

Khawājah Mawlānā ‘Ubayd Allāh: A Brief Biographical Portrait

Compiled by Bilal Ali¹

I. Origins and Household

Khawājah² Mawlānā ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Muḥammad Yūsuf ibn Muḥammad was born in 1956 CE in the small town of Sāhmal (Chak No. 126 Jhang Branch), in the Chiniot District of Punjab, Pakistan. The town lies approximately 12 km southeast of Chiniot and about 30 km northwest of Faisalabad, one of the major cities of Punjab. Sāhmal is located in the agricultural countryside between Chiniot and Faisalabad and forms part of the network of settlements established in the region during the development of the colonial irrigation system that

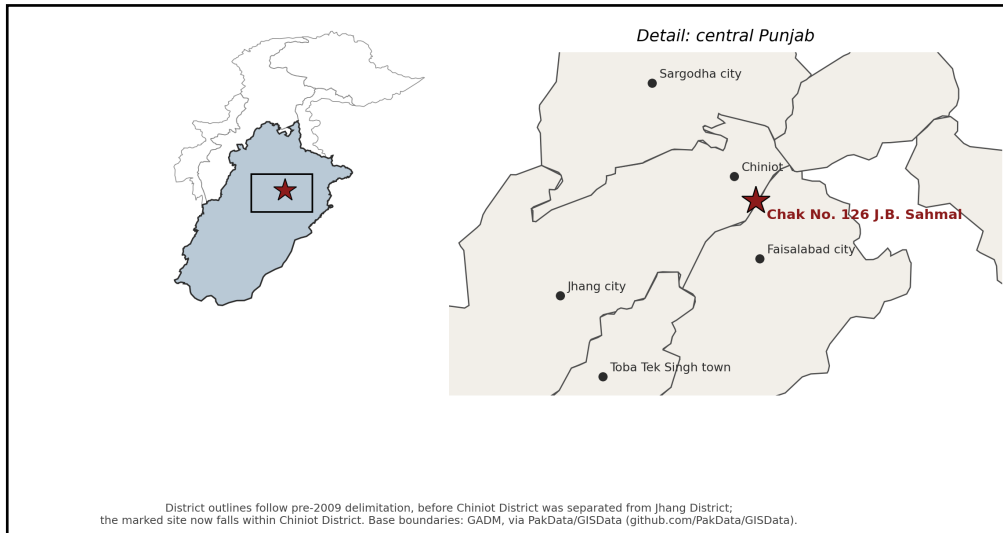


Fig. 1. Khawājah ‘Ubayd Allāh's hometown of Sāhmal is located approximately 30 km northwest of Faisalabad.

¹ This biographical notice has been constructed mainly from two sources, one being the short biography that prefaces Khawājah Mawlānā ‘Ubayd Allāh's *khānqāhī* devotional manual that comprises a daily litany of thirty-three Quranic verses, prophetic supplications, the shaykh's spiritual legacy (*shajarah*), and an introduction to the basic practices and disciplines of the Naqshbandī Mujaddidī *ṭarīqah*. The second is an interview with Khawājah ‘Ubayd Allāh, published in the series *Ṣuḥbat-i Ṣulāḥā* in the monthly Al-Īmān of Faisalabad. The final section is testimonial, labeled “Temperament and Spiritual Guidance”, and relies on the compiler's personal spiritual and psychological observations, but is not a detailed personal memoir, which is planned for a separate piece in the future, Allah-willing.

I was tempted to add personal accounts drawn from our two and half decades of relationship as his seminary student and spiritual mentee, but I have abstained from doing so in an effort to make this brief biographical notice more universally functional amongst both academics and devotees. To that end, I have largely adopted the IJMES style guide, so as to give the biography a more standardized and scholarly presentation. This means, amongst other things, the omission of some eulogistic formulas here such as *raḥimahu Allāh* for the deceased and *dāmat barakātuhum* for the living, which the reader is asked to supply in their own reading.

