

CELEBRATING THE BIRTH OF THE PROPHET  
IN BRITISH INDIA: AḤMAD RAẒĀ KHĀN  
BARELWĪ'S FATWĀS ON THE MAWLID

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**Abstract**

*In nineteenth-century British India, the celebration of the birth of the Prophet or mawlid became a contested ritual amongst Muslim scholars. One such scholar, Aḥmad RaẒā Khān (d. 1340/1921), founder of the Barelwī movement and a Sufi shaykh of the Qādiriyya fraternity, advocated strongly for its permissibility. It was his understanding of the ritual that ultimately became a core differentiating factor between more than 200 million adherents of the Barelwī movement and the rest of the Muslims in the Indian subcontinent. Accordingly, this article examines the manner in which the mawlid was conducted in nineteenth- to twentieth-century British India, including the type of practices associated with its undertaking and key debates regarding the ritual amongst Muslim scholars ('ulamā'). Situating Aḥmad RaẒā's views in the context of these debates, and against the backdrop of the political and communal environment of the time, I examine his thought on the legal status and significance of the mawlid celebration and associated practices. I also explore how he positioned his views within the broader Islamic tradition. I base my conclusions on a detailed qualitative and, to a certain extent, quantitative analysis of Aḥmad RaẒā's complete mawlid fatwās and treatises, which were recently gathered into a thirty-volume compendium.*

**Keywords:** Barelwī, juristic opinions (*fatwā*), mawlid, sufism

INTRODUCTION\*

The remembrance of the Leader of the Beloveds [Prophet] is the light [*nūr*] of faith [*īmān*] and joy of life. His remembrance is certainly *Raḥmān* 's [God's] remembrance.<sup>1</sup>

In line with other parts of the Muslim world, thirteenth /nineteenth century British India witnessed wide-ranging debates over Islamic practice. Among the contested issues was the celebration of the Prophet Muḥammad's birth, commonly known as the *mawlid*.<sup>2</sup> One prominent participant in these debates was scholar and Sufi *shaykh* Aḥmad Razā Khān (d. 1340/1921).<sup>3</sup> Recent scholars have primarily approached Aḥmad Razā's *mawlid fatwās* (non-binding juristic opinions) through the lens of the sectarian contestation between Barelwīs and Deobandīs, within which these texts occupy a central place. Mohammad Waqas Sajjad draws on selected *fatwās* from the late thirteenth/nineteenth century and early twentieth century from Aḥmad Razā and Deobandī scholars such as Aḥmad 'Alī Sahāranpūrī (d. 1296/1879) and Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī (d. 1943) to illustrate the contours of Barelwī–Deobandī polemics over the *mawlid*.<sup>4</sup> SherAli Tareen, by contrast, treats the *mawlid* as a case study for comparing Barelwī and Deobandī methodologies of identifying and classifying impermissible innovation (*bid'a*), relying in part on Aḥmad Razā's *fatwās*.<sup>5</sup> Building on this body of work, the present article shifts the analytical focus to the influence of the rational

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1 23 AḤMAD RAZĀ KHĀN, *FATĀWĀ RIḌWIYYA* 753 (2003).

2 MARION HOLMES KATZ, *THE BIRTH OF THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD: DEVOTIONAL PIETY IN SUNNI ISLAM* 209 (2007).

3 I have deliberately used the Urdu transliteration style for the 'Riḍā' in Aḥmad Razā Khān in recognition of the fact that in South Asia he is more widely known and recognized through the Urdu pronunciation of his middle name.

4 Mohammad Waqas Sajjad, *Contesting the Milad: Deobandis and Barelvis in British India and Contemporary Pakistan*, 31 *CONTEMPORARY SOUTH ASIA* 207 (2023); MOHAMMAD WAQAS SAJJAD, *FOR THE LOVE OF THE PROPHET: DEOBANDI-BARELVI POLEMICS AND THE ULAMA IN PAKISTAN* 203–38 (2018).

5 SHERALI TAREEN, *DEFENDING MUHAMAD IN MODERNITY* 224–82 (2020).

sciences (*ma'qūlāt*), specifically the use of logic (*manṭiq*), on Aḥmad Razā's legal reasoning and argumentative strategies.

The relationship between Aḥmad Razā's juristic reasoning and rationalist scholarly traditions remains underexplored. Previous studies have noted his connections to scholars who belonged to the Farangī Maḥal and Khayrābādī intellectual lineages, both of which emphasized logic and other rational sciences.<sup>6</sup> Such observations, however, generally appear in biographical contexts rather than as an analytical lens for examining his legal output. This article seeks to address that gap and argues that Aḥmad Razā's *mawlid fatwās* display a distinctive style of juristic reasoning. In this approach, Aḥmad Razā uses logic to structure legal judgment through definition, premise qualification, controlled inference, and the careful separation of essential and secondary elements of practice. This contrasts with his counterparts from the Deobandī and Ahl-i Ḥadīs movements, who used logic mainly as a supplementary aid to legal reasoning. In this respect, Aḥmad Razā appears as not merely a legalist but as what may be described as a juristic logician—someone who integrates logical reasoning into the very structure of *fatwā* argumentation by shaping how arguments are formulated, ordered, and defended.<sup>7</sup>

To substantiate this claim, I undertake a focused analysis of the complete corpus of 116 *mawlid fatwās* that Aḥmad Razā issued between 1299–1339/1881–1921. Rather than treating logic simply as an intellectual influence, this study examines how it functions within legal argumentation. I achieve this by tracing argumentative structures back to the *ma'qūlāt* tradition, specifically the logic curriculum associated with the Farangī Maḥal. Using defined criteria derived from classical syllogistic reasoning, I demonstrate that logic in Aḥmad Razā's *fatwās* does not merely support textual citation but governs the derivation, scope, and conditional application of rulings.

The article consists of two sections. The first section situates the *mawlid* within its Indian social and ritual context and

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6 BARBARA METCALF, *ISLAMIC REVIVAL IN BRITISH INDIA: DEOBAND, 1860–1900*, at 298 (1982); USHA SANYAL, *DEVOTIONAL ISLAM AND POLITICS IN BRITISH INDIA: AHMAD RIZA KHAN AND HIS MOVEMENT, 1870–1920*, at 59 (1996).

7 Sajjad, *supra* note 4, at 212.

provides an overview of the late thirteenth /nineteenth century *mawlid* debates. The second section surveys major themes and trends in his *mawlid fatwās* and presents Aḥmad Razā's connection to the Farangī Maḥal and related networks before moving on to a close analysis of their logical structure. This close analysis includes comparative readings of selected *fatwās* by his Deobandī and Ahl-i Ḥadīs interlocutors.

### THE INDIAN *MAWLID*

By the late thirteenth/nineteenth century, communities across India widely organized and practiced *mawlid* celebrations in households and public places such as roads, marketplaces, and mosques.<sup>8</sup> When participants performed the ritual in mosques, they even held it after Friday and 'Īd prayers<sup>9</sup> and recited poetry.<sup>10</sup> Occasionally, partakers held the *mawlid* at the front of a walking funeral procession.<sup>11</sup> These celebrations regularly included decoration and lighting.<sup>12</sup>

Scholars were invited to *mawlid* gatherings to deliver talks and recite narrations related to the ritual. At times, organizers also invited individuals who would not be viewed as scholars or who did not demonstrate outward religious piety to narrate events from the Prophet's life and sing poetry praising him in melodious voices. This was done in groups or as a chorus and in the format of the *ghazal*,<sup>13</sup> and sometimes in languages that the audience did not understand.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, in their recitals, they associated concepts with the Prophet that scholars would consider problematic, such as God coming to the temporal world in the Prophet's body and the Prophet becoming one with God.<sup>15</sup> There also appear to have been professional *mawlid*

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8 23 RAZĀ KHĀN, *supra* note 1, at 723, 737, 744.

9 Special prayers performed in congregation on the two Islamic festivals of 'Īd al-Fiṭr and 'Īd al-Adhā.

10 8 RAZĀ KHĀN, *supra* note 1, at 123, 600; 22 *id.* at 239; 23 *id.* at 409.

11 9 *id.* at 140.

12 23 *id.*, at 258; 26 *id.* at 553.

13 A form of prose usually associated with separation from or loss of a lover, common to the Persian and Urdu languages in the Indian subcontinent.

14 6 RAZĀ KHĀN, *supra* note 1, at 605; 23 *id.* at 722, 732–34, 737.

15 15 *id.* at 299, 302–3, 305, 309.

reciters who performed for a fixed fee.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, there were women-only *mawlid*s, where participants recited narrations and sang poetry.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, the ritual appears to have been quite pervasive in society, such that even those engaged in professions shunned by others (such as prostitution) might organize it,<sup>18</sup> and even Hindus participated.<sup>19</sup> Lastly, the Sufis were strong proponents of the ritual, with their unique practices such as *samāʿ* (devotional listening to sacred poetry with or without or music),<sup>20</sup> known as *qawwālī* in the Indian subcontinent.<sup>21</sup> Practices that have always been associated with the ritual, such as the recitation of Qurʾānic verses and the distribution of food (ranging from simple sweets to lavish meals), were still characteristic of the *mawlid* in thirteenth/nineteenth-century British India.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, animals were slaughtered specifically for the *mawlid*, sometimes as an offering to certain religio-cultural personalities, and served to attendees.<sup>23</sup>

There appears to be a fusion of the *mawlid* ritual with the Shīʿī practice of narrating the events of Karbala.<sup>24</sup> Another potential foreign influence on the Sunnī *mawlid* was the practice of building models and images of religious characters and deriving “blessings” from them, which was still common in Aḥmad Razā’s time.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the expression of deep respect and veneration in the form of the practice of standing up during the narration of the Prophet’s birth or at the end of the ceremony (*qiyām*)<sup>26</sup> was also prevalent.<sup>27</sup>

16 19 *id.* at 502.

17 20 *id.* at 240, 242, 245.

18 23 *id.* at 751; 24 *id.* at 490–91.

19 23 *id.* at 723, 738.

20 For the Sufi practice and ritual of *samāʿ*, see J. Dering & R. Sellheim, *Samāʿ*, in *ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF ISLAM* (2002).

21 6 RAZĀ KHĀN, *supra* note 1, at 605; 23 *id.* at 561.

22 23 *id.* at 118, 744.

23 20 *id.* at 26–66.

24 The 61/680 battle in which Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī, the Prophet’s grandson, and his companions were killed. 23 *id.* at 747, 751; 24 *id.* at 489, 514.

25 24 *id.* at 425.

26 According to Katz, it is challenging to determine when the *qiyām* became a part of the *mawlid*; nevertheless, it appears to be prevalent by the tenth/sixteenth century in Syria, Egypt, and other parts of the Ottoman Empire. See KATZ, *supra* note 2, at 129.

27 23 RAZĀ KHĀN, *supra* note 1, at 730–31, 745.

THE MAWLID DEBATES

Debates surrounding the ritual of the *mawlid* in thirteenth/nineteenth-century British India can be divided into two categories: those on the permissibility versus impermissibility of the ritual itself, and those related to specific practices associated with the ritual. In the early thirteenth /nineteenth century, Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dihlawī (d. 1239/1824) declared the ritual permissible, that is, if it was in line with how it was performed at his house.<sup>28</sup> In his view, permissibility depended upon the ritual’s proper performance, which included asking God’s blessings for the Prophet (*durūd*), reciting the Qur’ān and authentic narrations, reciting the *Fātiḥa* (the first sura of the Qur’ān)<sup>29</sup> over any available food, and arranging for someone with a melodious voice to send salutations to the Prophet (*salām*). For Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, anything other than this is against the *sharī‘a* and, therefore, not permissible.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps it was during Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s lifetime that the ritual became problematic for specific individuals close to him. Shāh Muḥammad Ismā‘īl (d. 1246/1831), Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s nephew and a disciple of Sayyid Aḥmad Barelvī (d. 1246/1831),<sup>31</sup> viewed the ritual as impermissible, although he did not address the *mawlid* directly, focusing instead on the broader practice of the *Fātiḥa* and the death anniversaries of the saints (*‘urs*).<sup>32</sup> He accepted that the basis (*aṣl*) of the practice was very good and in line with the *sharī‘a*, but when lavish meals and specific kinds of food were prepared, people viewed it as a requirement, dates were fixed, and it was serving a worldly purpose as opposed to its original objective, then it was no longer permissible.<sup>33</sup>

28 SHĀH ‘ABD AL-‘AZĪZ AL-DIHLAWĪ, *FATĀWĀ ‘AZĪZIYYA* 199 (1967).

29 Although the word refers to the first chapter of the Qur’ān, in the Muslim world it is generally taken to be synonymous with the practice of *iṣāl-i thawāb*, whereby the living after reciting certain verses from the Qur’ān, pray and transmit the rewards of their good deeds to the deceased.

