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Al-Qanuji's Position on the Divine Attributes that are Disputed Among Islamic Sects in His Book Al-Qa'id ila al-Aqa'id

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Abstract

The study of Divine Attributes holds a central position in Islamic creed, as it pertains to the highest knowledge of Allah, the One without partner and Lord of all worlds. Comprehending His Names and Attributes is fundamental to a believer's relationship with the Creator, encompassing His glorification, the affirmation of His oneness, and His transcendence above all imperfections. This research systematically examines the Divine Attributes through the scholarly framework of Ahl al-Sunnah, as articulated by Shaykh Muḥammad Ṣiddīq al-Qannūjī, a distinguished Sunni theologian from 13th-century AH India. In his seminal work, Al-Qā'id ilā al-'Aqā'id, al-Qannūjī affirms Allah's Attributes according to the methodology of the salaf (the pious predecessors), carefully avoiding distortion (taḥrīf), negation (ta'ṭīl), figurative reinterpretation (ta'wīl), anthropomorphism (tashbīh), and likening to creation (tamthīl). His approach relies exclusively on the Qur'an and Sunnah as primary sources.

Keywords: Divine Attributes, Islamic Creed, Muḥammad Ṣiddīq al-Qannūjī, Qur'an and Sunnah, Salaf Methodology

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Introduction

The study of Divine Attributes occupies a central place within Islamic creed, addressing the most exalted knowledge of Allah, the One without partner and Lord of all worlds. The significance of this discipline stems from the elevated nature of its subject; understanding Allah's Names and Attributes forms the foundation for knowing the Creator, affirming His oneness, and exalting Him above all imperfections. This field has attracted sustained scholarly attention throughout Islamic intellectual history due to its profound impact on shaping a believer's faith, reinforcing the principles of *tawḥīd*, and fostering deep reverence for the Divine.

Scholars have approached the Divine Attributes through various methodologies, ranging from direct affirmation to delegation (*tafwīd*) and figurative interpretation, each aiming to uphold Allah's majesty. Within this broader discourse, Shaykh Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān al-Qannūjī (1832–1890) emerges as a leading 19th-century scholar from the Indian subcontinent. As a foremost proponent of the Ahl al-Sunnah methodology, his theological stance, most notably articulated in *Al-Qā'id ilā al-'Aqā'id*, reflects the approach of the *salaf* (pious predecessors). He affirms the Divine Attributes without resorting to distortion (*taḥrīf*), negation (*ta'tīl*), figurative reinterpretation (*ta'wīl*), anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*), or likening to creation (*tamthīl*), grounding his arguments firmly in the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Despite his significant scholarly contributions and the continuing relevance of his thought, focused studies on al-Qannūjī's theological perspectives, especially within the domain of creed, remain limited. This gap is critical, as examining his works offers valuable insights into the transmission and adaptation of Islamic theological discourse beyond the Arab world. In non-Arab contexts such as the Indian subcontinent, al-Qannūjī exemplifies how classical Sunni methodology was preserved, articulated, and contextualized within unique cultural and intellectual environments.

This study aims to analyze al-Qannūjī's theological Position on the Divine Attributes through an analytical-inductive approach, supplemented by comparative analysis situating his thought alongside other theological schools. In doing so, it seeks to revive an important scholarly heritage, contribute to the critical evaluation of Islamic theological discourse in diverse cultural contexts, and enrich contemporary understanding of the enduring principles of the Ahl al-Sunnah creed.

Methodology

This study employs a systematic, source-based methodology. Qur'anic verses are cited directly within the text, accompanied by precise references to their respective

surahs to ensure accurate attribution. Prophetic traditions (aḥādīth) are analyzed with an emphasis on authenticity; only narrations with sound chains of transmission are included. When relevant reports are not found in the primary canonical collections, supplementary references are drawn from authoritative sunan and asānīd literature.

Each theological concept discussed is initially defined linguistically and technically, providing readers with a clear understanding of its meaning and conceptual framework. Furthermore, the viewpoints of various theological schools pertinent to the topic are succinctly presented, relying on their original and credible sources. This approach enables a comprehensive and balanced analysis firmly rooted in classical scholarship.