² Khawājah is an honorific of Persian origin meaning “master” and is applied across the Turco-Persian world, most commonly to spiritual masters and, in South and Central Asian usage, to Naqshbandī shaykhs specifically. The title is most often used in the Naqshbandī context as a marker of formal succession within that lineage of spiritual teachers. The term is used more loosely across the Chishtī and other South Asian spiritual orders as simply a mark of spiritual authority and respect.

began in the British colonial period. His family had settled in this region since the colonial period, when Chiniot was administered as a *tehsil* of Jhang District and remained so through the creation of Pakistan.

His paternal grandfather held the office of village headman, which passed to his father and then to his father's brother. His father, born in 1924, had taken discipleship under the renowned traditionist and spiritual master Shaykh al-Ḥadīth Mawlānā Muḥammad Zakariyyā al-Kāndhlawī. His mother's father, Miān Waryām, was a disciple of Mawlānā Shayr Muḥammad of Sharaqpur and a man given to continual *dhikr*. Mawlānā 'Ubayd Allāh recalls about both parents that they kept to regular recitation of the Qur'ān and to *dhikr*, and he credits his mother's encouragement with his early attachment to religious learning. Of his siblings, four brothers and two sisters survive, and all of them are *ḥuffāẓ* (memorizers of the Qur'ān). One brother, a scholar, leads the Friday prayer in the town masjid.

II. The Town Madrasah and Qur'ānic Memorization

His maternal grandfather founded a *madrasah* (religious seminary) in Sahmal, Madrasah Ta'lim al-Qur'ān al-Ṣiddīqiyyah, together with a congregational masjid (*jāmi' masjid*), dating back to around 1943 CE, or 1360 AH (which corresponds instead to 1939 or 1940 CE). Khwājah 'Ubayd Allāh began his education at that madrasah, whose first instructor was Mawlānā Dost Muḥammad Sāqī, a graduate of Dār al-'Ulūm Deoband and colleague of Mawlānā Manzūr Aḥmad Chiniotī.

His first teacher there was Qārī 'Abd al-Raḥmān of Dera Ismail Khan, a blind scholar, under whom he first read the Qur'ān and then began to memorize it. When that teacher departed, he completed his memorization under Qārī Jamīl, a disciple of Mawlānā Ḥusayn Aḥmad al-Madanī, finishing in 1968. He attended the town primary school alongside this work. In the same town he took the introductory Persian texts, among them the *Karīmah* and the *Pandnāmah*, under Mawlānā Dost Muḥammad, who had studied with Mawlānā Badr 'Ālam al-Mīrat-hī. Among the formative influences of these years were the various anecdotes Qārī Jamīl told his young students about the scholars of the past, which Mawlānā 'Ubayd Allāh attests to having shaped him more than he understood at the time.

III. The 'Ālimiyyah Course at Dār al-'Ulūm Faisalabad

When his father performed his Hajj in 1960, he met the custodian of Imam Anwar Shāh al-Kashmīrī's scholarly legacy, the polymath Mawlānā Sayyid Muḥammad Yūsuf al-Banūrī (1908-1977), and on Mawlānā al-Banūrī's encouragement resolved that his son should undertake the full traditional curriculum of seminary studies. Mawlānā al-Banūrī had proposed his own madrasah in Karachi, Jāmi'at al-'Ulūm al-Islāmiyyah, whereupon the more local scholar Muftī Zayn al-'Ābidīn (d. 2004), citing the distance, recommended his own institution, Dār al-'Ulūm Faisalabad, instead.

Muftī Zayn al-'Ābidīn was a prominent scholar, spiritual figure, and a leading figure in the Tabligh and Khatm-i Nubuwwat movements in Pakistan. A graduate of Dār al-'Ulūm Deoband and Jāmi'ah Islāmiyyah in Dabhel, he had founded Dār al-'Ulūm Faisalabad in the 1960's. He was a devoted companion of the second amīr of Tabligh, Mawlānā Muḥammad Yūsuf al-Kāndhlawī, and was so enamored by him that he named all four of his sons Yūsuf.

