Abstract:
Haji Imdadullah Muhajir Makki (1233-1317/1817-1899) was a prominent shaikh of the Chishti-Sabri order in British India. Born and brought up in the qasbahs (townships) of northern India, he migrated permanently to the Hijaz following the Uprising of 1857. The rest of his life was spent in Mecca, from where he continued to guide his dispersed murid (disciple) community. Living at a time when religious scholars were trying to re-assert the meaningfulness of their socio-religious world under colonial rule, Imdadullah appears to have made a prominent contribution. He was remarkably successful in establishing his authority within his immediate community of South Asian Muslim scholars and Sufi masters. Although not a qualified ‘alim (religious scholar), and despite his long absence from the subcontinent, he exerted a lasting influence on the north Indian ‘ulama and Sufi scholars. His numerous letters (written from Mecca), his malfuzat (Sufi discourses) and other writings show his constant involvement over questions about internal reform. This paper seeks to explain how Imdadullah continued to exercise his religious authority from a distance, what his presence in Mecca meant for his Indian disciples, and how his legacy came to be contested by both the Deobandi and the Bareilwy schools of thought.

When Authority Transcends Frontiers: Imdadullah Makki (d. 1899) and the North Indian Ulama

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