30 AL-DIHLAWĪ, *supra* note 28, at 199–200.

31 Sayyid Aḥmad Barelvī himself was a disciple and student of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. For him and Shāh Muḥammad Ismā‘īl, see METCALF, *supra* note 6, at 52–63.

32 Moulavī Mahommed Ismail, *Notice of the Peculiar Tenets Held by the Followers of Syed Ahmad, Taken Chiefly from the Sirāt-ül-Mustaḥqīm, a Principal Treatise of the Sect*, 1 JOURNAL OF THE ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BENGAL 485–86 (1832).

33 This is a summary of his arguments. For details, see MUḤAMMAD ISMĀ‘ĪL, *ŞIRĀT-I MUSTAḤQĪM* 73–79 (n.d.).

Thus, there were already disagreements regarding the permissibility of the ritual at the beginning of the thirteenth/nineteenth century and within the same circle of scholars. Moreover, it appears that, up until this time, the basis of the disagreement related more to the practices and the beliefs associated with the ritual rather than the ritual itself. However, by 1289/1873, the founders of the Ahl-i Ḥadīs movement started to advocate a more restrictive view where the ritual was considered an innovation (*bid'ā*) *per se*.<sup>34</sup> In his short *fatwā* on the issue, Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān (d. 1307/1890) labeled the ritual and accompanying practices an innovation since it had never been performed in the first three centuries of Islam (*qurūn-i thalātha*).<sup>35</sup> Several scholars endorsed this *fatwā*, especially those associated with the Deobandī movement, whose views will be discussed shortly.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Naẓīr Ḥussain (d. 1319/1902), in multiple *fatwās*, declared the ritual an innovation as a result all of its manifestations and practices, and hence prohibited. His main argument was the same as Ḥasan Khān's: it was never performed in the Prophet's lifetime, nor by the Companions or the Successors, and therefore cannot be permissible.<sup>37</sup> For the scholars associated with the Ahl-i Ḥadīs movement, the objective or intention behind the ritual was no longer a valid argument for its permissibility. In line with their reformist program, as the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* did not explicitly sanction the ritual, it could never be accepted as permissible under any circumstances. Both of the

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34 For background on the movement and brief biographies of its two leaders discussed here, Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān and Naẓīr Ḥussain, see METCALF, *supra* note 6, at 268–96.

35 There is also an indication by certain writers of Ḥasan Khān being a supporter of the *mawlid* and having written a treatise in support of it titled *al-Shamāma al-'anbarīyya min mawlid khayr al-barīyya*. See MUHAMMAD TAHIR-UL-QADRI, *MILĀD AL-NABI* 384 (2008). Unfortunately, I have not been able to verify if this work is indeed Ḥasan Khān's since he is not mentioned as the author on the version of the treatise that I have access to. Neither is this work listed by Saeed Ullah as Ḥasan Khān's treatise in his work on the scholar. See SAEED ULLAH, *THE LIFE AND WORKS OF MUHAMMAD SIDDIQ HASAN KHAN, NAWAB OF BHOPAL, 1248–1307 (1832–1890)*, at 195–198 (1973). On the contrary, Saeed Ullah explicitly states in his assessment of Ḥasan Khān's doctrines that he was someone who denounced the celebration. *See id.* at 140.

36 ṢIDDĪQ ḤASAN KHĀN, *FATĀWĀ* 177–80 (2013).

37 1 NAẒĪR ḤUSSAIN, *FATĀWĀ NADHIRIYYA* 214–15, 221–23 (1913).

Ahl-i Ḥadīs leaders were, to a certain extent, influenced by the extended scholarly circle of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz: Ḥasan Khān’s father was a disciple of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, and Naẓīr Ḥussain himself studied from Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s grandson.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, the idea of reforming rituals was not new; however, it acquired a new urgency in post-1857 British India.<sup>39</sup>

In a similar vein were the views of the founder of the Ahmadiyya movement, Mirzā Ghulām Aḥmad (d. 1326/1908), who considered the various practices associated with the ritual, such as performing the *qiyām*, to be innovations. He advocated for the recitation of the *mawlid* but not in the form that it had taken on in the thirteenth/nineteenth century. For him, the narration of the birth of the Prophet and other events from his life, after removing the elements of *bid‘a*, was equivalent to delivering a sermon. He therefore regarded this form of remembrance (what he refers to as “*mawlid* recitation”) as not only permissible but recommended.<sup>40</sup> In essence, for Ghulām Aḥmad, the “proper” *mawlid* was simply a sermon narrating the events of the Prophet’s life. As Hussain Khan has observed, prior to his messianic claims Ghulām Aḥmad had close relationships with certain key members of the Ahl-i Ḥadīs movement: Muḥammad Ḥussain Batālwī (d. 1338/1920), who was his classmate and friend, and Naẓīr Ḥussain himself, who at some point became his religious teacher and performed his second marriage.<sup>41</sup> These close relationships with the Ahl-i Ḥadīs scholars might have influenced his approach toward some issues, such as his views on the *mawlid*.

On the other end of the spectrum was the Aligarh movement led by Syed Ahmad Khan (d. 1315/1898), who was not against the ritual *per se* but was in favor of revising the narrations and material discussed during the ceremony. In his early years,

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38 METCALF, *supra* note 6 at 276.

39 This urgency is partly the result of broader processes of social and political transformation—subsequent to the decline of Mughal power—which politicized both Muslim and Hindu rituals and entwined debates about them with broader questions of communal identity and politics in colonial India. See SANDRIA B. FREITAG, *COLLECTIVE ACTION AND COMMUNITY: PUBLIC ARENAS AND THE EMERGENCE OF COMMUNALISM IN NORTH INDIA* 126–27 (1989); METCALF, *supra* note 6, at 354.

40 3 MIRZĀ GHULĀM AḤMAD, *MALFŪZĀT* 159–60 (1960).

41 ADIL HUSSAIN KHAN, *FROM SUFISM TO AHMADIYYA: A MUSLIM MINORITY MOVEMENT IN SOUTH ASIA* 171–72 (2015).

he had published a *mawlid* work that included certain traditional narrations on the Prophet and wherein he did not mention miracles of the Prophet, which was unusual for *mawlid* texts of the time. His text focused more on the moral aspects of the Prophet's personality.<sup>42</sup> However, in his later years, he even criticized some of these traditions that he had included in his text.<sup>43</sup> Similarly to scholars after Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, who were influenced by his approach of conducting the *mawlid* in a "proper" manner, Syed Ahmad Khan was impressed by the teachings and works of Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1176/1762), Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz himself, and Shāh Muḥammad Ismā'īl.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, this approach of revising the curriculum of the ritual appears to be in line with his broader program for educational and social reforms.

During Aḥmad Razā's time, scholars close to the early days of the Deobandī movement were divided on the issue of the *mawlid*'s permissibility. Broadly, there were three trends: complete opposition;<sup>45</sup> permissibility for the elite (scholars), who could identify its objectionable aspects and reform or remove certain practices;<sup>46</sup> and general permissibility.<sup>47</sup> According to Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī (d. 1323/1905),<sup>48</sup> who not only admired Shāh Muḥammad Ismā'īl but frequently referenced his works and encouraged his students to read them as well,<sup>49</sup> the *mawlid* was a *bid'a* and therefore impermissible, an opinion which happened to be perfectly in agreement with the Ahl-i Ḥadīs scholars.<sup>50</sup> He was one of the Deobandī scholars who endorsed Ḥasan Khān's above-mentioned *fatwā*.<sup>51</sup> He was also not in favor of accepting any good that could come out of a ritual based on illegitimate

42 METCALF, *supra* note 6, at 317.

43 HAFEEZ MALIK, SIR SAYYID AHMAD KHAN AND MUSLIM MODERNIZATION IN INDIA AND PAKISTAN 274 (1980).

44 *Id.* at 261, 264, 269.

45 This was mainly associated with the group of scholars led by Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī. See METCALF, *supra* note 6, 150.

46 Associated with Muḥammad Qāsim Nanūtwī. See *id.* at 151.

47 Associated with Imdād Allah al-Muḥajir al-Makkī and an initial position of Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī. See *id.* at 172.

48 For his biographical details, see *id.* at 78–80.

49 BRANNON D. INGRAM, REVIVAL FROM BELOW: THE DEOBAND MOVEMENT AND GLOBAL ISLAM 58 (2018).

50 *Id.* at 66.

51 ḤASAN KHĀN, *supra* note 36, at 179.

practices. However, he appears to be supportive of lectures on the Prophet's birth and life and, when someone once requested it, he even sent one of his students and disciples (a scholar in his own regard), Khalīl Sahāranpurī (d. 1927), to conduct a "proper" *mawlid* gathering. Khalīl Sahāranpurī's views regarding the *mawlid* were slightly different from his shaykh's. Although he considered the ritual to be an innovation, if it was stripped of all the "excesses" (such as quoting weak narrations, mixing genders, overindulgence in illumination) and erroneous beliefs (such as maintaining that the ritual was obligatory, declaring those who did not participate in it to be disbelievers, supposing that the Prophet was present in the gathering and as a result performing the *qiyām*), then it was no longer a *bid'a*.<sup>52</sup> Incidentally, Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī later adopted this view as well,<sup>53</sup> after revisiting his earlier stance of permissibility.<sup>54</sup> Lastly, both Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī and Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī's Sufi shaykh Ḥajī Imdādullāh al-Muḥajir al-Makkī (d. 1317/1899) did not consider the *mawlid* to be a *bid'a* intrinsically. Instead, Ḥajī Imdādullāh considered some of the blameworthy acts and beliefs treated as excesses by Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī and Khalīl Sahāranpurī as minor transgressions. He saw no issue with fixing a date for the *mawlid*, performing the *qiyām*, and the belief that the Prophet could be present in such gatherings. For him, prohibiting the complete ritual was like "burning one's rug because of a single flea."<sup>55</sup> Ḥajī Imdādullāh was a disciple of shaykhs who themselves were Sayyid Aḥmad Barelvī's disciples.<sup>56</sup> However, his views on the *mawlid* seem to contrast with the consensus of scholars influenced by Sayyid Aḥmad's reformist tendencies. One of the reasons for this difference could be that he was generally not viewed as a scholar but more as a Sufi, and thus some may have considered his legal reasoning weak or "flawed."<sup>57</sup> In the early Deobandī movement, then, we see a reflection of all the significant viewpoints regarding the ritual up until the late thirteenth/nineteenth century.

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52 INGRAM, *supra* note 49, at 67, 68.

53 For details of his life, *see id.* at 73.

54 *Id.* at 77.

55 *Id.* at 72.

56 METCALF, *supra* note 6, at 79.

57 INGRAM, *supra* note 49, at 69–70.

It was in the context of such thirteenth/nineteenth century trends, with calls either to reform the ritual itself or to declare it impermissible, that Aḥmad Razā presented his views on the *mawlid*.

**AḤMAD RAZĀ'S MAWLID FATWĀS:  
CHRONOLOGY, LOCATIONS, AND TOPICS**

Before examining the use of logic in Aḥmad Razā's *mawlid fatwās*, it is necessary to situate them within their contextual circumstances. Establishing this context is essential for understanding why Aḥmad Razā adopts certain modes of logical reasoning in his responses. Accordingly, this section maps the chronology, geographic distribution, and broad themes of his *mawlid fatwās* in order to clarify the kinds of questions he responded to, who asked them, and under what conditions.