Khwājah 'Ubayd Allāh entered Dār al-'Ulūm Faisalabad in 1972 and completed the *dawrah ḥadīth* program there in 1980 CE/1400 AH. His teachers in that final year included Shaykh al-Ḥadīth Mawlānā Naẓīr Aḥmad, Muftī Jamāl Aḥmad, Mawlānā Zarīf, Mawlānā Zayd, Mawlānā Ghulām Muṣṭafā, Muftī Aḥmad Jān, and Mawlānā Yūnus, among others.

His graduation ceremony was attended by Shaykh al-Ḥadīth Mawlānā Muḥammad Zakariyyā al-Kāndhlawī and his deputy Muftī Maḥmūd Ḥasan al-Gangohī.



Fig. 2. The masjid courtyard of Dār al-'Ulūm Faisalabad, People's Colony No. 2., where Khwājah 'Ubayd Allāh studied and later taught. Photo courtesy of Muhammad Yaseen Goorwala.

IV. Specialization and Early Teaching Career

After *dawrah* studies, Mawlānā 'Ubayd Allāh undertook specialization studies in Da'wah and Comparative Religion at Jāmi'at Ta'limāt-i Islāmiyyah and taught there for about two years.

In 1982 he began teaching at his alma mater, Dār al-'Ulūm Faisalabad, where he taught across nearly the whole traditional *dars niẓāmī* curriculum. Around the same period, he taught the *dawrah*-level ḥadīth texts at two women's seminaries in Faisalabad: Madrasah Umm Salamah lil-Banāt in Sarfārāz Colony and Madrasah Fāṭimat al-Zahrā' in Afshān Colony, along with several others. Over the course of these appointments he taught the full range of the syllabus, from the Persian primers to the terminal course in ḥadīth studies.

V. Discipleship under Mawlānā Zakariyyā al-Kāndhalwī and the Chishtī Affiliation

The year of Khwājah 'Ubayd Allāh's graduation from Dār al-'Ulūm Faisalabad, Mawlānā Zakariyyā spent the whole of Ramaḍān in retreat (*i'tikāf*) in the Dār al-'Ulūm's masjid. Khwājah 'Ubayd Allāh was assigned to attend to Shaykh al-Ḥadīth and his companions during this period, which placed him for a full month in close proximity to this scholarly and spiritual giant. Khwājah 'Ubayd Allāh took *bay'ah* at Shaykh al-Ḥadīth Mawlānā Zakariyyā's hand in 1980, at the close of that same Ramaḍān.

While he was teaching at Dār al-'Ulūm Faisalabad, Shaykh al-Ḥadīth had emigrated to Madinah. At some point, Mawlānā 'Ubayd Allāh prepared to follow him there in order to continue his spiritual training. However, he delayed the plan at the direction of Muftī Zayn al-'Ābidīn and instead accepted the post of imam at the masjid of the Punjab Medical College in Faisalabad.

This spiritual relationship lasted some two years, until Shaykh al-Ḥadīth's death in 1982. For more than a decade afterward he entered no further discipleship, keeping instead to the practices his teacher had prescribed.

VI. The Masjid of the Punjab Medical College (PMC)

In 1983 he took up the position of imam and *khaṭīb* at the congregational masjid of the Punjab Medical College campus, now Faisalabad Medical University, a post he still holds. He instituted regular Qur'ān lessons for the MBBS students which ran the length of their degree, and, finding them responsive, opened the sessions

to questions. According to Mawlānā ‘Ubayd Allāh, the exchange was as instructional for him as much as it instructed them. The Ramaḍān completion (*khatm*) of the Qur’ān at the masjid drew faculty, physicians, and the principal of the college.



Fig. 3. The PMC Hostel Masjid courtyard, where Khwājah ‘Ubayd Allāh has served as imam and khaṭīb since 1983. Picture taken by Muhammad Saad Irfan.

