

from intoxication (*sukr*) except when they reach the highest stage. 'Every stage below the stage of *ṣiddīqīyat* is tainted with *sukr* in one degree or the other.'¹²² And a person under *sukr* is not to be condemned. To sum up: The ideas of a walī which conflict with the Sharī'ah should be recognised as such and should be rejected as wrong; the Sufi, however, should not be condemned but rather excused as he might have said them under intoxication.

This is exactly the attitude which Sirhindī adopts towards Shaykh Ibn 'l-'Arabī. He believes that the doctrine of *wahdat 'l-wujūd* which the Shaykh expounds is essentially wrong, that many of its concepts and corollaries contradict the Sharī'ah, and that its errors should be exposed and condemned. Consequently, he criticises the doctrine, exposes its errors and warns people against its dangers. On the other hand, he believes that the Shaykh expounded the doctrine in the light of his experience of oneness and identity. Though he did not stay at the stage of 'pure union' and moved ahead, he did not move sufficiently enough and affirm the complete transcendence of God and His absolute difference. This was his shortcoming. The Shaykh therefore deserves to be excused rather than condemned. So far as his *walāyat* is concerned, that depends entirely on his obedience to the Sharī'ah, and his observance of the Sunnah of the Prophet. On that ground Sirhindī regards Ibn 'l-'Arabī as a walī with whom God is well pleased. He believes that his mystical shortcoming and erroneous doctrines do not affect his *walāyat*. He thinks that this is the right attitude¹²³ towards the Shaykh. One should not approve of his erroneous ideas, or keep silent about them, because he is one of the *awliyā'* of God. But one should not condemn him as a heretic and an infidel either, disregarding completely his life and position, on the ground that he has expounded erroneous doctrines.

Sirhindī's Claims

Shaykh Aḥmad has made two kind of claims. One that he is not merely a Sufi shaykh directing the aspirants in spiritual

pursuits, but a renovator (*mujaddid*) of Islam.¹²⁴ His task is to clearly define what is the Prophetic Islam, to distinguish it from the ideas and practices which are clearly opposed to Islam, or which go by the name of Islam, but do not belong to it. His mission is to review these unIslamic and anti-Islamic ideas and practices and expose their errors, and to defend the true beliefs, values, practices, and institutions of Islam.

I have discussed a part of Sirhindī's work in the first chapter. The other part is concerned with problems that Sufi thought and practice have raised. This is the special field of Sirhindī's renovatory work; here he claims to have made a solid and unique contribution. This book is in a way a vindication of this claim. The first part of his work has a local relevance; it is important in the context of the Indian subcontinent. But the relevance of the second work is not limited to India; it concerns the whole Islamic world, and affects the entire religious life and thought of Islam. Sirhindī's contribution in this field should be viewed in this perspective. Seen in this context, his claim that he is the renovator of Islam at the end of its first and beginning of the second millennium, high-sounding though it is, is nevertheless substantially true.

Sirhindī's other claim is about his *walāyat*. This is what I propose to discuss here. In one of the letters¹²⁵ which Sirhindī wrote to his preceptor he described his spiritual experiences and said that he passed through the stages of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, 'Umar 'l-Fārūq and Abū Bakr 'l-Ṣiddīq, one after the other, and came to a stage of *maḥbūbiyah*, a little below the stage of the Prophet. When the opposition against Sirhindī increased (to which I have referred before),¹²⁶ this letter was made an object of criticism and a pretext for vilification against him. He was charged with claiming superiority over the great Companions of the Prophet, including Abū Bakr 'l-Ṣiddīq. Some modern writers¹²⁷ have also joined in the same chorus.

Sirhindī denied these charges. Firstly, he points out that he described the vision in a letter which he wrote to his preceptor, and he wrote this letter because it was his preceptor's order to keep him informed of his visions and experiences. This is the standard practice of the *ṭariqah*. He

had no other motive.¹²⁸ Secondly, the inference which is drawn from the vision is incorrect. He himself never understood the vision in that sense, nor did he entertain the belief for a single moment. On the contrary, he believed and stated in clear words more than once that the lowest of the Companions of the Prophet was greater than the greatest of the *awliyā'* of the Ummah. 'Even Waḥshī, the killer of Ḥamzah, who embraced Islam later, is better than the great *tābi'i*, Uways 'l-Qaranī, famous for his devotions.'¹²⁹

As for the vision, it signifies nothing more than that he participated to an extent in some of the qualities of the Companions he mentions, and shared for a while in God's blessings on them. So far as rising to their status and honour is concerned, neither he nor any walī can dream of that.¹³⁰ Those who charge Sirhindī with claiming to have attained the status and honour of the Companions on the basis of the vision, understand the vision literally with utter disregard of the nature and the meaning of the mystic vision, and do so in the face of a clear denial of that charge by Sirhindī. They insist on their understanding of the vision, and allege that Sirhindī has offered an unconvincing and lame excuse.