Over the forty years (1299–1339/1881–1921) during which Aḥmad Razā issued his *mawlid*-related *fatwās*, it appears that the bulk of these (almost fifty percent) emerged towards the last six years of his life (1334–39/1915–21).<sup>58</sup> This trend occurred due to a growing concern with *mawlid* practices during his lifetime, triggered primarily as a result of the *mawlid* debates, and Aḥmad Razā's growing popularity in the later part of his life.

In fact, for the first years, he only issued *fatwās* pertaining to specific elements of the *mawlid*, the first couple addressing the permissibility of performing the *qiyām*. It seems that the first *fatwā* on the permissibility of the ritual as a whole does not make an appearance until 1320/1902. Although, as highlighted earlier, scholars had already contested the permissibility of the ritual prior to this, with some of the initial *fatwās* on its impermissibility appearing and being disseminated in scholarly circles

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58 Of the total 116 *mawlid fatwās*, four are treatises in response to petitions (*Naṭiq al-hilāl bārakh wilād al-habīb wa'l-wiṣāl*, *iqāma al-qiyāma 'alā ṭā'an al-qiyām li-Nabī Tihāma*, *khayr al-amāl fī ḥukm al-kasb wa'l-sūwāl*, and *Shifā al-wālah fī šūra al-habīb wa-mazāra wa-na'ālah*). However, given the total quantity of treatises included in his *Fatāwā* (206 to be precise), this is a tiny percentage (under 2%). For further details, see Figure 1.

for endorsement purposes by 1291/1874.<sup>59</sup> One reason for this is that the issuance of a *fatwā* depends upon the *mufī*<sup>60</sup> receiving a petition (*istiftā*<sup>61</sup>). There could be two possible explanations for Aḥmad Razā not receiving any *mawlid*-related petitions during this period. First, the impact of the *mawlid* becoming a concern for Indian Muslims, triggered to a certain extent by the growing influence of the Deobandī and Ahl-i Ḥadīs movements, would have taken some time to foment.<sup>62</sup> Second, Aḥmad Razā's popularity as a *mufī* increased only towards the later part of his *fatwā*-writing career. There were three key events that raised his profile amongst his followers and the scholars associated with him: first, he was declared a *mujaddid* in a gathering of scholars in 1318/1900;<sup>63</sup> second, he issued a controversial *fatwā* declaring certain scholars guilty of disbelief in 1324/1906; and third, access to a widely circulated regional newspaper helped him to disseminate his teachings from 1328/1910.<sup>64</sup> A round 1328/1910, we see an increase in the number of petitions received by Aḥmad Razā on the *mawlid*. However, whether this is consistent with the overall trend for a substantial increase in petitions generally is something that requires additional research and is beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, there is an indication of an overwhelming number of petitions received by Aḥmad Razā towards the later part of his life, such that he arranged for several students to assist him in issuing *fatwās*.<sup>65</sup> This development conforms, broadly speaking, to a general trend for the growing production and public circulation of *fatwās* from the 1890s onward.<sup>66</sup> Figure 1 (overleaf) presents a graphic representation of the timing of Aḥmad Razā's *mawlid fatwās*.

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59 The Deoband *madrassa* was in existence by 1283/1867, and one of the earliest dated endorsements of Ḥasan Khān's *fatwā* by Deobandī *mufī*s is 1290/1873. See ḤASAN KHĀN, *supra* note 36, at 179.

60 Someone qualified to issue a *fatwā*.

61 On the significance of the petition, see Muhammad Khalid Masud, *The Significance of Istiftā' in the Fatwā Discourse*, 48 ISLAMIC STUDIES 341–66 (2009).

62 METCALF, *supra* note 6, at 354–55.

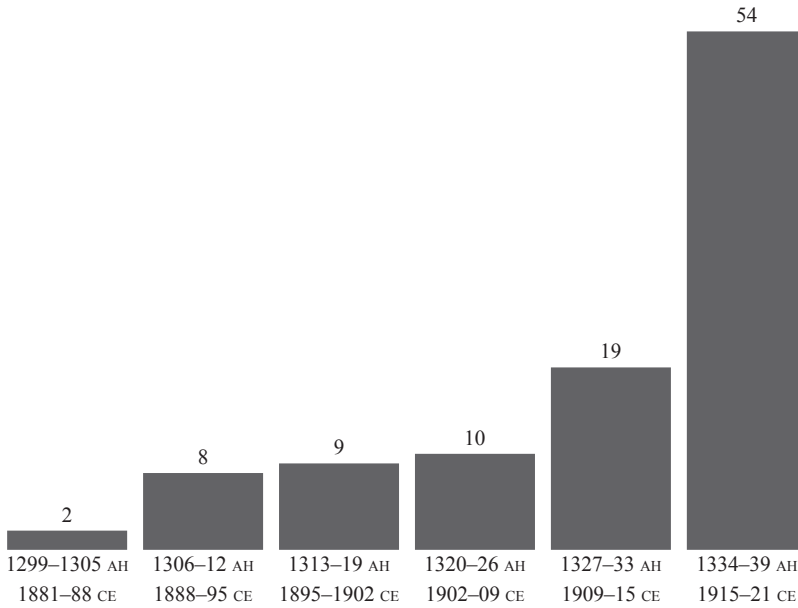
63 A reformer who seeks to revive or renew Islamic thought or practices, believed to appear at the turn of each Islamic century.

64 SANYAL, *supra* note 6, at 88, 226–27, 231.

65 *Id.* at 180–81.

66 DIETRICH REETZ, ISLAM IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE: RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN INDIA, 1900–1947, at 289 (2006).

Figure 1: Time period of the mawlid-related fatwās.



Aḥmad Razā’s *Fatāwā Riḍwiyya* addresses more than 6,500 questions on topics ranging from creeds, rituals, marriage and divorce, contracts and trading to customs. The *mawlid*-related *fatwās* form a tiny percentage of Aḥmad Razā’s output: less than two percent of the total questions answered or 116 *fatwās* in total, indicating that he was occupied with other far more critical issues. Volume 23 of the *Fatāwā* contains the most *fatwās* relevant to *mawlid*, which is to be expected given that it has a whole chapter dedicated to the *mawlid* and other rituals, such as celebrating the ‘*urs* of saints and narrating the events of Karbala. For the rest of the volumes, the *fatwās* are scattered under various topics; *fatwās* often relate to multiple topics, so that any sort of categorization is challenging. However, by first identifying the question from the petitioner and then analyzing Aḥmad Razā’s response, I was able to classify the *fatwās* into broad categories. Table 1 presents these categories with the greatest number of *fatwās*.

A quick review of the locations from where Aḥmad Razā received his petitions reveals that most of these were in and around the United Provinces of British India. This is no surprise

## *Celebrating the Birth of the Prophet in British India*

*Table 1: Categories with the greatest number of mawlid fatwās.*

<i>Mawlid</i> category	Number of <i>fatwās</i>	Percentage of total
Reciter requirements	17	15%
Content	14	12%
Permissibility	13	11%
Spending	13	11%
<i>Qiyām</i>	10	9%
Wahhābīs and Deobandīs	8	7%
Food	8	7%
Relations with deniers	8	7%
Organizer requirements	5	4%
Prophetic presence	4	3%
Women	4	3%

given that the institutional bases of the movement associated with Aḥmad Razā and his earlier supporters from amongst the *‘ulamā’* (Islamic scholars) were located around this region.<sup>67</sup> However, it might also have to do with the fact that, during this period, people in these regions widely spoke the Hindustani language (a term used by the British rulers to refer to both Urdu and Hindi).<sup>68</sup> Figure 2 presents petitioners’ various locations, indicating that the *mawlid* had become a subject of some concern across the region, and that Aḥmad Razā was known in some of the farthest parts of British India.

Another notable aspect of these petitions is that they appear to originate mostly from individuals belonging to the non-scholarly class.<sup>69</sup> While there are questions from individ-

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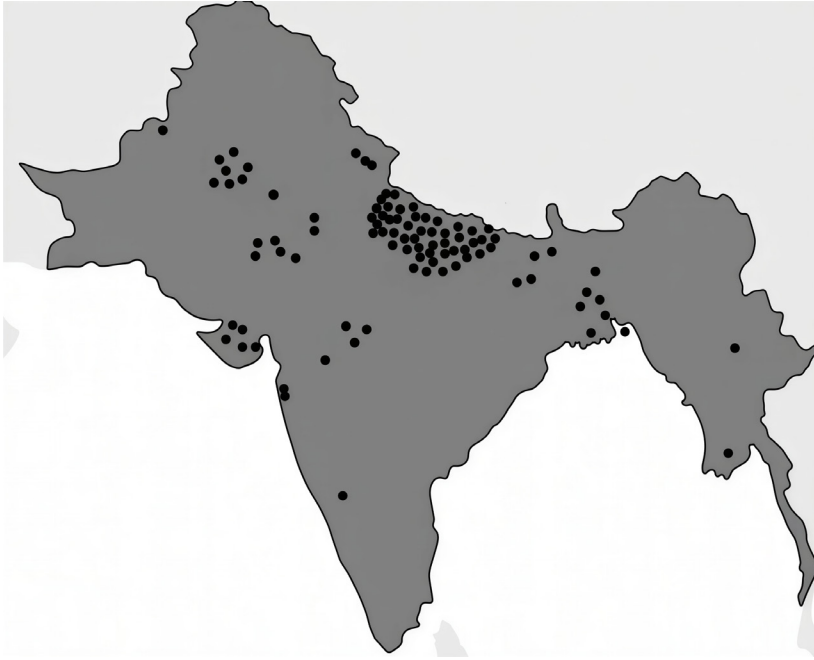
<sup>67</sup> SANYAL, *supra* note 6, at 69.

<sup>68</sup> The British did not segregate between Hindi and Urdu. These languages were loosely clubbed into three broad categories: Hindi, Western Hindi, and Eastern Hindi. For a discussion of this, see David Lelyveld, *Colonial Knowledge and the Fate of Hindustani*, 35 *COMPARATIVE STUDIES IN SOCIETY AND HISTORY* 665–82 (1993).

Based on the 1911 census of British India, out of the 98 million Indians who spoke some form of Hindi, around 72 million were residents of the region comprising the United Provinces and Bihar. For the data in support of this, see tables 20 and 21 in *STATISTICAL ABSTRACT RELATING TO BRITISH INDIA FROM 1910–11 TO 1919–20*, at 18–22 (1922).

<sup>69</sup> This is based on a review of the information provided in the petition relating to the petitioner. More often than not, the title before the name (such as *Mawlvī*) of the individual or other references within the question indicate whether they are

Figure 2: Locations of mawlid-related petitions.



uals who appear to be scholars, teachers, and students associated with religious institutions, these seem to focus mostly on the correct modalities for the ritual instead of its permissibility.<sup>70</sup> Although this might indicate that, for most scholars petitioning Aḥmad Razā, the permissibility of the ritual was a non-issue, it may also have to do with advances in infrastructure that resulted in the ‘*ulamā*’ reaching a wider audience than the scholarly class.<sup>71</sup>

This chronological, thematic, and geographic mapping establishes the context within which Aḥmad Razā’s *mawlid fatwās* must be read. These rulings were not abstract legal exercises but responses to recurring and contested questions that

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from the scholarly class. This is based on 65 of 93 petitions (approximately 70%) where I was able to find this information.

70 There are only three such petitions from scholars inquiring about permissibility. However, they also include the various practices associated with the ritual in their petition.

71 BARBARA D. METCALF & THOMAS R. METCALF, *A CONCISE HISTORY OF MODERN INDIA* 97, 99 (2006); MUHAMMAD QASIM ZAMAN, *THE ULAMA IN CONTEMPORARY ISLAM: CUSTODIANS OF CHANGE* 25 (2002).

a largely non-scholarly audience posed across different settings. The range of issues that the *fatwās* address shows that the *mawlid* presented a group of interrelated ritual, doctrinal, and social concerns rather than a single legal problem. This complexity helps to explain why Aḥmad Razā's reasoning often moves beyond textual citation toward distinctions and conditional rulings capable of accommodating variation. It is within this space that logic (*manṭiq*) operates not just as a supporting tool but as an organizing principle of his juristic method.