VII. Discipleship Under Khwājah Khān Muḥammad and the Naqshbandī Affiliation

In 1995 he formed a bond of *bay‘ah* and spiritual training with Khwājah Khān Muḥammad of Khānqāh Sirājiyyah at Kundian in the Mianwali district of Pakistan. His first visit to the khānqāh was in 1994, where Ḥājī ‘Abd al-Rashīd, a senior deputy, urged him to pledge spiritual allegiance. He performed *istikhārah* and returned home without pledging. A change then began in his heart and grew more pronounced, until the Khwājah appeared to him in a dream and instructed him to take *bay‘ah*, which he did the following year.

He visited the khānqāh frequently thereafter, particularly for the Ramaḍān devotions. In 2006/2007 he was granted the higher stations of the order, having completed the course of spiritual exercises during the Khwājah's lifetime.

Khwājah Khān Muḥammad died on the 5th of May 2010. His senior successors, Khwājah Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Ghafūr al-Qurayshī and Khwājah Ḥājī ‘Abd al-Rashīd, then conferred formal authorization (*ijāzah*) on Mawlānā ‘Ubayd Allāh in the Naqshbandiyyah-Mujaddidiyyah path and directed him to carry the khānqāhī tradition forward in his own work.

VIII. The Spiritual Genealogy of the Order (*Shajarah*)

1. Ḥaḍrat Muḥammad, the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him, his family, and grant him peace
2. Khalīfat Rasūl Allāh Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, may Allah be pleased with him
3. Salmān al-Fārisī, Companion of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah be pleased with him
4. Qāsīm ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, may Allah have mercy on him
5. Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, may Allah have mercy on him
6. Bāyazīd al-Baṣṭāmī, may Allah have mercy on him
7. Khwājah Abū al-Ḥasan al-Kharaqānī, may Allah have mercy on him
8. Khwājah Abū ‘Alī al-Fārmadī, may Allah have mercy on him



Fig. 5. The Khānqāh Sirājīyyah (Sirajia) in Kundian is one of the oldest spiritual lodges of the Naqshbandī Mujaddidi order in Pakistan. Photo courtesy of Khanqah Sirajia.

9. Khwājah Yūsuf al-Hamadānī, may Allah have mercy on him
10. Khwājah ‘Abd al-Khāliq al-Ghujdawānī, may Allah have mercy on him
11. Khwājah ‘Ārif al-Rīwūgarī, may Allah have mercy on him
12. Khwājah Maḥmūd Anjīr al-Faghnawī, may Allah have mercy on him
13. Khwājah ‘Azīzān ‘Alī al-Rāmītānī, may Allah have mercy on him
14. Khwājah Muḥammad Bābā al-Sammāsī, may Allah have mercy on him
15. Sayyid Mīr Kulāl, may Allah have mercy on him
16. Sayyid Bahā’ al-Dīn Muḥammad Naqshband, may Allah have mercy on him
17. Khwājah ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-‘Atṭār, may Allah have mercy on him
18. Mawlānā Muḥammad Ya’qūb al-Charkhī, may Allah have mercy on him
19. Khwājah ‘Ubayd Allāh Aḥrār, may Allah have mercy on him
20. Mawlānā Muḥammad Zāhid, may Allah have mercy on him
21. Khwājah Darwīsh Muḥammad, may Allah have mercy on him
22. Mawlānā Khwājah Muḥammad al-Amkanagī, may Allah have mercy on him
23. Khwājah Muḥammad Bāqī bi’llāh, may Allah have mercy on him
24. Mujaddid Alf-i Thānī Shaykh Aḥmad al-Fārūqī al-Sirhindī, may Allah have mercy on him
25. Khwājah Muḥammad Ma’šūm, may Allah have mercy on him
26. Shaykh Sayf al-Dīn, may Allah have mercy on him
27. Sayyid Nūr Muḥammad al-Badāyūnī, may Allah have mercy on him
28. Mīrzā Maḥzar Jān-i Jānān, may Allah have mercy on him
29. Shāh Ghulām ‘Alī al-Dihlawī, may Allah have mercy on him
30. Shāh Abū Sa’īd, may Allah have mercy on him
31. Shāh Aḥmad Sa’īd, may Allah have mercy on him
32. Ḥājji Dūst Muḥammad al-Qandahārī, may Allah have mercy on him
33. Khwājah Muḥammad ‘Uthmān, may Allah have mercy on him
34. Khwājah Ḥājji Muḥammad Sirāj al-Dīn, may Allah have mercy on him
35. Mawlānā Abū Sa’d Aḥmad Khān, may Allah have mercy on him

