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Contributions of Nawab Siddiq Hasan Khan with Special Reference to his Contribution as Interpreter as of the Holy Qur'an: An Analytical Study

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Abstract:

Through this study, an attempt has been made to focus and highlight the life and contribution of Nawab Siddiq Hasan Khan to the development Qur'an literature. Nawab Siddiq Hasan Khan was an Islamic scholar and leader of India's Muslim community in the 19th century, often considered to be the most important Muslim scholar. He is largely credited alongside Sayyid Nazeer Husain with founding the revivalist Ahl-i Hadith movement, which became the dominant strain of Sunni Islam throughout the immediate region. Siddiq Hasan Khan was also a prominent scholarly authority of the Arab Salafiyya movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He was also a major South Asian exponent of the teachings of the classical theologian Ibn Taymiyya. Apart from Ibn Taymiyya, Siddiq Hāsān Khan was also influenced by the scholarly traditions of Al-Shawkani, Shah Wali Allah and Syed Ahmed. He contributed a lot to the development of Arabic language as well as to the development of Persian and Urdu literature.

Key Words: Ahl-I- Hadith Movement, Qur'an Literature, Ibn Taymiyy, Shah Wali Allah,

Introduction:

Sayyid Abu al -Tayyib Siddiq bin Hasan bin Ali Lutufullah, known to fame as Nawab Siddiq Hasan Khan, was born at Bareilly (U.P.), India, on Sunday, 14th October, 1832. He was a descendant of the famous Suhrawardy Sufi Shaikh Jalaluddin Jahaniyan Jahan Gasht of Uch, who traced his descent back to the Prophet Muhammad. After completing his education in Delhi, the young Siddiq Hasan entered the Civil Service of the erstwhile Islamic State of Bhopal. Later, he became the second husband of Nawab Shah Jahan Begum,

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the ruler of Bhopal, and took part in the governance of the State. He breathed his last in Bhopal on 20th February, 1890.¹

The life of the great literary stalwart Nawab Siddiq Hasan Khan coincided with the period of a number of political upheavals and religious reform movements in India. He witnessed with his own eyes, during his stay in Delhi, the complete downfall of the last remnants of the Mughal Empire. The direct and natural consequence of the decline of the Muslim political power in the sub - continent was that it led to the social, economic and intellectual decay of the Muslims. Their faith was confronted with a number of external and internal challenges. Apparently, the British Government adopted a neutral attitude in religious matters, but it did look upon the propagation of Christianity with traditional Muslim education, following which Arabic and Islamic studies were neglected to a deplorable extent, and the old centres of Islamic learning appeared to be on the verge of collapse.

Furthermore, the Muslims started deviating from the path of Islam, while their religious practices became encumbered with a number of superstitions and innovations, which had nothing to do with Islam. At the same time, a number of rationalists, naturalists and free thinkers appeared on the scene, who subjected to biased criticism the fundamental principles of Islam. For example, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, in his zeal and enthusiasm for modernizing the Muslims of his time, gave a rational interpretation of some of the basic concepts of the Qura'n in a novel manner which was bitterly opposed by his contemporary Nawab Siddiq Hasan Khan, who represented the ' Ulama group of religious reformers. There was a world of difference between these two reformers and champions of the Muslim cause. Consequently, a bitter controversy arose between them which Sayyid Sulayman Nadawi has expressed in the following words:

Because of Nawab Siddiq Hasan Khan, Bhopal was a great centre of Muslim Scholars and men of letters in those days. The Nawab and his associates were so bitterly opposed to Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan that even to cite his name was counted as a crime. Her Highness Nawab Shahjahan Begum, the ruler of Bhopal also held the same opinion.²

Besides, enthusiasm for learning among the students and scholars of Islam was almost dead. They were not fully acquainted even with the basic teachings of Islam. The Muslims educated along Western lines were totally unaware of the history and fundamental principles of their religion. Due to these unfavorable circumstances the future of Islam appeared to be quite dark to Nawab Siddiq Hasan not only in India, but in the whole Muslim world.³

Description of the Topic:

In order to meet the various challenges of his time, the Nawab chose the path of a devoted scholar and peaceful religious reformer. He was of the opinion that a return to the uncorrupted principles of Islam was a must for the regeneration of the Muslims. With that end in view, he produced a large number of books on Islamic sciences.