Before I analyze the construction of Aḥmad Razā's arguments, I provide background on his connection to the *ma'qūlāt* tradition in British India. This context enables a fuller appreciation of his response and provides the context for my later analysis of his *fatwās*, particularly their use of heightened logical reasoning.

#### THE FARANGĪ MAḤAL CONNECTION

Theologically, Aḥmad Razā was influenced not only by the heightened focus on *ḥadīth* associated with the Shāh Walī Allāh trend but also by the “rationalist” (*ma'qūlī*) orientation of the Farangī Maḥal.<sup>72</sup> This latter trend differed from that of Shāh Walī Allāh and his successors, such as Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, at the Madrasa-i Raḥīmiyya. Whereas Shāh Walī Allāh emphasized *ḥadīth*-based scholarship, the Farangī Maḥal approach placed greater weight on the rational sciences, particularly logic, which its proponents considered essential for the proper study of *fiqh*.<sup>73</sup>

Aḥmad Razā's primary intellectual influence, his father Naqī 'Alī Khān (d. 1297/1880), maintained close associations with scholars linked to the Farangī Maḥal tradition, whose curricula emphasized the rational sciences, especially logic.<sup>74</sup> Among the close associates of Aḥmad Razā's family were the father-son duo Fazl-i Rasūl Badāyūnī (d. 1298/1872) and 'Abd al-Qādir Badāyūnī

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72 USHA SANYAL, AHMAD RIZA KHAN BARELWI: IN THE PATH OF THE PROPHET 59–60 (2005).

73 FRANCIS ROBINSON, THE 'ULAMA OF FARANGI MAHALL AND ISLAMIC CULTURE IN SOUTH ASIA 46–53 (2001).

74 METCALF, *supra* note 6, INDIA at 298; SANYAL, *supra* note 6, at 59.

(d. 1319/1901). Fazl-i Rasūl studied under and graduated from Nūr al-Ḥaqq Farangī Maḥalī (d. 1238/1822) in Lucknow.<sup>75</sup> Aḥmad Razā later composed a commentary on one of Fazl-i Rasūl’s most significant polemical works against Shāh Muḥammad Ismā‘īl (d. 1246/1831), *al-Mu‘taqad al-Muntaqad* (*The Decisive Refutation*). In the realm of polemics, as Tareen demonstrates, Aḥmad Razā was an “intellectual heir” to Badāyūnī.<sup>76</sup> Fazl-i Rasūl also issued a *fatwā* in response to a petition by the last Mughal emperor, Bahādur Shah Zafar (d. 1279/1862), concerning certain practices associated with the *mawlid*.<sup>77</sup>

Aḥmad Razā was also connected to the Badāyūnīs through Sufi networks. Fazl-i Rasūl’s father was a disciple and vicegerent (*khalīfa*) of the Sufi master Shāh Āl-i Aḥmad Barkātī (d. 1235/1819) of the Barkātiyya Sayyids of Marahra. Fazl-i Rasūl himself was later invested with vicegerency (*khirqā* or *kh-ilāfa*), and his son, ‘Abd al-Qādir, was among his disciples. The family maintained close ties with the Barkātīs well into Aḥmad Razā’s lifetime.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, it was ‘Abd al-Qādir who suggested that both Naqī ‘Alī and Aḥmad Razā become disciples of Āl-i Aḥmad’s nephew, Shāh Āl-i Rasūl Barkātī (d. 1296/1879).<sup>79</sup> Significantly, Āl-i Rasūl had also studied under Nūr al-Ḥaqq in Lucknow, further reinforcing Aḥmad Razā’s intellectual links to the Farangī Maḥal.<sup>80</sup>

Alongside the Farangī Maḥal, another *maqūlat* tradition was active during this period: the Khayrābādī school. Emerging from the Farangī Maḥal in the late twelfth/eighteenth century, the Khayrābādī trend had developed a distinct character by Aḥmad Razā’s time, including differences in curricular emphases and instructional texts.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, considerable overlap existed,

75 REHMAN ALI, TAZKIRA-I ULAMĀ-YI HIND 329–30 (2003).

76 TAREEN, *supra* note 5, at 136–37.

77 FAZL-I RASŪL BADĀYŪNĪ, IKHTALĀFĪ MASA’IL PAR TĀRIKHĪ FATWA 35–54 (2009).

78 FAZL-I RASŪL BADĀYŪNĪ, SAYF AL-JABBĀR AL-MASLŪL ‘ALĀ A’DĀ AL-ABRĀR 8–9 (1973); for the Barkātiyya Sayyids, see Sanyal’s excellent chapter in SANYAL, *supra* note 6, at 97–127.

79 *Id.* at 59.

80 BADR AL-DĪN AḤMAD QĀDRĪ, SAWĀNIḤ A’LĀ ḤAZRAT 119 (1984).

81 Asad Q. Ahmed, *Logic in the Khayrābādī School of India: A Preliminary Exploration*, in LAW AND TRADITION IN CLASSICAL ISLAMIC THOUGHT: STUDIES IN

as both belonged to the broader *ma'qūlāt* tradition. Students often studied with scholars associated with both trends, and scholars maintained intellectual ties across these networks. Fazl-i Rasūl and Fazl-i Ḥaqq Khayrābādī (d. 1278/1861), for instance, were both students of Fazl-i Imām Khayrābādī (d. 1243/1828) and maintained a close friendship. Moreover, 'Abd al-Qādir studied logic under Fazl-i Ḥaqq.<sup>82</sup> Aḥmad Razā himself shared a close bond with 'Abd al-Qādir, such that he even composed a poem of 105 verses in his praise.<sup>83</sup>

These scholarly, pedagogical, and Sufi networks within which Naqī 'Alī and Aḥmad Razā operated, produced a distinctive scholarly orientation and approach. This intellectual formation helps explain the enhanced use of logic in Aḥmad Razā's *fatwās*, to which I now turn.

#### AḤMAD RAZĀ'S USE OF LOGIC IN *FATWĀ* ARGUMENTATION

What, then, would qualify someone as a *ma'qūlī* in late thirteenth/nineteenth century British India? One indicator is formal study under, and intellectual association with, scholars of the *ma'qūlī* tradition, a criterion that Aḥmad Razā clearly meets, as shown above. A second, and analytically central indicator is the way arguments are constructed and presented in written works. While intellectual affiliation establishes Aḥmad Razā's location within the *ma'qūlī* tradition, it is this pattern of argumentation that provides the primary evidence for how he operationalizes logic in his *fatwās*. It is therefore this indicator that forms the focus of the analysis that follows, which examines construction and deployment of arguments across Aḥmad Razā's *fatwās*.

Before examining selected *mawlid fatwās* of Aḥmad Razā, a number of methodological clarifications are necessary. I do not argue that Aḥmad Razā employed logical reasoning while his opponents did not. Rather, my contention is that he represents a distinctive mode of *fatwā* reasoning in which logic

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HONOR OF PROFESSOR HOSSEIN MODARRESSI 234–36 (2013).

82 ALI, *supra* note 75, at 273.

83 MUHAMMAD MASOOD AHMAD, 'ĀSHIQ AL-RASŪL MAWLĀNĀ MUḤAMMAD 'ABDUL QADĪR BADĀYŪNĪ, 18 (1978).

is operationalized as an authoritative juristic tool, rather than a supplementary device. This study treats logic as supplementary when it merely reinforces a conclusion grounded independently in textual authority, and authoritative when it actively structures the derivation, scope, and conditional application of the ruling. The latter appears when reasoning drives the argument, the jurist integrates texts into that reasoning, and rulings vary according to different situations. It is this difference in the function and weight accorded to logic that distinguishes Aḥmad Razā's approach from that of his opponents, a distinction this section aims to demonstrate through targeted comparison with selected *fatwās* issued by his opponents.

Owing to the limited scope of this paper, it was not possible to undertake a corpus-wide analysis of the *mawlid*-related *fatwās* of the scholars with whom Aḥmad Razā is compared. An ideal comparative framework would have involved a similar examination of the complete body of *fatwās* addressing the prohibition of the *mawlid* and its associated practices across these scholars. Such an undertaking, however, lies beyond the parameters of the present study. Despite this limitation, a meaningful comparison remains possible. By selecting representative *fatwās* from across Aḥmad Razā's opponents this section enables a controlled comparison of argumentative strategies across different contexts and schools of thought.

It is also important to note that logic did not occupy the same curricular status within the Deobandī and Ahl-i Ḥadīs intellectual worlds that it did within the Farangī Maḥal tradition. Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, for instance, opposed the study of logic at Deoband, regarding it as trivial in comparison to foundational religious texts.<sup>84</sup> This curricular orientation inevitably shaped the manner in which scholars deployed logic within legal reasoning.

Nevertheless, this observation should not be read as a uniform judgment across all scholars associated with these movements. As will become evident, even within a single movement there were variations in the extent and manner in which logical reasoning was engaged. What does emerge

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84 METCALF, *supra* note 6, at 101.

consistently from the sampled *fatwās*, however, is that scholars primarily employed logic in support of the transmitted sciences, functioning as a supporting device rather than as a dominant mode of argumentation.

The key methodological question, however, is how to link the argumentative strategies deployed in these *fatwās* to the *ma'qūlī* tradition. To link these argumentative strategies to the *ma'qūlī* tradition, I trace them back to the logic (*manṭiq*) texts that formed the core of *ma'qūlī* instruction. Based on Robinson's comparison of the number of texts taught at Farangī Maḥal and at the Madrasa-i Raḥīmiyya in the early twelfth/eighteenth century, one rational discipline stands out clearly: logic (eleven texts versus two).<sup>85</sup> As Asad Q. Ahmed demonstrates, this heightened emphasis on logic continued well into Aḥmad Razā's time.<sup>86</sup> Biographical accounts of Aḥmad Razā further suggest that he had engaged with several advanced works in logic.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, he authored commentaries on logical texts such as *Mullā Jalāl*, further reinforcing his strong orientation toward logical reasoning.<sup>88</sup>

To systematically assess the application of logical reasoning, I evaluate *fatwās* using four criteria derived from classic syllogistic reasoning: (1) structural organization, (2) use of connectives, (3) incorporation of supporting texts (e.g., the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, and *fiqh*), and (4) treatment of multiple scenarios versus single rulings. These criteria were selected from a sample advanced logic text, *Sullam al-'ulūm (The Ladder of the Sciences)*,<sup>89</sup> which was taught at the Farangī Maḥal.<sup>90</sup> The Madrasa-i Raḥīmiyya did not include this text in its curriculum.<sup>91</sup> Its use as a reference allows me to demonstrate that Aḥmad Razā's reasoning reflects systematic application of logical principles

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85 ROBINSON, *supra* note 73, at 214.

86 Ahmed, *supra* note 81, at 236.

87 For an example, see SANYAL, *supra* note 72, at 59.

88 QĀDRĪ, *supra* note 80, at 395.

89 For a recent English translation of the *Sullam*, see ASAD Q. AHMED, PALIMPSESTS OF THEMSELVES: LOGIC AND COMMENTARY IN POSTCLASSICAL MUSLIM SOUTH ASIA (2022). The selected criteria appear on pp. 184–94.

90 ROBINSON, *supra* note 73, at 250.

91 G.M.D. SUFI, AL-MINHĀJ: BEING THE EVOLUTION OF CURRICULUM IN THE MUSLIM EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS OF INDIA 69 (1977).

rather than mere reading of texts. This curricular distinction is significant. The *Sullam al-‘ulūm* also addresses additional topics on logic such as definitions, propositions, modals, and rhetoric. These topics are either covered to a certain extent within the selected criteria or excluded because they cannot be consistently observed in actual *fatwās*. Therefore, the four criteria focus on forms of logical reasoning that are both clearly observable in the *fatwā* texts and directly involved in shaping legal rulings.

I assess the application of logical reasoning based on a six-point scale (0–5), where 0 indicates non-existent reasoning and 5 indicates the highest level. This scale enables a more precise criteria for measuring the usage of logic. The specific criteria assessed are structural organization, use of logical connectives, reliance on supporting texts, and treatment of multiple scenarios.

