

AN ISLĀMIC PERSONALITY OF INDIA – IMĀM AḤMED RIḌĀ KHĀN

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Shaykh Aḥmed RiḌā Khan is listed among those prominent *‘ulamā* [scholars] of the Indian Subcontinent who have served immensely in the propagation of Islām, *‘ilm* [knowledge], *Adab* [literature] and the Arabic Language in that region. His works in the field of the Arabic and Islāmīc Sciences are vast in number. These cover his innumerable writings in *Tafsīr* [exegesis], *Ḥadīth*, *Fiqh* [jurisprudence], *Kalām* [theology], *Taṣawwuf* [spirituality] and various other Islāmīc sciences. Similarly, he has also authored works in the spread of *Adab*, e.g., his writings in *Ṣarf* [morphology], *Balāghah* [rhetoric], *Sh‘ir* [poetry], *Inshā’* [literary composition], etc. He has also left behind writings in the field of logical sciences, e.g., his works on *Mantiq* [logic], *‘ilm ul-Ḥay’at* [astronomy], *Ḥisāb* [arithmetic], *Ḥikmat ut-Ṭaba‘iyyah* [physical reasoning], etc.

Imām Aḥmed RiḌā was born on 10 Shawwāl 1272 H (14 June 1856 CE). He was named Muḥammad and later became famous by the name Shāh Aḥmed RiḌā Khān. His ancestors were from the Qandahār region of Afghānistān. They migrated and settled in India during the Mughal Rule. His father was an immensely god-wary and pious person. It is said that Imām Aḥmed RiḌā memorised the entire Qur’ān in a month. He attained mastery over Arabic and Islāmīc sciences at the age of 14. His prominent teachers include ‘Allāmah

`Abd ul-`Alā Rampūrī, Shaykh Abul Ḥussain Nūrī Mārehrawī, Mirzā Ghulām Qādir Baig, etc.

His inclination towards *Taşawwuf* [spirituality]

Self-restraint and God-wariness were witnessed in him right from his childhood. He used to behave with forbearance, modesty, good moral values and beautiful character. In 1294 H., he was blessed by pledging allegiance at the hands of a major *Şufī*, the *Quṭb* of his time, Sayyid Shāh Āl ur-Rasūl Mārehrawī. He then spent the rest of his scholarly life in self-restraint and abstemiousness, so much so that he became famous all over the Indian subcontinent. The seekers of spiritual enlightenment and gnosis travelled from far off places to gain spiritual benefit from him.

Journey to the Two Noble Sanctuaries

Imām Aḥmed Riḍā visited the House of Allāh twice and also the Blessed Mausoleum of the Prophet [peace be upon him]. During these two visits, in his free time, he surveyed the centres of learning situated in the Arab and Islāmic nations, met the scholars present there and had discussions with them on religious and scholarly issues. During this time, he obtained the chains of transmission of *Ḥadīth* from some major scholars of *Ḥijāz* and he himself gave the certifications in *Ḥadīth* narrations to several people.

His expertise in Geometry

It is worth mentioning that Shaykh Aḥmed Riḍā Khān held a distinguished position among his contemporary *`ulamā*. He had a strong hold of theoretical and scholarly sciences. He was well versed in geometry and other mathematical fields. People like the famous mathematician Dr. Ḍiyā ud-Dīn, the then Vice Chancellor of Aligarh University, would go to him for solutions to their complex problems.

Once, Dr. ʿIyā ud-Dīn had a difficulty in solving a complex mathematical problem. He decided to visit London so that he would present the problem to the experts there and get it clarified. During his journey towards the port of Bombay, he met Shaykh Aḥmed Riḍā in the train. He thought of him as a mere *Ṣufī* and a scholar of the *Dīn*. Sir ʿIyā ud-Dīn mentioned his purpose of journeying towards London. Imām Aḥmed Riḍā asked him to present his question and solved the problem in a short time with much clarification. Sir ʿIyā ud-Dīn was amazed. Since then, whenever he had any problem concerning operational and theoretical sciences, he would present the question to the *Imām* for its solution and clarification.

Poetic Excellence

It was said long ago that deep research and colourful thought cannot be found in a single person. The personality of Shaykh Aḥmed Riḍā seems to be completely opposite to this postulate. He was a colourful minded poet also. His poetry, which is in Fārsī and Urdū, testifies to this fact. The collection of his poems, known as Ḥadā'iq-e-Bakhshish, is very popular among the poets of the Indian Subcontinent.

His other writings, which are in the fields of philosophy, astronomy, geometry and religious literature, are immensely popular.

His writings

His printed and non-printed works are numbered around one thousand and are in various languages. Few of his works are named below:

1. Az-Zulāl ul-Anqā min Baḥri Sabqati'l Atqā
2. Commentary on Tafsīr ul-Bayḍāwī
3. Commentary on Tafsīr Khāzin
4. Commentary on ad-Durr ul-Manthūr

5. Commentary on Ma`ālim ut-Tanzīl
6. Madārij Ṭabaqāt il-Ḥadīth
7. Commentary on Ṣaḥīḥ ul-Bukhārī
8. Commentary on Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim
9. Commentary on Sunan ut-Tirmidhī
10. Ar-Rawḍ ul-Bahīj fi Ādāb it-Takhrīj

He has authored writings in more than fifty sciences and arts. He has also penned works in unconventional arts and sciences. Relativity, Algebra and Comparison, Study of the layers of the Earth, etc., to name a few. The juristic decrees [*fatāwā*] which he issued on various topics have been collected and compiled and they are contained in twelve bulky volumes¹. They span eleven thousand pages of foolscap size and the collection is known as “al-`Aṭyā un-Nabawiyah fi ‘l-Fatāwā ar-Riḍawiyah”.

To maintain the teachings of this great scholar, many institutes of learning have been set up. The prominent ones are Jāmi`at ur-Riḍā (Bareilly, India) and Jāmi`ah Amjadiyyah (Karachi, Pakistan). These two institutes play the role of centres for the propagation of Arabic and Islāmic Sciences.

His Passing Away

After spending a scholarly and intellectual life, Shaykh Aḥmed Riḍā passed away in 1340 H. He left behind a magnificent treasure of pearls of knowledge and literature for the generations to come after him. His blessed mausoleum at Bareilly is a centre of attraction for his lovers and spiritual followers.

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¹ Recently, it was published in 30 volumes spanning 21656 pages with referencing of all texts quoted and translation of Arabic and Fārsī passages and tracts. [Translator]