defines *mutashābihāt* as verses that have confusing interpretation of its similarity to other either in term of the literal word or meaning of it. See al-Rāghib al-Iṣḥānī, *al-Mufradāt fī Ghārīb al-Qur'ān* (Riyadh: Maktabat Nizār al-Muṣṭafā al-Bāz, 1991), 1: 335.

³⁴ Al-Sha'rānī, *al-Qawā'id al-Kashfiyyah*, 238.

He further noted that whoever denies any attribute affirmed by God in His Book or on the tongue of His Messenger has disbelieved. Likewise, anyone who affirms the text but interprets it in a way that resembles human attributes, or imagines such resemblance, or believes it possible, is in error.³⁵ Al-Sha'rānī recognised the classical divergence between *salaf* (early generations) and *khalaf* (later scholars) in handling such texts. The *salaf* advocated for *tafwīd*, consigning the knowledge of the exact meaning to God, accompanied by a firm belief in the text's truth and in God's transcendence.³⁶ The *khalaf*, however, engaged in *ta'wīl* when necessary, particularly to counter heretical or anthropomorphic tendencies.

Despite acknowledging the permissibility of interpretation in times of necessity, al-Sha'rānī warned of its potential theological shortcomings:

“*Tafwīd* is safer, while *ta'wīl* is more prone to error and entails the loss of perfect faith in the text, as God only commanded us to believe in the actual words He revealed—not in meanings we derive through human reasoning, which may or may not reflect His true intent.”

³⁵ Al-Sha'rānī, *al-Qawā'id al-Kashfiyyah*, 241-242.

³⁶ The Salaf school may be understood as the integrated application of seven methodological steps: (i) to declare God free from all deviant or anthropomorphic conceptions [*al-taqdīs*]; (ii) to affirm and accept the content of the revealed texts as they stand [*al-taṣdīq*]; (iii) to acknowledge one's epistemic incapacity to grasp with certainty the true reality of the Divine Essence [*al-i'tirāf bi al-'ajz*]; (iv) to maintain silence and refrain from speculative discussion [*al-sukūt*]; (v) to withhold oneself from manipulating or re-interpreting the texts [*al-imsāk*]; (vi) to desist from probing or rationally interrogating such matters [*al-kaff*]; and (vii) to consign the matter to those qualified in this domain [*al-taslīm li-ahlīh*]. For a further discussion, see al-Ghazālī. *Ijām al-'Awwām 'an 'Ilm al-Kalām*, (Beirut: Dār al-Minhāj, 2017), 51-100.

This, according to al-Sha'rānī, demonstrates that even when figurative language is used, the divine speech accommodates human understanding without compromising transcendence. He added that scholars only resorted to interpretation out of mercy for those unable to reconcile apparent contradictions between texts affirming transcendence and those which could be misconstrued as anthropomorphic. Had the laity truly grasped the foundational principle that the Essence of God bears no resemblance to creation such interpretations would not have been required.³⁷

In conclusion, al-Sha'rānī's engagement with this discourse demonstrates a refined and nuanced theological methodology that embodies the core principles of Ash'arī school of thought. He upholds that text suggesting anthropomorphism are to be interpreted or consigned, with the intention of affirming divine transcendence. His formulation skillfully bridges the positions of *tafwīd* as the preferred stance and *ta'wīl* as a conditional necessity, thereby offering an integrative vision characterised by intellectual rigour, orthodoxy, and profound reverence for the divine.

iii. On Indwelling (*ḥulūl*) and Union (*ittiḥād*)

The concepts of *ḥulūl*, *ittiḥād*, and *waḥdat al-wujūd* stem from ancient pantheistic and monistic traditions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, which view either the cosmos as God's corporeal form or all existence as a direct manifestation of God. Such beliefs blur the line between Creator and creation, contradicting orthodox Islamic theology. They undermine key doctrines like divine judgment, reward and punishment, and the moral order, rendering revelation and religious law meaningless.³⁸

³⁷ Al-Ghazālī. *Ijām al-'Awwām 'an 'Ilm al-Kalām*, 238-249.