Structural organization ranges from simple assertions to fully articulated syllogisms with clearly identifiable major premises, minor premises, and conclusions. The use of connectives tracks the clarity and density of inferential links, distinguishing between minimal connectors (e.g., words such as “and”), weak connectors (e.g., the word “otherwise”), and clearly marked logical relations (e.g., “if ... then”). The supporting-texts criterion measures the balance between transmitted sources and independent reasoning, while the multiple-scenarios criterion captures the extent to which objections, distinctions, and alternative cases are anticipated and addressed. Table 2 presents the pointers for each criterion.

The appendix includes the detailed results. Around 38% of the *fatwās* scored 4 or higher, with eight *fatwās* achieving a perfect score of 5 across all criteria, demonstrating Aḥmad Raḏā’s skill as a logician. The mean score of 3.23 and median score of 3.0 together indicate that moderate-to-high levels of logical reasoning are not exceptional and are embedded across the *fatwās*. Furthermore, conceptually abstract issues such as the *qiyām*, Prophetic presence, and permissibility constitute 26% of the total corpus, while they account for 36.4% of the highest-scoring *fatwās* (scores of 4 or above). This disproportionate representation suggests that issues marked by conceptual

*Table 2: Criteria for assessing the application of logical reasoning in the mawlid fatwās.*

<b>Logic criteria</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Structural organization</b>	Assertion only	Text to ruling (implicit)	Single principle applied	Implied syllogism	Clear rule to case to ruling	Explicit setup as major premise, minor premise, and conclusion
<b>Use of connectives</b>	None	Minimal	Weak connectors	One clear connector	Two clear connectors	More than two clear connectors
<b>Supporting texts</b>	Pure citations	Texts dominant	Mostly text plus one principle	Balanced	Mostly reasoning	No texts
<b>Multiple scenarios</b>	No objections handled	None shown	One distinction	Two distinctions	Three distinctions	More than three distinctions

ambiguity or theological sensitivity tend to produce more explicit and structured logical reasoning.

Another trend emerges when the *fatwās* are divided into two chronological phases: prior to 1334/1915 and after 1334/1915. The mean logic score rises from 2.90 in the period 1299–1333/1881–1914 to 3.30 in 1334–39/1915–21, with the median increasing from 3.0 to 3.5. This shift suggests not a random increase, but a consolidation of a rationalist method over time. Notably, the proportion of *fatwās* addressing deniers, Wahhābīs, and Deobandīs nearly doubles, from 10% in the earlier period to 19.4% in the later one. This rise in polemical engagement corresponds with the rise in logical reasoning, indicating that increased doctrinal contestation contributed to more explicit rational argumentation.

Accordingly, analysis of the complete corpus of 116 *mawlid*-related *fatwās* indicates that Aḥmad Razā systematically and extensively deploys logical reasoning to defend the *mawlid*, endorsing certain practices while explicitly rejecting others.

The next section substantiates this conclusion by examining a selected set of representative *fatwās*, analyzing the logical structures and argumentative techniques through which Aḥmad Razā articulates and justifies his rulings.

### ON PERMISSIBILITY OF THE *MAWLID*

Aḥmad Razā's principal argument in support of the permissibility of the ritual rests on the claim that it is not explicitly prohibited. In response to a petition from the Assistant Secretary of the Ahl-i Ḥadīs association of Amritsar on providing proof in support of the *mawlid* from the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, and *fiqh*, Aḥmad Razā's main line of argument is clear and succinct: it has not been explicitly deemed prohibited. According to him, the scriptures or recognized books of *fiqh* provide no proof prohibiting the celebration of the *mawlid*.<sup>92</sup> This hermeneutical stance aligns with what Tareen identifies as a core principle in Aḥmad Razā's legal reasoning: A practice can only be deemed impermissible through a conclusive proof text (*naṣṣ-i qaṭ'ī*), otherwise the

92 29 RAZĀ KHĀN, *supra* note 1, at 248–49.

default value was that of permissibility (*ibāḥat*).<sup>93</sup> Aḥmad Razā's response to the Amritsar petition thus operates squarely within this framework, shifting the burden of proof onto his opponents by demanding a decisive textual basis for prohibition rather than supplying evidence of explicit authorization.

This approach sharply distinguishes Aḥmad Razā from his opponents, who maintain that anything not explicitly designated as permissible by the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, and accepted practices of the first three centuries of Islam is not allowed. Furthermore, if the original (*aṣl*) ruling for something is permissibility, then that ruling remains applicable. A ruling of prohibition or impermissibility applies only to the reprehensible matters that become associated with it. Thus, giving the example of unauthentic and fabricated narrations being recited in *mawlid* gatherings in India, he states that this will not change the original ruling of permissibility.<sup>94</sup> In his response, Aḥmad Razā engages in a form of compound syllogism,<sup>95</sup> which was heavily used by Fazl-i Haqq Khairābādī and scholars associated with him to argue against Shāh Ismā'īl's views on God's omnipotence.<sup>96</sup> The presence of such structured logical reasoning underscores that Aḥmad Razā's defense of the *mawlid* is not merely rhetorical or devotional but firmly anchored in the *ma'qūlī* tradition.

A useful comparison can be drawn with one of Ṣiddīq Hasan Khān's *fatwās* endorsed by Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī.<sup>97</sup> In this ruling, the prohibition of the *mawlid* rests on a single premise: it was not observed during the first three centuries of Islam, and no scriptural evidence supports it. The conclusion follows: the practice is an innovation (*bid'a*). Here, logic is employed in a basic, linear fashion from premise to conclusion without

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93 TAREEN, *supra* note 5, at 257.

94 24 RAZĀ KHĀN, *supra* note 1, at 519.

95 He presents part of a Qur'ānic verse, accompanied by a statement along the following lines: "IF the Wahhabis can provide proof that ... OR ... THEN a reward of 40 rupees." See generally JOEP LAMEER, AL-FĀRĀBĪ AND ARISTOTELIAN SYLLOGISTICS: GREEK THEORY AND ISLAMIC PRACTICE (1994) (regarding syllogism in Islamic practice).

96 Asad Q. Ahmed & Reza Pourjavady, *Theology in the Indian Subcontinent*, in THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF ISLAMIC THEOLOGY 621 (Sabine Schmidtke ed., 2016).

97 HASAN KHĀN, *supra* note 36, at 177–80.

layering or qualification. Gangohī's endorsement reinforces this simplicity; he states that such gatherings are impermissible and attending them is sinful; if someone calls out to the Prophet with the belief that he is present and observing (*ḥāẓir o nāẓir*), this constitutes disbelief (*kufr*). The reasoning is minimal and categorical, with no anticipatory handling of objections or secondary considerations.

By contrast, Aḥmad Razā consistently structures his arguments in multi-step syllogisms, qualifying premises and anticipating challenges. For instance, he explicitly maintains that the original ruling of permissibility remains applicable even when reprehensible elements appear in practice, thereby preserving the act's legitimacy while addressing potential objections. This multi-step and qualified reasoning demonstrate his advanced and distinctive use of logic compared to the basic linear approach of Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān and Gangohī. A key difference between Aḥmad Razā and the Deobandī scholars was that, even when some corrupt or reprehensible practices were associated with the *mawlid*, Aḥmad Razā maintained that the scholars had no authority to stop the ritual itself. Both Sajjad and Tareen make this observation.<sup>98</sup> I would take this a step further by arguing that Aḥmad Razā's distinctive approach lay in his systematic separation of the original ruling (*aṣl*) from the secondary or contingent aspects of the practice (*far'*). This separation was achieved through a precise form of logical reasoning using defined concepts and qualified premises to determine which aspects of the practice are legally essential and which are contingent. By isolating the core permissibility of the ritual from problematic additions, he could identify and address objections while still defending the practice. This method of drawing out underlying principles and using them to justify the ritual represents the primary logical and methodological difference between Aḥmad Razā and the Deobandī scholars.

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98 Sajjad, *supra* note 4, at 211; TAREEN, *supra* note 5, at 267.

## USING SCRIPTURE THROUGH LOGIC IN LEGAL REASONING

In a significant proportion of his *fatwās* (25%), Aḥmad Razā does not refer to scripture at all, which itself indicates reliance on other modes of argumentation, most notably logical reasoning. In the majority (75%) of his *mawlid fatwās* in which he cites supporting sources, he refers to the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* in 44% and 37% of these cases, respectively.<sup>99</sup> This underscores the centrality of scripture in his reasoning. Crucially, however, Aḥmad Razā does not invoke scripture as isolated proof texts; rather, he incorporates it into a structured logic-based argumentative process that proceeds from the absence of explicit prohibition to a legal conclusion of permissibility. For instance, there are three verses that he frequently quotes from the Qur'ān, the first two being:

Say: In the bounty (*faḍl*) of Allah and in His mercy: therein let them rejoice. It is better than what they hoard. (Qur'ān 10:58)<sup>100</sup>

Therefore of the bounty (*ni'ma*) of thy Lord be thy discourse. (Qur'ān 93:11)<sup>101</sup>

Aḥmad Razā quotes each of these in six separate *fatwās*, and for him the “bounty” of God is the Prophet, and this should be declared and rejoiced in; what better way than through the *mawlid*? In the first verse, exegetes have interpreted the bounty of God to be the Qur'ān, and “mercy” as referring to either Islam or the Prophet, while bounty in the second verse has had a wide range of interpretations ranging from the Qur'ān, Prophethood, or guidance, to any blessing in general.<sup>102</sup> In addition, Aḥmad Razā quotes the following verse:

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99 This approach of a *muftī* not providing their sources is not unique and has been prevalent since classical times. See Masud, *supra* note 61, at 347.

100 In Pickthall's version of the translation, this appears as verse 59 of chapter 10. MARMADUKE PICKTHALL, *THE MEANING OF THE GLORIOUS KORAN: AN EXPLANATORY TRANSLATION* 216 (1930).

101 *Id.* at 656.

102 *THE STUDY QURAN: A NEW TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY* chapters 10 and 93 (Seyyed Hossein Nasr et al. eds. and trans., 2015).

That ye (mankind) may believe in Allah and His messenger, and may honour Him, and may revere Him, and may glorify Him at early dawn and at the close of day. (Qur'ān 48:09)<sup>103</sup>

Exegetes have interpreted this verse in different ways; either it relates to honoring and revering God or it applies to the Prophet instead.<sup>104</sup> Aḥmad Razā prefers the latter reading.<sup>105</sup> Accordingly, he selects an interpretation as his premise that will lead to him conclude the permissibility of the *mawlid*. For Aḥmad Razā the *mawlid* is a way of honoring and revering the Prophet. As per Aḥmad Razā, these Qur'ānic verses have general applicability and one should not restrict these verses to a specific time period, such as to the first three centuries of Islam, or to certain acts and practices only.<sup>106</sup> Coincidentally, in Aḥmad Razā's *fatwā* to the Ahl-i Ḥadīs association of Amritsar, his fourth verse from the Qur'ān and accompanying statement are as follows:

Allah the Great says: And whatsoever the messenger giveth you, take it. And whatsoever he forbiddeth, abstain (from it). (Qur'ān 57:7)<sup>107</sup> If the Wahhabīs can provide proof that somewhere the Majestic Qur'ān or the exalted *ḥadīths* disallow the blessed *mawlid* gathering, then a reward of 40 rupees.<sup>108</sup>

Here he uses scriptural syllogism to convert Qur'ānic silence into certainty, showcasing his textual-to-logical or scriptural-to-rational deployment.

From the *ḥadīth* literature, the texts Aḥmad Razā most often quotes are the authoritative collections of Bukhārī (thirteen times), Muslim (eleven times), and Abū Dāwūd (ten times), and he deploys these texts in a similar manner. This also indicates his concern for using sources that provoked minimum

103 PICKTHALL, *supra* note 100, at 529.

104 THE STUDY QURAN, *supra* note 102, chapter 48.

105 For an example of this, see 23 RAZĀ KHĀN, *supra* note 1, at 750.

106 29 *id.* at 251–52.