Results and Findings

Biographical Overview of Shaykh al-Qannūjī

Name

Shaykh al-Qannūjī's full name is al-ʿAllāmah Muḥyī al-Sunnah, Qāmiʿ al-Bidʿah, al-Nawwāb al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ṣiddīq ibn Ḥasan ibn Luṭf Allah ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ʿAlī ibn Luṭf Allah ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Luṭf Allah ibn Tāj al-Dīn ibn Dhakī ibn ʿAlī Taqī ibn Muḥammad Taqī ibn Imām Mūsā al-Kāẓim ibn Imām Jaʿfar ibn Imām ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn ibn Imām al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may Allah be pleased with them all, tracing his lineage to the al-Ḥusaynī family.

He is associated with the Indian town of Qannūj, from which he takes his nisbah “al-Qannūjī.” Occasionally, he is referred to as “al-Bukhārī” due to his connection with Bukhara. His noble ancestry traces back to the martyred Imām al-Ḥusayn al-Ṣaḥb al-Aṣghar, grandson of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, Radiyallahu ʿAnhu.

Lineage

Al-Qannūjī's distinguished lineage is rooted in the sacred family of Imām al-Ḥusayn al-Ṣaḥb al-Aṣghar, the grandson of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, a lineage held in high esteem within Islamic tradition.

Birth and Early Life

Imām al-Qannūjī was born on Sunday, 19 Jumādā al-Ulā 1248 AH (1832 CE) in Bareilly, India, the hometown of his maternal grandfather. Shortly after his birth, his mother moved him to Qannūj, the ancestral home of his paternal family. At the age of six, he lost his father. Following this, his elder brother, al-Sayyid Aḥmad Ḥasan ʿArīsh, alongside his mother, assumed responsibility for his upbringing. In Qannūj, he began his early education under the guidance of local scholars, acquiring knowledge in various disciplines.

Legacy and Demise: Titles and Death of Shaykh al-Qannūjī

Titles and Honorifics

In recognition of his leadership and scholarly stature, Shaykh al-Qannūjī was honored with several titles, including Amīr (Prince), Nawwāb, Khān, and Bahādur, each reflecting his prestige and distinction. He was also widely known by the kunyah Abū al-Ṭayyib.

Death

Al-Qannūjī passed away on the night of 29 Jumādā al-Ākhirah, 1307 AH (1889 CE), after enduring a prolonged and severe illness that resisted treatment. His final days were marked by confusion and exhaustion. Even in his last moments, his fingers moved as if writing, and near midnight, he softly uttered the phrase, “I love to meet Allah,” once or twice. After requesting water, he peacefully departed this world and returned to his Lord at 59. A large congregation attended his funeral, and the funeral prayer was performed three times. In accordance with his wishes, he was buried following the Sunnah.

Al-Qannūjī’s Position on the Divine Attributes Disputed among Islamic Sects

Definition of the Term “Attribute” in Language and Terminology

Linguistic Definition of “Attribute”

In Jamhurat al-Lughah, it is explained that al-waṣf derives from the phrase waṣaftu al-shay’a aṣifuhu waṣfan, meaning “I described the thing” by mentioning its qualities; thus, the speaker is the describer (wāṣif), and the object described is the mawṣūf.”

Al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr elaborates that waṣaftuhu waṣfan, from the verb pattern fa‘ala yaf‘alu, means describing something by the qualities it possesses. This term comes from the expression waṣafa al-thawb al-jism, where the garment reflects the state and form of the body beneath. Generally, ṣifah refers to a transient condition, while na‘t denotes an inherent characteristic of one’s physical makeup or moral nature. The word ṣifah originates from waṣf, just as ‘iddah derives from wa‘d. Its plural is ṣifāt.

Terminological Definition of “Attribute”

Imām al-Bāqillānī defines an attribute as “that which exists in, or belongs to, the described entity and imparts to it the quality that constitutes the na‘t (description) arising from the attribute.”

Al-Jurjānī stated: “An attribute is a noun denoting one of the states of the essence, such as ‘tall,’ ‘short,’ ‘intelligent,’ or ‘foolish.’ It is the essential sign inherent in the described entity by which it is recognized.”