36. Mawlānā Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh, may Allah have mercy on him
37. Khwājah-i Khwājagān Mawlānā Khān Muḥammad, may Allah have mercy on him
38. Khwājah Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Ghafūr, may Allah have mercy on him
39. Khwājah Mawlānā ‘Ubayd Allāh, may his lofty shadow long endure

IX. Madrasat al-Ḥasanayn (Al Hasanain)

In 2000, at the urging of the renowned orator and scholar Mawlānā Ṭāriq Jamīl, he began teaching at Madrasat al-Ḥasanayn in the Green Town area of Faisalabad shortly after its founding in 1999. He began with *fiqh* and now teaches the dawrah-level ḥadīth texts, namely *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, *Mishkāt al-Maṣābiḥ*, and a portion of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. He concluded his teaching service at Dār al-‘Ulūm Faisalabad in 2008 in order to devote himself fully to al-Ḥasanayn, but still serves as a member of its Governing Council (*majlis al-*



Fig. 4. Masjid courtyard of Madrasat al-Ḥasanayn in Green Town, Faisalabad. Courtesy of Al Hasanain.

shūrā) and was appointed in October 2026 as Dār al-‘Ulūm Faisalabad’s governing council’s Chief Administrator (*nāzim a’lā*).

Over the two and a half decades since he joined al-Ḥasanayn’s faculty, he has become the institution’s de facto spiritual and personal counselor, a role in which hundreds of its students have turned to him for guidance in matters of both religious practice and daily life. Several madrasahs in Pakistan and abroad now operate under his guidance.

X. Family, Travel, and Later Life

Khwājah ‘Ubayd Allah married while he was still a student. Of his four children, the elder daughter is a trained scholar and *ḥāfiẓah*, the younger son a *ḥāfiẓ* and scholar who leads prayers and delivers sermons, and

the elder son a *ḥāfiẓ*. He performed the Hajj for the first time in 2004. He first traveled to Malaysia in 2007 and has traveled almost every year since, to the Ḥaramayn and to countries including Malaysia and Thailand.

XI. Temperament and Spiritual Guidance

Those who have studied with Khwājah ‘Ubayd Allāh describe him as a man of few words, words delivered with particular care and in a manner that is calm and deliberate. A faint smile is habitual to him, as is a settled cheerfulness. He is free of *takalluf* or any of the forced formality that usually comes with religious eminence, and its absence is one of the first things most visitors notice.

His independence is unique in that he does not solicit *khidmah* from his students. At the same time, he may not refuse it when they press it on him. A trait his students name often is his *ḥusn al-ẓann*. He naturally assumes the best of others, and to a degree they find uncommon. However, he is not naive or blind to his students’ failings. He sees deficiency where it exists and does not pretend otherwise, but his attention focuses by default on his students’ positive attributes.

The consequence of this positive temperament has been that madrasah and medical students alike come to him as a counselor in spiritual and practical matters, and did so long before he held formal spiritual authorization from Khwājah Khān Muḥammad. At every institution where he has taught he has become, without appointment and without seeking it, the personal guide of his students who bring him difficulties of every kind and who leave, by their own account, with their anxieties dissolved.

His guidance of students is personal and involved. When he would direct them to Khwājah Khān Muḥammad during the shaykh’s lifetime, he accompanied them on these long and regular journeys to the khānqāh at Kundian and introduced hundreds of them in person.

His method in *iṣlāḥ* is gentle. He is not sharp with those he corrects and does not use severity as an instrument. He gives time without hesitation and without any suggestion that it inconveniences him. No one who comes to him is made to feel that he has intruded on a schedule. His *dhikr* gatherings have the same quality that students of his predecessors describe of theirs, a stillness and serenity that is hard to put into words.