107 PICKTHALL, *supra* note 100, at 575.

108 29 RAZĀ KHĀN, *supra* note 1, at 248–49 (emphasis added).

disagreement amongst the scholars of his time when setting up his premises. Although Aḥmad Razā was a Sufi shaykh, he only refers to eight Sufi texts in the *mawlid fatwās*.<sup>109</sup> These references include al-Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* and *Kimīyā-e sa'ādat*, and al-Zabīdī's (d. 1205/1790) *Ithāf al-sāda al-muttaqīn*, a commentary on the *Iḥyā'*, which is quoted seven times, while the rest of the Sufi texts are referred to only once. The *Ithāf* is mainly used as a source of *ḥadīths* rather than views of the Sufis, reinforcing that for Aḥmad Razā not all sources are equal in terms of their importance for the argument and they are leveraged in different ways in support of his reasoning.

Most of his sources (56% in 49 *fatwās*) are from *fiqh* texts. The most frequently cited *fiqh* manuals are Ḥanafī texts: 'Alā al-Dīn al-Ḥaskafī's (d. 1088/1677) *al-Durr al-mukhtār sharḥ Tanwīr al-abṣār* (fourteen times) and Ibn 'Ābidīn's (d. 1252/1836) commentary on it titled *Radd al-Muḥtār 'alā al-Durr al-Mukhtār* (eighteen times), and *al-Fatāwā al-Hindiyya* (10 times) composed under the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb's (d. 1118/1707) patronage. Aḥmad Razā appears to not only rely on Ḥanafī manuals that were closer to his time but also those which were accepted and referred to by his main counterparts, the Deobandīs.<sup>110</sup>

From the perspective of logic, this source selection functions as a form of argument from shared premises. By grounding his legal reasoning in authorities that his opponents themselves accepted as reliable, Aḥmad Razā constrained the range of objections and shifted the dispute from questions of textual authority to the conclusions logically followed from those shared texts. In this sense, his reliance on these works reflects a conscious logical strategy, structuring the debate in a way that rendered dismissal on epistemic grounds logically untenable.

As a related observation, this concern for using sources that would be accepted as valid by his contemporaries supports Sajjad's characterization that Aḥmad Razā operates as a legalist (as opposed to a Sufi), and that the *mawlid* is an Islamic ritual for

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<sup>109</sup> That is, those I was able to identify as focused on Sufi or mystical-related subjects.

<sup>110</sup> INGRAM, *supra* note 49, at 42, 86, 170.

him.<sup>111</sup> It also confirms that his target audience was mainly the Ḥanafī Sunnī Muslims of the Indian subcontinent. At the same time, I would argue that Aḥmad Razā’s method exceeds legalism alone. His sustained emphasis on shared premises, controlled inference, and argumentative constraint reveals him to be operating as a logician within the legal tradition, rather than merely as a jurist invoking authority; someone I would refer to as a “juristic logician.”

This characterization is based on an analysis of Aḥmad Razā’s *mawlid*-related *fatwās* and should be understood within that scope. Nevertheless, these *fatwās* frequently extend beyond the *mawlid* itself, on topics such as lawful food and income, inheritance, relations with non-Muslims, and intra-Muslim disagreement. The appearance of the same forms of premise qualification and inferential control in these discussions suggests that this mode of reasoning is not confined to ritual polemics alone but arguably reflects a broader pattern in his juristic practice.

## SECONDARY PRACTICES IN THE *MAWLID*

Aḥmad Razā’s logical method is most visible in cases where he explains which parts of the *mawlid* are essential and which are secondary, without relying heavily on Qur’ānic or *ḥadīth* citations. One such cluster of rulings concerns practices commonly associated with the *mawlid* but not constitutive of it, such as the distribution of sweets or food and the compensation of reciters. For Aḥmad Razā, it is not mandated that an attendee should take their share of sweets unless there is a risk that the organizer might feel personally offended. Furthermore, the distribution of sweets does not have to be equal if it is a regional custom, for example, for a young person to receive half of an adult’s share, or more generally if the recipients do not consider it insulting.<sup>112</sup> In this specific *fatwā*, where his response is based on pure reasoning, Aḥmad Razā treats the distribution of sweets or food as an accidental (non-essential) attribute of the *mawlid* rather than a constitutive requirement. He grounds this judgment in a prior

<sup>111</sup> Sajjad, *supra* note 4, at 212.

<sup>112</sup> 23 RAZĀ KHĀN, *supra* note 1, at 744.

definition of the ritual's essence as the remembrance (*dhikr*) of the Prophet. From this major premise, he derives several qualified rulings: participation in the distribution is not obligatory, and refusal to accept one's share is permissible, except in cases where such refusal would result in personal offense to the host. He further extends this reasoning to the question of unequal distribution, allowing it when supported by established custom (*urf*) or when no perception of insult arises among recipients.

The same inferential structure governs his rulings on compensating *mawlid* reciters. Aḥmad Razā also deems it impermissible for a reciter to obtain compensation for a *mawlid* recital. This is because they are performing an act of worship, and it is *ḥarām* (prohibited) to obtain compensation for such deeds (major premise).<sup>113</sup> Extending this reasoning, if the reciter is invited to have food after the event and the food is deemed as compensation for him, then this is impermissible as well. However, if the food or meal is offered by general invitation to everyone and not specifically to the reciter, and if they are not given a more significant portion or an exceptional tidbit, then the reciter is allowed to take it.<sup>114</sup> This ruling of impermissibility is consistent across most of his *fatwās* on the subject.

However, in one specific *fatwā*, the petitioners highlight a practice in Bengal whereby *mawlid* reciters are compensated after the ritual. There is no prior agreement between the two parties on the time and compensation, but since it is a common practice, it is expected. Here Aḥmad Razā concludes that as the reciters are led by common practice to expect something at the end, this is impermissible. Here again, logic drives the conclusion; expectation generated by custom renders the act analogous to pre-agreed compensation.

At the same time, Aḥmad Razā displays sensitivity to local conditions by outlining two scenarios (multiple scenario handling) in which remuneration would be acceptable. In the first, the two parties expressly declare beforehand that neither will the reciters accept any compensation for the recital nor will the organizers compensate them. Any voluntary compensation

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<sup>113</sup> *Id.* at 605, 725–26; 9 *id.* at 648; 19 *id.* at 502.

<sup>114</sup> 21 *id.* at 663.

by the organizer at the end is then permissible since there was no expectation or prior agreement specific to the recital. In the second, the organizers hire the reciters as labor for a fixed rate and time. They can then utilize them as they deem fit, and thus the compensation is not tied to their *mawlid* recital.<sup>115</sup>

These solutions might appear to be “creative” techniques employed by the *muftī* to avoid the prohibition of compensation pertaining to *mawlid* recitals. However, they do highlight the real underlying issue for Aḥmad Razā, which is his concern that the *mawlid* recital might be treated as a service or product that can be transacted and negotiated based on time and cost, even when there is no great need to do so.<sup>116</sup> This case illustrates the value of examining his *mawlid fatwās* as a corpus as it allows one to trace the tensions and nuanced reasoning applied to the same issue across different contexts. Aḥmad Razā preserves a stable major premise while adjusting secondary rulings through controlled inference, offering a practical framework for regulating devotional practices without undermining their integrity. Moreover, it provides a practical model for contemporary adherents of the Barelwī movement when navigating the challenge of compensating professional reciters without compromising the devotional integrity of the ritual.

The same logic of distinguishing essence from accident also governs how Aḥmad Razā evaluates the correct form and limits of *mawlid* performance more broadly, to which I now turn.

#### NORMATIVE MODELS AND CONDITIONAL PERMISSIBILITY

For Aḥmad Razā, the recitation of the Qur’ān, “appropriate” poetry in praise of the Prophet but without music, distribution of sweets, illumination and decorations, and performing

115 19 *id.* at 486–88, 495–96.

116 In the same *fatwā*, he identifies certain activities for which compensation can be agreed upon beforehand, such as the teaching of the Qur’ān and other religious subjects and those associated with the *īmām* (prayer leader) and the *adhān* (call to prayer). These too, he states, have been deemed permissible by later scholars as desperate measures due to the conditions of the time (*hāl-i zamāna*) and whereby they were viewed as necessary for the protection of the religion and faith. 19 *id.* at 486, 495.

the *qiyām* were all permissible.<sup>117</sup> However, he does detail the correct modalities for these practices in his *fatwās*, and one should not treat this as a blanket allowance. Permissibility is thus made conditional upon conformity to an established model, which was how the ritual was performed in Aḥmad Razā's time in the Hijaz.<sup>118</sup> Just as for Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, whose standard for the "proper" demonstration of the ritual was defined by how it was conducted at his home, for Aḥmad Razā the holy cities of Mecca and Medina set the bar.<sup>119</sup> In both cases, permissibility is determined through a form of analogical reasoning in which contemporary practice is measured against an accepted normative precedent.

In Mecca, the *mawlid* was not only held throughout the year in homes but also specifically on the eleventh and twelfth days of Rabī' al-Awwal,<sup>120</sup> when a grand *mawlid* was held in the Holy Mosque involving, amongst other practices, sermons on the Prophet, recitations of poetry and *mawlid* texts, feasts, lighting, and *dhikr*.<sup>121</sup> In the Islamic tradition, the word *dhikr* has multiple meanings depending upon the context in which it is used.<sup>122</sup> Aḥmad Razā considers the *mawlid* to be the *dhikr* of the Prophet. He then makes the next logical move in his argument: since remembrance of the Prophet constitutes remembrance of God, it must be permissible.<sup>123</sup> This is because, for him, the Prophet is not separate from God, and a matter (*mu'āmalā*) relating to the Prophet effectively relates to God.<sup>124</sup>

A contrasting mode of reasoning appears in a *fatwā* addressed to Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī. The petitioner cites Shāh

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117 8 *id.* at 123; 23 *id.* at 118, 258, 730–31, 744, 745; 26 *id.* at 427–28, 553.

118 23 *id.* at 561, 739.

119 23 *id.* at 739, 748; 24 *id.* at 514.

120 The third month of the Islamic calendar in which the Prophet is believed to have been born.

121 C. SNOUCK HURGRONJE, *MEKKA IN THE LATTER PART OF THE 19TH CENTURY: DAILY LIFE, CUSTOMS AND LEARNING. THE MUSLIMS OF THE EAST-INDIAN ARCHIPELAGO* 130 (2007).

122 It could mean "remembrance, reminder and invocation," or even a "repetitive recitation of the Divine Name or other sacred utterance." See ÉRIC GEOFFROY, *INTRODUCTION TO SUFISM: THE INNER PATH OF ISLAM* 162 (2010); *A TREASURY OF SUFI WISDOM: THE PATH OF UNITY* 59 (Peter Samsel ed., 2015).

123 23 RAZĀ KHĀN, *supra* note 1, at 753.

124 SANYAL, *supra* note 6, at 154.

Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī's reported spiritual experience of witnessing angels present in Mecca on the Prophet's birthday, apparently coinciding with a *mawlid* gathering. Gangohī responds by denying any normative significance to the event. He argues that the occurrence was coincidental; it happened to coincide with the Prophet's birthday, people happened to be present at the place of birth, and they engaged in his remembrance without prior planning, organization, illumination, or the distribution of sweets.<sup>125</sup> Here, Gangohī does not construct a formal syllogism or present a precedent to establish permissibility. Instead, he relies on basic rational explanation (*'aql*) to neutralize the evidentiary value of the report by reframing it as accidental rather than intentional. Logic, in this case, functions primarily as a tool of negation and refutation, used to deny that an isolated occurrence can serve as a legal or ritual proof. The contrast is therefore not between the presence and absence of reasoning, but between different deployments of logic. Aḥmad Razā uses logic constructively whereas Gangohī employs logic defensively.