³⁸ Ṭāha 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmi wa al-Imām al-Sharānī*, 111-112; 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd, *al-Madrasah al-Shādhiliyyah al-*

Throughout numerous writings, al-Sha'rānī categorically denounced the doctrines of *hulūl* and *ittiḥād*, branding them not only heretical but blasphemous. In one of his most explicit statements, al-Sha'rānī declares:

“There is neither indwelling nor union for to claim such is to say that God exists within the bellies of beasts and insects. Exalted is God above such falsehood!”³⁹

He further critiques those who propagate such beliefs by comparing them unfavourably even to idolaters, who at least acknowledged their deities as intermediaries and not as divine embodiments. He contends that no true saint (*walī*) could ever claim union with the Divine, for the essence of God is categorically unlike all created realities and beyond the grasp of human comprehension. Quoting his teacher, Sīdī 'Alī al-Khawwās, al-Sha'rānī rejects even the expression that “God is in every place,” as misused by some theological sects such as Mu'tazilah and Qadariyyah, because it implies spatial limitation and corporeality.⁴⁰ He emphasises that God is absolutely One, transcending any union with or inhabitation of creation. Creation brings no change to His Essence, as He is beyond being a locus for the contingent. He refutes those who claim divinity by challenging them to demonstrate divine power, exposing their false understanding of true spiritual knowledge.⁴¹

In *Laṭā'if al-Minan wa al-Akhlāq*, al-Sha'rānī condemns the claim that “all things are God” as even beneath the madness of the insane. He remarks that if Satan himself were accused of holding such beliefs, he would likely disavow them out of shame. He labels the proponents

Ḥadīthah wa Imāmuhā Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadīthah, n.d.), 248-259.

³⁹ Al-Sha'rānī, *al-Yawāqūt wa al-Jawāhir*, 1: 115.

⁴⁰ Al-Sha'rānī, *al-Yawāqūt wa al-Jawāhir*, 1: 120.

⁴¹ Al-Sha'rānī, *al-Qawā'id al-Kashfiyyah*, 192.

of this doctrine as *zanādiqa* (heretics) and "the filthiest of all sects," devoid of any moral code, eschatological belief, or religious commitment. According to him, no other religion, not even among the polytheists or the People of the Book, has ever equated the entire cosmos with the Divine Essence in such an unbridled manner.⁴²

Thus, al-Sha'rānī's stance is unambiguously clear. He considers the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, as interpreted by its extremist proponents, to be a grave deviation from Islām, more aligned with atheistic nihilism than with spiritual insight. His thorough critique stands as one of the most powerful repudiations of this concept in the history of Islamic thought, preserving the transcendent distinction between the Divine and the created, and upholding the metaphysical integrity of Islamic theology.⁴³

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study reaffirms that 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī's theological thought represents a vital yet underexplored dimension of Sunni intellectual history. His nuanced engagement with both the textual foundations of Islam and the complexities of mystical experience provided a coherent, orthodox framework that remains relevant to contemporary theological discourse. Al-Sha'rānī's ability to mediate between *tanzīh* and *tafwīd*, between popular piety and scholarly precision, marks him as a significant figure whose works deserve deeper integration into modern scholarship on Islamic theology.

Future research could expand on this study by conducting comparative analyses between al-Sha'rānī and his contemporaries across different regions, or by examining the reception of his thought in later Islamic intellectual traditions, including its influence on Sufi orders

⁴² As quoted in Ṭāha 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmi wa al-Imām al-Sharānī*, 92.

⁴³ Ṭāha 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmi wa al-Imām al-Sharānī*, 116.

and juridical debates. Moreover, a critical edition and translation of his key theological treatises would greatly benefit both scholars and students of Islamic studies.

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