The Divine Attributes According to al-Qannūjī

Al-Qannūjī's writings clearly reflect his firm adherence to the creed of Ahl al-Athar regarding the Divine Attributes (ṣifāt). He affirms that Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Ḥadīth accept all Allah has declared in His Book, revealed through His divine message, and transmitted via authentic narrators from the Prophet Muhammad. These attributes are accepted as they are, without figurative interpretation (ta'wīl), negation (ta'ṭīl), or distortion (taḥrīf), all of which could lead to anthropomorphism (tashbīh) or likening (tamthīl) Allah to His creation.

According to al-Qannūjī, Allah has safeguarded Ahl al-Sunnah from any alteration of meaning or inquiry into "how" (takayyuf), granting them the correct understanding necessary to uphold pure monotheism (tawḥīd) and divine transcendence (tanzīh). This approach avoids denying divine attributes and their assimilation to created beings. He supports this stance with Qur'anic verses such as:

"There is nothing whatsoever like unto Him, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing" (asy-Shūrā: 11)

"And there is none comparable to Him" (al-Ikhlāṣ: 4)

For al-Qannūjī, Ahl al-Sunnah rely solely on the purified Sunnah of the Prophet and the straight path of the early generations (salaf), refraining from any innovation (bid'ah). This adherence, he asserts, elevates them to noble ranks before Allah.

In his works, al-Qannūjī enumerates Divine Attributes affirmed in the Qur'an and Sunnah, encompassing those related to the Divine Essence (dhātiyyah) as well as Divine actions (fi'liyyah). These include life, knowledge, power, strength, majesty, glory, will, hearing, sight, speech, observing His creation, revelation, and causing some of His creation, including angels, messengers, and servants, to hear His speech.

He further affirms scripturally explicit attributes such as face, two hands, self, eye, essence, person, form, right hand, palm, finger, forearm, upper arm, chest, shin, foot, leg, side, spirit, mercy, shade, highness, exaltedness, companionship, watchfulness, nearness, coming, swift approach (harwala), tread, amazement, laughter, joy, smiling, looking, jealousy, weariness, shyness, mockery, deception, plotting, completion, hesitation, bounty, mercy, love, pleasure, anger, wrath, enmity, friendship, choice, patience, re-creation, presence, handshake, inspection, supervision, being "with Him," turning hearts, knowledge of the unseen, remembrance of creation, and the affirmation that "each day He is in a matter."

The Position of Shaykh al-Qannūjī on the Disputed Attributes of Allah

Shaykh al-Qannūjī's views on the attributes ascribed to Allah can be systematically categorized into three distinct groups.

First, some attributes must be affirmed for Allah exactly as they appear in the explicit wording of the Qur'an and authentic Sunnah, without any distortion (taḥrīf), negation (ta'ṭīl), or likening to created attributes (tamthīl). These attributes are accepted in their apparent meanings per the revealed texts.

Second, some attributes have apparent literal meanings that necessitate interpretation consistent with Allah's majesty and perfection. Such interpretations must conform to the principles of the Arabic language and must never imply any deficiency or imperfection in Allah. In these cases, it is also permissible to adopt the approach of tafwīd, entrusting the proper knowledge of their meaning wholly to Allah.

Third, upon thorough examination of their textual evidence and scholarly consensus, certain expressions are found not to be established as Divine Attributes. Consequently, these terms should not serve as a basis for affirming Allah's attributes.

Through this tripartite classification, Shaykh al-Qannūjī exemplifies a balanced methodology firmly rooted in textual sources, preserving the purity of creed by avoiding tashbīh (anthropomorphism) and steering clear of misguided or excessive interpretations. The following section will present and analyze representative examples of attributes from each category in detail.

Attributes over Which There Is Disagreement Regarding Their Interpretation, Affirmation, or the Entrustment of Their Meaning

Among the attributes that have sparked theological debate are al-Istiwa' (rising over the Throne), al-Nuzūl (descending), al-'Uluw (elevation), and al-Ittilā' (overseeing). Islamic theological schools differ in their approach to these action-related attributes.