For Aḥmad Razā, it is permissible to stop someone from attending a *mawlid* if it is not free from reprehensible and prohibited practices.<sup>126</sup> This position rests on a conditional distinction: the permissibility of the *mawlid* depends on its proper performance. However, if someone declares one who practices the ritual as destined for hell, then for Aḥmad Razā such a person is himself destined for hell.<sup>127</sup>

In another *fatwā*, he states that in India the only group of people to deny the *mawlid*'s permissibility are the Wahhābīs<sup>128</sup>—an umbrella term he uses for the Deobandīs and Ahl-i Ḥadīs.<sup>129</sup> Elsewhere, he argues that those who prevent people from actions that have not been expressly prohibited by the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* are innovators themselves.<sup>130</sup> His logical move here is

125 RASHĪD AḤMAD GANGOHĪ, *FATĀWĀ RASHĪDIYYA* 256–57 (n.d).

126 23 RAZĀ KHĀN, *supra* note 1, at 760.

127 14 *id.* at 687.

128 29 *id.* at 204–05.

129 Usha Sanyal, *Are Wahhabis Kafir? Ahmad Riza Khan Bareilwi and His Sword of the Haramayn*, in *ISLAMIC LEGAL INTERPRETATION: MUFTIS AND THEIR FATWAS 206* (Muhammad Khalid Masud, Brinkley Messick & David S. Powers eds., 1996).

130 23 RAZĀ KHĀN, *supra* note 1, at 745.

consistent, i.e., denying permissibility in the absence of prohibition constitutes an unjustified innovation (*bid'a*).

Extending this reasoning further, Aḥmad Razā maintains that not only are certain scholars of the Deobandīs and Ahl-i Ḥadīs disbelievers; so too are their followers who, despite becoming aware of their scholars' alleged statements of *kufr*, still view them as Muslims. For him, it is not surprising that his opponents are deniers of the "essence" (*nafs*) of the *mawlid* since they are deniers of the essence of the Prophet.<sup>131</sup> In Aḥmad Razā's heightened Prophetology, the Prophet is conceived as the center of the universe and its reason for existence.<sup>132</sup> This serves as a foundational premise in his thought and all subsequent conclusions about permissible practice, ritual, and belief flow from this starting point. In this light, disregarding alternative views, let alone accepting them, would be not only theologically unacceptable but also logically incoherent, since any challenge would contradict the first premise on which his entire argumentative framework rests.

#### LOGICAL REASONING AND THE *QIYĀM*

On the correct modalities for performing the *qiyām*, Aḥmad Razā states that it should be undertaken at the time of the recital of the Prophet's birth. His reasoning is that this moment constitutes a form of *dhikr* (mention) marking the Prophet's arrival into the world and is therefore the most appropriate moment for its performance.<sup>133</sup> However, here Aḥmad Razā also addresses the correct interiorization of the practice, for a question arises about whether the Prophet arrives physically at a *mawlid* gathering? To this, Aḥmad Razā responds that no one could claim to know with certainty, for it was in the Prophet's power (*ikhtiyār*) to arrive should he choose to do so, but it could not be assumed for every gathering.<sup>134</sup> From this, the inferential chain is clear; standing up at the end of a *mawlid* gathering did not imply that

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131 15 *id.* at 524–25.

132 SANYAL, *supra* note 6, at 216, 262; MUHAMMAD MUṢṬAFĀ RAZĀ KHĀN, *MALFŪZĀT-I 'ALĀ ḤĀZRAT* 251–52 (2014).

133 26 RAZĀ KHĀN, *supra* note 1, at 523.

134 14 *id.* at 670; 23 *id.* at 749.

the Prophet had physically arrived but was only an expression of respect for him. Standing at the mention of the Prophet's birth is thus justified as a symbolic act of respect, rather than as a theological claim about presence.

Another Ahl-i Ḥadīs scholar Naẓīr Ḥussain, by contrast, adopts a far more compressed line of reasoning. In one of his *fatwās* on the *qiyām*, he declares that performing it at the mention of the Prophet's birth constitutes an innovation and is therefore impermissible. He further maintains that if this is undertaken with the belief that the Prophet is present and observing the gathering then it amounts to disbelief.<sup>135</sup>

The contrast between the two approaches is instructive. Aḥmad Razā's *fatwā* demonstrates a higher degree of logical engagement through his systematic separation of premises, his anticipation of potential objections, and his careful delimitation of what the practice does and does not entail. By separating the act of *qiyām* from claims about physical presence, he preserves its permissibility through controlled inference. Although Naẓīr Ḥussain does distinguish between the outward act and the belief attached to it, his analysis remains relatively compressed. The ruling moves directly from classification to judgment, with limited attention to intermediate distinctions or alternative interior states. This difference highlights Aḥmad Razā's more rigorous deployment of logical reasoning in navigating contested ritual practices.

In contrast, one of Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī's *fatwās* addressing the *qiyām* illustrates his own engagement with logical reasoning, particularly through the use of compound syllogisms to challenge the purpose of the practice.<sup>136</sup> The *fatwā*, structured as a seven-point response, addresses various practices associated with the *mawlid*, including ignorant speakers, fabricated narrations, extravagance, treating a specific date as religiously necessary, and other matters. For the first five points, Thānvī supports his conclusions by citing from the Qur'ān or *ḥadīth*. However, when addressing the *qiyām* in point six, he shifts entirely to logical argumentation, relying on inference rather than textual proof.

135 ḤUSSAIN, *supra* note 37, at 221.

136 11 ASHRAF 'ALĪ THĀNVĪ, *IMDĀD AL-FATĀWĀ* 351 (2017).

Thānvī establishes his premises by considering the beliefs of those who perform the *qiyām*: some believe that the Prophet is present and observing the gathering. From this, he reasons that if the Prophet is thought to have independent knowledge or power, it constitutes *shirk* (polytheism). Conversely, if this belief is not held, then the act is a falsehood against God and His Messenger. He further accounts for the alternative belief that angels are present, prompting participants to stand in respect. Thānvī then engages in a series of logical counterarguments, systematically questioning the internal consistency of these beliefs:

1. Angels are always present with individuals, so why single out the *dhikr* gathering?
2. Even if restricted to the *dhikr* gathering, why restrict it to the *mawlid*?
3. If limited to the *mawlid*, why specifically at the mention of the Prophet's birth?
4. If the act is performed solely out of respect for the *dhikr* of the Prophet's birth, why not stand on other occasions when it is mentioned?

Through these steps, Thānvī demonstrates internal coherence in argumentation, testing each assumption against logical consequences. He ultimately concludes that the practice is pointless and frivolous, having subjected the belief structures supporting it to rigorous analytical scrutiny.

From a logic perspective, this *fatwā* exemplifies structured compound reasoning: Thānvī identifies premises, considers multiple possible internal beliefs, anticipates objections, and traces the implications of each premise to reach a conclusion. A comparison to Aḥmad Razā's *fatwās* highlights important differences in method and depth of reasoning. In his *mawlid fatwās*, Aḥmad Razā consistently employs multi-layered compound syllogisms, linking multiple premises, textual sources, and consequences to justify permissibility while preemptively addressing objections. Thānvī's argument is logically sound but narrower in scope, structured to expose contradictions rather than to construct a positive, defensible normative conclusion. Thānvī, in this instance, thus functions more as a refutational logician, using logic primarily to critique and negate practices.

## CONCLUSION

Through my analysis of Aḥmad Razā's *mawlid fatwās*, I was able to demonstrate that they display a distinctive style of juristic reasoning in which Aḥmad Razā deploys logic as an authoritative juristic tool. This contrasts with approaches in which scholars use logic as a supplementary tool to reinforce a conclusion grounded independently in textual authority. Firmly entrenched in the Farangī Maḥal trend, which placed increased emphasis on logic as necessary for the study of *fiqh*, Aḥmad Razā's argumentation in support of the *mawlid* and associated practices reflects this approach.<sup>137</sup> I have argued that Aḥmad Razā's distinctive approach lies in his systematic separation of the original ruling from the secondary aspects of the practice. Through this, he could respond to objections while defending the core practice. By distinguishing between what is legally essential to a ritual and what is non-essential or removable, he recognized the prevalence of reprehensible practices without declaring the ritual itself impermissible. He achieved this separation through a specific form of logical reasoning that relied on clearly defined concepts and carefully qualified premises. Furthermore, as this article has shown, Aḥmad Razā does not ignore scripture completely and in majority of his *mawlid fatwās* he refers to the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*. This highlights the significance of scriptural support in his reasoning. However, Aḥmad Razā does not invoke scripture independently and it is part of a logic-based argumentative process.

To substantiate the above, I analyzed 116 *mawlid fatwās* of Aḥmad Razā issued between 1299/1881 and 1339/1921. I evaluated these *fatwās* using four criteria derived from classic syllogistic reasoning that are observable in the *fatwās*: structural organization, use of connectives, incorporation of supporting texts and the treatment of multiple scenarios. By scoring these on a six-point scale (0–5), and arriving at a mean score of 3.23, moderate-to-high levels of logical reasoning were observed. Moreover, issues such as the *qiyām*, Prophetic presence and permissibility account for a significant portion of

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137 ROBINSON, *supra* note 73, at 46–53.

the highest-scoring *fatwās*. This suggests that conceptual ambiguity issues generated more explicit and structured logical reasoning. Furthermore, the proportion of *fatwās* addressing his opponents nearly doubles (from 10% to 19.4%) towards the later part of his *fatwā*-writing career. This arguably indicates that increased polemical engagement contributed to more rational argumentation.

However, this was not only a simple increase in rational argumentation; it was also how Aḥmad Razā deployed logic that distinguished him from his counterparts from the Ahl-i Ḥadīs and Deobandī movements. By comparing his *fatwās* to selected *fatwās* from his rivals in the Ahl-i Ḥadīs and Deobandī movements, I demonstrate that they employ logic mainly as a supporting device, whether for refuting or negating. On the other hand, for Aḥmad Razā, it was a dominant mode of argumentation. Based on this, I conclude that he operates as a logician within the legal tradition: a juristic logician.

I base this characterization on an analysis of Aḥmad Razā's *mawlid*-related *fatwās* and it should therefore be understood within this scope. However, as I observed, these *fatwās* usually extend beyond the *mawlid* itself, and cover other topics such as lawful food and income, inheritance, relations with non-Muslims, and intra-Muslim disagreement. The prevalence of the same forms of logical reasoning in these discussions suggests that Aḥmad Razā did not confine this mode of reasoning to *mawlid*-related polemics but rather reflects a broader consistent pattern in his juristic practice.

This study also illustrates the value of examining his complete *mawlid fatwās* as a corpus as it allows one to trace the tensions and nuanced reasoning applied to the same issue across different contexts. A case in point is the apparently “creative” technique used to avoid the prohibition of compensation pertaining to *mawlid* recitals, which might appear to be inconsistent when compared to Aḥmad Razā's other rulings on the matter.

As Sanyal demonstrates, what differentiated Aḥmad Razā from his contemporary reformists, mainly the Deobandīs and Ahl-i Ḥadīs, was his heightened Prophetology and venerative love for the Prophet, which is clearly reflected in the

argumentation and language of his *mawlid fatwās*.<sup>138</sup> However, most of Aḥmad Razā's opponents on the permissibility of the *mawlid* were drawn from the circle of scholars influenced by the *ḥadīth*-based reformist inclinations of Shāh Walī Allāh and his successors. Aḥmad Razā was impacted by Shāh Walī Allāh's *ḥadīth*-focused approach as well.<sup>139</sup> This inherent tension between the two assumptions and hermeneutical methods is one of the underlying causes for other disagreements between Aḥmad Razā and his contemporaries. Ahmed and Pourjavady conclude that parts of these differing traditions that is, the Farangī Maḥal and the *ḥadīth*-based approach of Shāh Walī Allāh, were absorbed separately by the two dominant movements in the subcontinent, that is, the Barelwī and Deobandī.<sup>140</sup> I contend it is not fair to assume that there was a complete disconnect between logic and *ḥadīth* in Aḥmad Razā's approach. As this article demonstrates, Aḥmad Razā synthesized the two in a unique manner and to a different degree than his counterparts. This difference in scholarly approach and methodology was one of the reasons for disagreements relating to the ritual of the *mawlid* in thirteenth /nineteenth century British India.

