

Notes

Hakim Syed Mahmud Ahmad Barkati

*Syed Munir Wasti**

The death of Hakim Syed Mahmud Ahmad Barkati [on 9 January 2013] as the result of an assassin's bullets is a tragedy of immense proportions. It speaks volumes of the state of criminal violence and targeted killing that has become endemic to Pakistan's socio-political life. What compounds the tragedy is that the Hakim Sahib was no ordinary person. He was the embodiment of the finest intellectual traditions of Islam, a great scholar of Muslim history, an unrivalled physician of Oriental medicine, and he embodied an excellent combination of core personal qualities. His scholarship is seen in his original research on Shah WaliAllah and his family, on Fazl-i-Haq Khayrabadi and in his other essays, editions, compilations and translations. He was the last Imam of the Khayrabadi School [*maktab-i-Khayrābād*] of logic and philosophy and the last distinguished exponent of its theories. There is nobody to succeed him. His list of patients – past and present – is immeasurably long and several generations of patients have received treatment at his hands. Above all, he was a non-partisan in the murky waters of Pakistani politics and maintained a neutral stance. Such a principled position was not acceptable to his fanatic foes who brutally gunned him down in his eighty-sixth year. An Arabic saying goes: *maut al-‘ālim maut al-‘ālam* [= 'the death of a scholar is the death of the world']. It is a scholar who gives life and meaning to a world bereft of guidance. That such a life-giving scholar should himself be deprived of his own life is all the more reprehensible.

My association with Hakim Barkati Sahib extends over twenty years. I had the extremely good fortune to imbibe from the treasure-house of his wide knowledge and deep wisdom. This privileged source would not have normally been available to me. For a long time, I used to visit him every Sunday and listen to his learned discourses. He was the embodiment of the liberal vision of Islam and of its humane approach. In

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addition, he had a vast stock of memories and reminiscences that could not be had from elsewhere. This he freely shared with me. He was an ardent bibliophile and had a unique collection of books, papers and other MSS. I was able to bring him books that I regularly purchased and show them to him. He would select those of interest to him and carefully return them after reading them. This habit I have not found in anyone else.

Hakim Sahib was full of praise for his late associate, Hakim Nasiruddin Nadvi and felt his absence strongly. He was also appreciative of the efforts of Dr. Mazhar Mahmud Shirani [also from his home state of Tonk, Rajasthan] who collected and printed his essays. I had the privilege of reprinting the Hakim Sahib's edition of the *Seerat-i-Farīdia* – a biography by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan of his grandfather. I was able to present him over 200 copies of the reprint [which, I am told, have disappeared].

Hakim Mahmud Sahib was, in his later years, surrounded by a circle of warm admirers among whom I include myself. I made it a point to introduce Dr Syed Tanvir Wasti [my brother] to him and Tanvir regularly visited Hakim Sahib whenever he came to Pakistan from Turkey. Hakim Sahib had a large family of children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He was able to hold them together in a firm bond of affection and unity. His children were most respectful to him and showed him reverence though he was full of love for them and by nature a most soft-hearted individual. When his son, Dr Sohail Barkati, was in the USA for treatment, Hakim Sahib was full of anxiety and concern for him although, perforce, a degree of reserve was visible in his attitude to his children and vice versa.

Hakim Mahmud's life was dominated by Islam which became the axis of his existence. He lived for Islam and died for Islam attaining, in a climactic conclusion to his life, the crown of martyrdom. With the Elect in the Heavens!