The first group affirms these attributes exactly as they appear in the sacred texts, without engaging in distortion, denial, or likening Allah to His creation. The second group, however, advocates for a figurative interpretation, aiming to exalt Allah and assert His transcendence above any similarity to His creation.

Al-Istiwa' (Rising Over the Throne)

The term al-Istiwa' is mentioned explicitly in several Qur'anic verses, such as:

"Indeed, your Lord is Allah, who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then rose over the Throne." (Al-A'raf, 7:54)

"The Most Merciful rose over the Throne." (Tāhā, 20:5)

Al-Nuzūl (The Divine Descent)

The attribute of al-Nuzūl (Divine Descent) is explicitly mentioned in several Prophetic traditions (aḥādīth). Among the most well-known is the narration: *“Allah descends every night to the lowest heaven during the last third of the night and says: ‘I am the King; I am the King. Who is calling upon Me so that I may respond to him? Who is asking me so that I may grant him? Who is seeking My forgiveness so that I may forgive him?’ This continues until the break of dawn.”*

Statements of Those Who Affirm the Attribute of Al-Nuzūl

Imām Abu Ḥanīfah, when asked about this hadith, responded: *“He descends without [inquiring into] the ‘how’ (bi lā kayf).”*

Imām al-Shāfi‘ī stated: *“The statement I adhere to, and the view of our hadith scholars from whom I learned, is twofold: First, the testimony that there is no deity but Allah and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah; and second, that Allah, Exalted is He, descends to the lowest heaven in a manner He wills.”*

Abū Sa‘īd al-Dārimī remarked after citing the Prophetic narrations: *“All these hadith, and many more, concerning the Lord’s descent have been fully accepted and believed by our scholars and teachers. None denies these narrations, nor do transmitters hesitate to report them.”*

Ibn Khuzaymah wrote: *“This chapter mentions authentic reports with sound chains, transmitted directly from the Prophet by the scholars of Hijāz and ‘Irāq, confirming that the Lord, Glorious and Exalted, descends every night to the lowest heaven. We affirm these reports without delving into the ‘how’ of this descent. Our Prophet did not explain the modality of the descent, but we know for certain that He descends. Allah did not leave His servants uninformed, so we accept these narrations without speculative interpretation or innovation.”*

Ibn Abī Zamīn added: *“Among the statements of Ahl al-Sunnah is that Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, is to be exalted above having any limit imposed upon Him by other than Himself.”*

Statements of the Interpreters Regarding the Attribute of Al-Nuzūl

Al-‘Arāzī, discussing the interpretation of al-Nuzūl, suggested: *“The meaning could be that a gathering of noble angels descends at that time by His command, and this is attributed to Allah because it occurs by His order.”*

Others have interpreted nuzūl figuratively, understanding it as an expression of divine kindness and mercy, without implying anything that would compromise Allah’s exalted status, supreme rank, or absolute self-sufficiency.

Moreover, in Sharh Jawharat al-Tawhid by al-Laqqani: *“That is, the angel of your Lord descends.”*

Shaykh al-Qannūjī stated regarding al-Nuzūl: *“The people of truth, devoted to monotheism and sincerity, unanimously agree that Allah, Glorified and Exalted, descends every night to the lowest heaven without any comparison to the descent of created beings, nor any analogy or modality. Our Prophet did not describe how our Creator descends; He only informed us that He indeed descends.”*

Al-‘Ulūw (The Exaltedness / Highness)

The attribute of al- ‘Ulūw, the Highness or Exaltedness of Allah, Glorified and Exalted, is affirmed in numerous noble verses of the Qur’an.

Textual Evidence:

Allah, the Exalted, says: *“And He is the Most High, the Most Great.”* Al-Baqarah [2:255]

He also declares: *“The name of your Lord, the Most High.”* Al-A’lā [87:1]

Moreover, His Glorious Majesty says: *“Knower of the unseen and the witnessed, the Great, the Exalted.”* Ar-Ra’d [13:9]

Rational Proof

The Verse: *“The name of your Lord, the Most High.”* Al-A’lā [87:1]. Establishes that Allah is elevated above all else. Since “direction” (jiha) denotes something other than Allah, His essence must transcend any physical direction. Consequently, His Highness is intrinsic and not dependent on any external direction.