Finally, this article contributes to a broader understanding of how logical reasoning functioned as a critical device in shaping legal authority and managing ritual disagreement in colonial South Asia. Controversial practices tend to generate dense and varied forms of argumentation, as opponents utilize the full range of available juridical and intellectual tools. Aḥmad Razā's *mawlid fatwās* illustrate this dynamic. They show how logic, when treated as authoritative rather than supportive, can preserve legal commitments and regulate practice, under intense contestation. This study of Aḥmad Razā's *mawlid fatwās* offers a framework through which the role of the *ma'qūlāt* in modern Islamic legal thought can be assessed across other movements.

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138 SANYAL, *supra* note 6, at 265–66.

139 As Sanyal observes, Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dihlawī was viewed as a *mujaddid* by the Barelwī movement, *see id.* at 229.

140 Ahmed & Pourjavady, *supra* note 96, at 622.

**APPENDIX: SCORING OF LOGICAL REASONING IN THE MAWLID FATWĀS**

Islamic dates are used here because the petitions are dated according to the Islamic calendar and for the sake of brevity. N.D. = no date given.

#	Year (AH)	Month	Day	Vol.	Pg.	Structural organization connectives	Use of connectives	Supporting texts	Multiple scenarios	Mean score
1	1299	N.D.	N.D.	26	495	3	3	3	2	2.75
2	1301	N.D.	N.D.	23	760	5	5	3	4	4.25
3	1308	<i>Ṣafār</i>	21	23	116	4	4	4	5	4.25
4	1309	<i>Rabī' al-Awwal</i>	27	23	258	1	1	1	1	1
5	1311	<i>Sha'bān</i>	22	23	722	3	3	4	1	2.75
6	1311	<i>Sha'bān</i>	22	24	514	2	2	2	1	1.75
7	1312	<i>Rabī' al-Awwal</i>	15	23	118	1	1	1	1	1
8	1312	<i>Rabī' al-Thānī</i>	22	6	418	3	3	3	3	3
9	1313	<i>Rabī' al-Thānī</i>	27	23	723	4	4	3	5	4
10	1313	<i>Sha'bān</i>	14	30	660	1	1	1	1	1
11	1314	<i>Shawwāl</i>	20	7	483	2	2	3	4	2.75
12	1315	<i>Rajab</i>	22	23	730	4	5	5	5	4.75
13	1315	<i>Dhū al-Qa'da</i>	26	21	425	1	1	1	1	1
14	1316	<i>Muḥarram</i>	18	23	731	4	4	3	5	4

#	Year (AH)	Month	Day	Vol.	Pg.	Structural organization	Use of connectives	Supporting texts	Multiple scenarios	Mean score
15	1316	<i>Rabī' al-Awwal</i>	16	23	732	3	3	3	4	3.25
16	1318	<i>Jumādā al-Thāniya</i>	27	23	604	2	2	2	2	2
17	1319	<i>Jumādā al-Awwal</i>	22	6	502	4	4	3	4	3.75
18	1320	<i>Şafar</i>	15	24	490	2	3	2	2	2.25
19	1320	<i>Jumādā al-Thāniya</i>	29	23	176	3	3	3	3	3
20	1321	<i>Muḥarram</i>	18	23	734	3	3	3	3	3
21	1321	<i>Muḥarram</i>	N.D.	24	517	3	3	2	3	2.75
22	1321	<i>Rabī' al-Thānī</i>	19	20	265	2	2	3	2	2.25
23	1321	<i>Jumādā al-Awwal</i>	18	23	737	4	4	4	4	4
24	1322	<i>Rabī' al-Thānī</i>	6	23	747	4	3	4	3	3.5
25	1322	<i>Jumādā al-Thāniya</i>	2	23	737	2	2	2	2	2
26	1322	<i>Sha'bān</i>	29	23	738	4	4	3	3	3.5
27	1322	<i>Dhū al-Hijja</i>	27	23	739	3	3	3	3	3
28	1324	<i>Rajab</i>	24	16	129	3	3	4	3	3.25
29	1326	<i>Jumādā al-Awwal</i>	12	13	584	4	4	3	3	3.5
30	1330	<i>Jumādā al-Awwal</i>	16	10	312	3	3	3	3	3
31	1330	<i>Jumādā al-Awwal</i>	19	5	391	5	5	5	4	4.75
32	1331	<i>Rabī' al-Thānī</i>	6	23	744	4	4	4	3	3.75
33	1331	<i>Jumādā al-Thāniya</i>	17	29	214	4	4	4	4	4

#	Year (AH)	Month	Day	Vol.	Pg.	Structural organization	Use of connectives	Supporting texts	Multiple scenarios	Mean score
34	1331	<i>Ramaḍān</i>	10	5	326	2	2	2	2	2
35	1331	<i>Dhū al-Hijja</i>	20	23	745	3	3	3	2	2.75
36	1332	<i>Muḥarram</i>	N.D.	23	745	2	2	2	1	1.75
37	1332	<i>Ṣafar</i>	22	6	548	3	3	3	3	3
38	1332	<i>Ṣafar</i>	22	20	369	3	3	3	2	2.75
39	1332	<i>Rabī' al-Awwal</i>	10	23	561	2	2	2	2	2
40	1332	<i>Jumādā al-Thāniya</i>	1	21	648	3	3	3	3	3
41	1334	<i>Muḥarram</i>	7	10	255	2	2	2	1	1.75
42	1334	<i>Ṣafar</i>	4	16	152	3	3	2	1	2.25
43	1334	<i>Ṣafar</i>	12	22	239	3	3	2	2	2.5
44	1334	<i>Rabī' al-Thānī</i>	10	23	749	2	2	2	1	1.75
45	1334	<i>Jumādā al-Awwal</i>	12	23	751	3	3	3	3	3
46	1334	<i>Jumādā al-Awwal</i>	12	19	502	4	4	3	3	3.5
47	1334	<i>Jumādā al-Awwal</i>	15	22	240	4	4	3	4	3.75
48	1334	<i>Rajab</i>	17	29	629	5	5	4	4	4.5
49	1335	<i>Jumādā al-Awwal</i>	27	23	753	4	4	3	3	3.5
50	1335	<i>Sha'bān</i>	7	22	242	3	3	3	2	2.75
51	1335	<i>Sha'bān</i>	23	23	755	3	3	3	3	3
52	1335	<i>Sha'bān</i>	26	29	230	5	5	4	5	4.75

#	Year (AH)	Month	Day	Vol.	Pg.	Structural organization	Use of connectives	Supporting texts	Multiple scenarios	Mean score
53	1335	<i>Dhū al-Qa'da</i>	9	21	178	3	3	3	2	2.75
54	1336	<i>Rabī' al-Awwal</i>	19	16	450	3	3	3	2	2.75
55	1336	<i>Rabī' al-Thānī</i>	18	6	572	2	2	2	1	1.75
56	1336	<i>Rabī' al-Thānī</i>	22	21	662	3	3	2	2	2.5
57	1336	<i>Rabī' al-Thānī</i>	22	21	663	3	3	3	3	3
58	1336	<i>Rabī' al-Thānī</i>	25	9	650	4	4	4	4	4
59	1336	<i>Jumādā al-Awwal</i>	1	29	97	2	2	2	2	2
60	1336	<i>Jumādā al-Awwal</i>	12	22	245	4	4	4	3	3.75
61	1336	<i>Jumādā al-Awwal</i>	16	29	204	4	4	4	4	4
62	1336	<i>Jumādā al-Awwal</i>	21	21	663	5	5	4	5	4.75
63	1336	<i>Jumādā al-Awwal</i>	30	29	205	5	5	3	5	4.5
64	1336	<i>Jumādā al-Thānīya</i>	15	29	114	3	3	3	3	3
65	1337	<i>Ṣafar</i>	23	29	237	4	4	4	4	4
66	1337	<i>Rabī' al-Awwal</i>	25	14	683	4	4	4	4	4
67	1337	<i>Rabī' al-Awwal</i>	27	29	247	3	3	3	3	3
68	1337	<i>Rabī' al-Awwal</i>	27	6	578	4	4	4	4	4
69	1337	<i>Rabī' al-Thānī</i>	19	14	370	5	5	5	5	5
70	1337	<i>Jumādā al-Awwal</i>	3	14	685	4	4	4	4	4
71	1337	<i>Jumādā al-Awwal</i>	4	8	74	3	3	3	2	2.75

#	Year (AH)	Month	Day	Vol.	Pg.	Structural organization connectives	Use of connectives	Supporting texts	Multiple scenarios	Mean score
72	1337	<i>Jumādā al-Awwal</i>	7	15	299	4	4	4	4	4
73	1337	<i>Jumādā al-Awwal</i>	7	15	302	1	1	1	1	1
74	1337	<i>Jumādā al-Awwal</i>	8	15	303	3	3	3	3	3
75	1337	<i>Jumādā al-Awwal</i>	8	19	519	5	5	4	5	4.75
76	1337	<i>Jumādā al-Awwal</i>	14	29	258	4	4	4	4	4
77	1337	<i>Jumādā al-Thāniya</i>	15	29	267	3	3	3	3	3
78	1337	<i>Ramaḍān</i>	6	15	305	4	4	4	4	4
79	1337	<i>Ramaḍān</i>	10	26	553	4	4	4	4	4
80	1337	<i>Ramaḍān</i>	10	30	127	4	4	4	4	4
81	1337	<i>Ramaḍān</i>	16	29	282	4	4	4	4	4
82	1337	<i>Shawwāl</i>	11	26	553	4	4	4	4	4
83	1338	<i>Ṣafar</i>	10	8	600	4	4	4	4	4
84	1338	<i>Rabī' al-Awwal</i>	1	14	667	3	3	3	3	3
85	1338	<i>Rabī' al-Awwal</i>	19	19	167	3	3	3	3	3
86	1338	<i>Ramaḍān</i>	12	25	648	2	2	2	2	2
87	1338	<i>Ramaḍān</i>	14	9	597	1	1	1	1	1
88	1338	<i>Dhū al-Hijja</i>	8	23	104	1	1	1	1	1
89	1339	<i>Muḥarram</i>	18	14	386	5	5	4	5	4.75
90	1339	<i>Muḥarram</i>	20	16	253	3	3	3	3	3

#	Year (AH)	Month	Day	Vol.	Pg.	Structural organization	Use of connectives	Supporting texts	Multiple scenarios	Mean score
91	1339	<i>Şafar</i>	28	22	691	4	4	4	4	4
92	1339	<i>Rabī' al-Awwal</i>	N.D.	15	520	2	2	2	2	2
93	1339	<i>Rabī' al-Thānī</i>	28	9	648	3	3	3	3	3
94	1339	<i>Jumādā al-Thānīya</i>	18	15	309	5	5	5	5	5
95	1339	<i>Sha'bān</i>	9	23	757	4	4	4	4	4
96	1339	<i>Sha'bān</i>	9	23	758	3	3	3	3	3
97	1339	<i>Ramaḍān</i>	5	8	123	4	4	4	4	4
98	1339	<i>Ramaḍān</i>	7	26	427	2	2	2	2	2
99	1339	<i>Ramaḍān</i>	8	6	586	1	1	1	1	1
100	1339	<i>Ramaḍān</i>	23	23	759	5	5	3	5	4.5
101	1339	<i>Ramaḍān</i>	29	23	409	4	4	4	4	4
102	1339	<i>Dhū al-Qa'da</i>	5	9	140	4	4	4	4	4
103	N.D.	<i>Rabī' al-Awwal</i>	2	13	590	3	3	3	3	3
104	N.D.	<i>Rabī' al-Thānī</i>	20	13	594	4	4	4	4	4
105	N.D.	<i>Jumādā al-Thānīya</i>	18	24	489	2	2	2	2	2
106	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	23	739	5	5	5	5	5
107	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	21	150	5	5	5	5	5
108	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	21	633	3	3	3	3	3
109	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	26	405	5	5	5	5	5

#	Year (AH)	Month	Day	Vol.	Pg.	Structural organization	Use of connectives	Supporting texts	Multiple scenarios	Mean score
110	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	29	220	5	5	5	5	5
111	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	29	249	5	5	5	5	5
112	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	29	273	5	5	5	5	5
113	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	29	591	2	2	2	2	2
114	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	6	605	4	4	4	4	4
115	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	19	486	3	3	3	3	3
116	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	19	494	3	3	3	3	3