

## *Notes*

# **Remembering Professor Abdul Hamid**

*Sharif al Mujahid*\*

I had known Professor Abdul Hamid (d. 1980) for over two decades, during the last part of his life. I had first heard of him way back in 1953 when I was a student at the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill (Montreal). He had just then done his Ph.D. thesis on Sir Syed Ahmad Kahn. Prof. Smith, Wilfred Cantwell, the Institute's Director, told me that he was due to visit the Institute for a few days at the end of his (first) stint in the U.S.; but, then, for some reason or other he did not. However, since 1963 when the Pakistan History Conference was hosted by the Punjab University, I had met him off and on whenever he visited Karachi and I Lahore, and at seminars and conferences. I had also corresponded with him on various academic matters, and after my appointment as the first Director of the Quaid-i-Azam Academy in January 1976. I had had extended consultations with him about the projects that had to be set up, the areas that called for early attention, and the steps that ought to be taken into making the Academy, then only a paper body, into a leading research institute. He also did a mini volume for the Quaid's Centenary series, entitled *On Understanding Quaid-i-Azam*, which was published by the National Book Foundation (NBF) on behalf of the Centenary Committee whose publication programme I was looking after.

I am sorry I did not follow up his advice in full. Otherwise, I would have been more productive, and would not have had to live with the uncomfortable thought of having missed an opportunity to accomplish fully the tasks I had in mind. Research, it is said, must be done as imprecisely as possible; otherwise, one would have to go in for a complete census instead of a sample survey of the population. Meticulous in his research though, Professor Abdul Hamid yet felt that a time-frame is a must for research, that the principle of closure must be applied at some point, that research must be adjusted to the environment

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(which subsumes research funding and other facilities) in which it is done. The dull fire of experience in an earlier age – i.e., in a harsher academic climate and in a less research-oriented environment – had enabled him to extract these general principles; but, alas!, in my yesteryears, I was too much of an idealist, and, perhaps, a little too exuberant and overconfident as well, to heed readily his sound advice. Otherwise, I would have done the *Muslim League Documents* volumes in a mere chronological sequence, and would have been able to produce at least four volumes within the time I had spent to produce one. Without adequate and standard research assistance, it is well nigh impossible to edit systemically, and within a reasonable time-frame a volume of documents in Pakistan.

In any case, I feel privileged to have known him. He was kind; he was helpful; he was humane; he was academic oriented; and he gave me free time as he did to all those who wished to consult him. Above all, he was a true Pakistani – in thought, word, and deed. And that, as we all know, is a scarce commodity to come by in this blessed God-given country, called Pakistan. If I were to pay my mead of tribute to him in one sentence, I would like to recall what Mark Antony said over the corpse of Brutus:

“His life was gentle; and the elements  
 “So mixed in him that Nature might stand up  
 “And say to all the world ‘This was a man!’  
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As regards his academic contribution to the reconstruction of the Muslim saga in quest of a separate state for Muslims; I shall try to present an assessment of only two of his works – *Muslim Separatism in India: A Brief Survey, 1958-1947* and *Iqbal ba-haysiat Mufakkir-i-Pakistan*.

The first one, used as a textbook in course on Pakistan studies, is rather well known. It is, however, more than a mere textbook: it represents the first systematic attempt to trace the story of Muslim separatism in India, and, for that reason, must be considered indispensable for all students, researchers, and scholars interested not only in the making of Pakistan, but also in the Muslim developments during the last ninety years of British imperial rule in India.

The second one work, viz, that on Iqbal though a significant contribution, is not so well known. The topic is less pervasive, and the audience limited. Written in Urdu, it has failed to catch the attention of the literati to an extent such a book should have. And, as most of us are perhaps aware, researchers in the subcontinent have developed the tradition of scarcely, and, if all, casually exploring the research material

in Urdu and the local languages, although rich by any standard. No wonder, I had not come across it in the documentation and bibliographies of the works I have had occasion to go through. For these reasons, *Iqbal ba-haysiat-i-Pakistan* remains largely ignored. Yet, as noted above, it is a significant work.

The main argument of this work is that Iqbal's claim to being considered the philosopher of Pakistan rests on two counts. First, he presented the idea of an "Islamic state" in the subcontinent, and that not in terms of poetic flight but in terms of practical politics, providing cogent arguments to delineate how and why the idea was viable. Second, most of the strands in the thought of Iqbal became part of the Muslim psyche in the subcontinent, and this to a point that the Muslims of Iqbal's generation, nurtured in the climate created by his prolific, soul-striving poetical writings, thoughts, consciously or otherwise, in terms of Iqbal's ideas, aspired toward a destiny delineated in his poetic thoughts and prose writings, and opted for the political path outlined in his 1930 Allahabad address and in his letters to Jinnah in 1937. That is, Iqbal had not only mooted the idea of a separate autonomous state for Muslims, but had also prepared the nation psychologically and emotionally to opt for that idea, and thus helped substantially to transform it into a political reality.

To these, I may add the following. Iqbal's genius lay in providing a plan by which the Indian Muslims could overcome their demographic minoritarianism. After all they comprised but a little over 24 per cent of India's sprawling population, and the demographic factor is all too critical in the nation-state system, with its overriding credo of sheer majority rule. In this context, therefore, Iqbal's plan for the centralization of 'the life of Islam as a cultural force' in 'a specified territory' – i.e. the vast swathe of territory in northwest India characterized by Muslim demographic and dominance which he proposed in his 1930 address, was the only way to establish an 'Islamic state' which the Muslims had longed and striven for since the decline and downfall of Muslim power in the subcontinent. This, territorial solution to the knotty, intractable Indian constitutional conundrum, to me, represents Iqbal's most significant contribution to Muslim political evolution towards Pakistan and to a surge in Muslim activism towards a separate but viable destiny.