Ibn Jarir explained: *“The Exalted One (al-Muta’āl) is the One who is above all things by His power.”*

Al-Muzanī, a companion of Imām al-Shāfi’ī, described Allah’s exaltedness as follows: *“He is high above His Throne in His Majesty by His own Self. He is the Ever-Living, the Generous, the Forgiving. His knowledge encompasses all affairs, and He is fully aware of what is hidden in the hearts and what the eyes conceal.”* [Ghafir 40:19]

Al-Zajjāj stated: *“The Exalted One (al-Muta’āl) is the one who is most exalted and elevated; Allah, Glorified and Exalted, is high, exalted, and wise.”*

Imām Mālik said: *“Allah is in the heavens, and His knowledge is everywhere.”*

Abū Bakr al-Ājurri (may Allah have mercy on him) said: *“Indeed, Allah, Mighty and Majestic, is upon His Throne above His heavens.”*

Al-Rāzī, in mentioning the interpretation of the verses of elevation (‘uluww), said: *“The elevation in these contexts means elevation in dominance and power, not elevation in direction.”*

Shaykh al-Qanuji (may Allah have mercy on him) said: *“Whoever denies His exaltation above the creation, His separation from this originated world, and His being above*

it, after those illuminating evidence, is opposing the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him)."

Al-It̤tilāʿ (The Divine Observing)

The attribute of al-It̤tilāʿ, Divine Observing, is affirmed in several authentic Prophetic traditions (aḥādīth). For instance, the Prophet Muhammad said: *"Perhaps Allah looked upon the people of Badr and said: 'Do what you will.'"*

In another narration describing the Day of Resurrection, the Prophet said: *"Allah will gather the people on a single plain, and then the Lord of the Worlds will look upon them and say: 'Will you follow those whom they used to worship?' Then the disbelievers will be shown the idols and will follow them, but the Muslims will remain. Allah will then look upon the Muslims and say: 'Will you not follow the people?' They will reply: 'We seek refuge in Allah from you; Allah is our Lord, and this is our place until we see our Lord.' Then Allah will command and affirm them."*

When asked if they would see Allah, the Prophet replied that seeing Him would be no more difficult than seeing the moon on the night of Badr, emphasizing the reality and possibility of this vision.

Ibn al-Muhib al-Sāmit, in his work *Ṣifāt Rabb Alamin* ("The Attributes of the Lord of the Worlds"), explains: *"Al-It̤tilāʿ means to look and observe. The term derives from the root meaning 'to look upon.' It is said: 'Whoever is high above you has looked upon you.'"*

From the authenticated Prophetic narrations, the scholarly explanations of Ibn al-Muhib al-Sāmit, and the linguistic definitions, it is evident that Al-It̤tilāʿ is an actual attribute of Allah, an attribute of action indicating that Allah is aware, observant, and fully attentive to His creation.

Shaykh al-Qannūjī affirmed the Divine Attributes as presented in the authentic texts of the Qur'an and Sunnah without engaging in anthropomorphism, comparison, negation, or figurative reinterpretation. He accepted all attributes explicitly ascribed to Allah, the Exalted, based on sound textual evidence. Upon careful examination, it becomes clear that while many of these attributes are firmly established, some do not constitute actual attributes of Allah, and others have been understood metaphorically or figuratively by various scholars. Furthermore, specific attributes are attributed to Allah in an honorific or metaphorical sense rather than as literal descriptions.

Conclusion

The will and assistance of Allah have completed this research, and I do not claim perfection or completeness in it. I have exerted my utmost effort. If I have succeeded in what I have researched and presented, it is by the grace and guidance of

my Lord, to whom all praise and commendation belong. Should there be any errors, they are due to me and Satan, and I sincerely seek Allah's forgiveness and repentance.

The stance of Shaykh al-Qannūjī exemplifies steadfast adherence to the methodology of Ahl al-Sunnah in understanding the Divine Attributes. He affirms the attributes of Allah, the Exalted, without any form of anthropomorphism, comparison, negation, or metaphorical distortion. This approach embodies complete submission to the Divine Law and absolute glorification and transcendence of His Essence.

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