But it is not correct to interpret Sufi visions literally; one should try to see what their real purpose is, and what they want to convey through their symbolic language. I will here quote a few cases. When Walī Allāh visited Madinah before he embarked on his great programme of interpreting Prophetic truths in the language of his times and reviving the Prophetic life and society, he saw in a dream that the Prophet's grandsons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn presented his pen to him. Its nib was broken; they repaired it first, and then gave it to him.¹³¹ The dream cannot be interpreted literally; the Prophet did not have a pen, he was not a writer; and if he had a pen nobody can rise up to his status so as to interpret Islam as he would do. The dream means, as Walī Allāh understood it, that he is being commissioned by the Prophet to revive his Islam: his truths, his words and his ways; and that he would have the blessings of the Prophet in doing that task. Walī Allāh's father, Shāh 'Abd 'l-Raḥīm, saw in a vision that a number of people were running in order to have a glimpse of God. He was also running along with them.

When the time of 'Aṣr prayer came, they requested him to lead the prayer. When he had finished, he asked what were they running after? They said that they were going to see God. Shāh 'Abd 'l-Raḥīm said: 'I am the one you have been looking for.' They got up, and shook hands with him. Commenting on this vision, Walī Allāh writes: 'Visions like this sometimes convey the good news that one will influence people with power bestowed by God; sometimes they herald the experience of unity (*tawḥīd*).'¹³²

There are many instances of such visions and dreams. I hope that these two will be sufficient to show that literal interpretation of visions and dreams is wrong. Sirhindī's vision does not mean what it apparently shows: it only tells that Sirhindī shares some qualities which mark the life of 'Uthmān, 'Umar and Abū Bakr, and that he would have a special favour from God that would in some sense resemble theirs. What those qualities are and what that special favour is, the vision does not indicate. But it would not be difficult to form an idea of it from the facts of his life, his works and attainment, which is consistent with his ideas and beliefs. To me this seems to be his effort to define the Prophet's way to God which these great Companions followed, to revise Sufism in that light, and serve Islam as they served it.

The Sufi way is based on *fanā'* and *baqā'* which involves ecstasy and intoxication. Even when the Sufi crosses the stage of pure union and enters the next higher stage of separation after union, he is not completely free from intoxication. Sufis who are known for sobriety (*ṣaḥw*), such as Junayd and al-Suhrawardī, have not been completely free from intoxication. Sirhindī lists some words of Junayd which were spoken in that state: 'He is the knower (*al-'ārif*) and He is the known (*al-ma'rūf*)'; 'The colour of water is the colour of the glass' and 'When the contingent is united with the Eternal, no trace of it is left.'¹³³ About Shaykh 'l-Suhrawardī he says: 'The author of the '*Awārif*' is one of the most sober Sufis, yet his book contains a number of words pronounced in intoxication. I would not like to mention them here; I have collected some of them elsewhere.'¹³⁴

Sirhindī does not rule out that possibility in his own case. In a letter he wrote: 'I am a direct disciple of God, and my

hand is a substitute for the hand of God. I am a disciple of Muḥammad through a number of links . . . but I am a direct disciple of God with no links in between. Hence I am a disciple of Muḥammad as well as his colleague, coming after him to the same feast. Even though I am an attendant, I have not come without an invitation. Though I am a dependant, I have a kind of independence; even though I am his follower, I share in his honour. . . . However, I share not as an equal; that is infidelity; I share as a servant shares with his master.¹³⁵ When he was questioned about this letter and his claim of partial independence from the Prophet, he explained the point at length.¹³⁶

The substance of his explanation is that the spiritual development of a Sufi has two aspects: One, his effort to reach God following the path of the Sharī'ah which the Prophet has defined; this is called *sulūk*. The other is God's attention to the Sufi; He pulls the Sufi to Himself; this is called *jadhb*. The point of the claim is that in his spiritual development, his own effort even though it is there, is very insignificant in comparison to the preponderant pull of God. It resembles, in a sense, prophecy which is entirely a matter of God's favour, without any effort from the Prophet. The other point which Sirhindī hints at here and has stated elsewhere¹³⁷ more clearly, is that his *walāyat* is not an ordinary kind of *walāyat*, but one which in orientation and results is very close to the *walāyat* of the Prophet. It is sober and almost completely free from *shatḥ*. It affirms that God is absolutely other; that man is a mere creature, having nothing in common with the Lord; and that the highest stage of man's progress is servanthood (*'ubūdīyah*) rather than union or oneness (*tawḥīd*). The truths which have been revealed to him are in full agreement with the Prophetic Sharī'ah, and his mission is to preach the Sharī'ah and restore its rule on the pattern of the Prophet.

Sirhindī realises that the words which he has used are rather boastful. He admits in all humility that they are the product of *sukr*. To his disciples who were shocked¹³⁸ by such loud claims, coming particularly from a preacher of sobriety, he said that they should never think that all that he had said or written was completely free from intoxication.

Intoxication is a part of *walāyat*; even a Sufi known for his sobriety may often succumb to it. This is not, as he puts it, 'the first bottle which has been broken'; one can find such lapses in Junayd, al-Suhrawardī, and al-Jīlānī. He goes on to advise them to put his words also on the scale of the Sharī'ah, and accept that which is true. If they find something unexpected and discordant, they should not hasten to condemn him, but try to interpret his words in a sense consistent with the Sharī'ah. But if they cannot do that they should regret it as a lapse.¹³⁹