His indefatigable pen covered an immense field of knowledge i.e., the Qura'n, Apostolic Traditions (Hadith), Jurisprudence, tasawwuf, history, philosophy and literature. He is the author of about 222 publications on different subjects, out of which 54 books are in Arabic, 42 books in Persian, and the remaining books are in Urdu.

The Nawab's most valuable contribution as religious reformer lies in the fact that he contributed a great deal to the restoration and preservation of the dynamic straightforward religion of Islam as practiced by the rightly guided early Muslims, who are collectively known as the Salaf-e-Salihin (virtuous ancients). With his persistent efforts he succeeded to a great extent in denouncing free thought, and revived the teachings of Islam as supported by the Qura'n, the Traditions and the practice of the early schools of Muslim theologians. The pivotal point of his religious thought was that he laid much emphasis on the study of the original sources of Islam, i.e., the Qur'an and the Traditions which had hitherto been neglected in India where the doctrine of taqlid (the tradition of following the decisions of a particular past jurist without due inquiry) has been in force since the advent of Islam in this country. Through his voluminous writings and publications, he gave the Qur'an and Hadith their due recognition in the religious life of Muslims, and kept alive the evolutionary spirit of Muslim Jurisprudence by rejecting the principle of taqlid and justifying the principle of Ijtihad (forming new legal Opinions)

His Special Contribution as Interpreter of The Holy Qur'an:

The Nawab considered Tafsir (the science of Qur'anic exegesis) as the most important of all the religious sciences. First, he made a thorough study of the works of his predecessors on the subject and divided the Qur'anic commentators into three main categories: (a) those who based their interpretations exclusively on riwayat (narration of traditions); (b) those who based their interpretations exclusively on dirayah (knowledge of Arabic language and grammar); and (c) those who based their interpretations on a combination of both riwayat and dirayah and they are the most rightly guided of all the interpreters. According to the author's own judgement, the best interpretation of the Qur'an written from this point of view is that of Muhammad bin Ali al-Shawkani of Yemen.

The learned Nawab was greatly influenced by his model interpreter Muhammad bin-Ali al-Shawkani. Like him he was also totally against all kinds of free-thought and baseless philosophical speculation in interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an. And particularly, regarding the Ayat Mutashabihat (allegorical verses) dealing with the Attributes of Allah and His Essence, he was of the opinion that they should be believed and accepted without any disputation, modification, symbolization or intellectualization. He argued that these verses were not open to exegetical disputation, as the knowledge of them was not given by Allah to anyone.

On the basis of the fact mentioned above, the author criticized and rebuked all those who attempted to analyze or define the divine Self by interpreting the allegorical verses according to their own opinions. He also supported his viewpoint by giving the example of al-Salaf al-Salih (the virtuous ancients) who never entered into analytical interpretation of

these allegorical verses in order to establish their precise meaning. Instead, they accepted them as directed in the Qur'anic verse:

" He (Allah) it is Who hath revealed unto thee (Muhammad) the Scripture wherein are clear revelations - They are the substance of the Book - and others (which are) allegorical. But those in whose hearts is doubt pursue, forsooth, that which is allegorical seeking (to cause) dissension by seeking to explain it. None knoweth its explanation saves Allah. And those who are of sound instruction say: We believe therein; the whole is from our Lord; but only men of understanding really heed " ⁴

The Nawab's important works on Tafsir are briefly mentioned below:

➤ *Fath Al - Bayan Fi Maqasid Al - Qur'an*

This is the most important book of the author on Tafsir in the Arabic language. It was published from both Bhopal and Egypt in ten big volumes running into 4002 pages. It soon became very popular in the whole Muslim world. Its publication was widely celebrated in Bhopal. As described by the author himself, when he knew about the grand feast organized by the eminent scholar Hafiz ibn Hajar al ' Asqalani in celebration of his world - famous commentary on al - Sahih by al - Bukhari, he too followed his example and organized a grand feast in celebration of publication of this book, on which the amount of about 25000 rupees was spent.⁵

The main Endeavour of the Nawab has been to compile in this book all useful and relevant information from different sources of interpretations based on riwayat and dirayat as well as on a combination of riwayat and dirayat. While doing so, he kept his book free from all kinds of free - thought and baseless philosophical speculation in the matter of Tafsir. He also pointed out weak, wrong stories of Jewish origins that got interwoven in interpretation of some Qura'nic verses in the course of time. Similarly, in case of contradictory statements he clearly described the ones nearer to truth and more preferable.

Besides, the book deals in detail with such important aspects of translation and interpretation as the literary, linguistic and grammatical meanings and explanations of the words and phrases used in the Qur'an. The context of revelation of different verses as well as the miraculous nature and inimitable style of the book have also been properly highlighted, the main authors whom the Nawab quoted copiously in the book are Jalaluddin al - Suyuti, Muhammad bin ' Ali al - Shawkani, Najmuddin Muhammad, Ibn Khaldun, etc.

It is rightly said that had the Nawab not produced any other book, this single, spectacular contribution would have immortalized his name in the field of Islamic studies. When the author sent a copy of the book to the Ottoman Sultan, ' Abdul Hamid Khan, the latter was greatly pleased to receive it and awarded him the prestigious Majidi Order. Prime Minister of the Ottoman Empire, Sayyid Khayr al-Din Pasha also congratulated him on this work.

➤ *Nayl al-Maran min Tafsir Ayat al -Ahkam*

This is the next most important book of the author produced in the Arabic language on Tafsir Literature. The book containing 240 pages was published by the ' Alawi Press at

Lucknow in 1292 A.H. It contains interpretation of 255 legislative verses of the Qur'an relating to prayers, Zakat (poor-due), Hajj, lawful and forbidden things, etc. Wheresoever's necessary, meaning and explanation of difficult Arabic words and expressions have been properly elaborated. The book embodies a fine, authentic interpretation of the said Qur'anic verses in a precise and eloquent manner. The interpretations are also substantiated by the mention of relevant traditions of the Prophet as well as sayings and opinions of different Imams and renowned religious authorities, due to which the book has become a rich, authentic source of information and knowledge on the subject. The author is fully justified in his claim that it was the first book of its kind, and that alike of it was not produced earlier.⁶

➤ ***Tarjuman al-Quran bi -Lata'if al - Bayan***

This book in fifteen volumes containing 8355 pages is an important Urdu rendering of the Qur'an. In it the author has reproduced material from Mudih al - Qur'an of Shah ' Abd - al - Qadir, which is said to have left its deep impact upon the Muslims of the Indian sub - continent in their understanding of the Qur'an in the eighteenth century. The other sources, from which the author has quoted copiously are Tafsir of Ibn Kathir, Fath al - Rahman of Shah Wali - Allah, Fath al - Qadir of al - Shawkani, and Fath al - Bayan of the author himself.

While explaining the verses of the Qur'an, the Nawab cited other explanatory verses of the Book and the relevant Apostolic traditions for further elaboration. He has also given marginal translation of these supplementary verses. This book is an important contribution to Tafsir literature in the Indo - Pak sub -continent, as it provides an authentic and rich source of a wide range of knowledge and information to the Urdu readership.

Only seven volumes of the book were authored by the Nawab. The remaining eight volumes were written and completed after his death by Maulana Muhammad Ibn Hashim of Lahore and Maulana Dhu al - Fiqar Ahmad of Bhopal. They were Published at the Ansari Press of Delhi and Mufid ' Amm Press of Agra between 1306 A.H. and 1314 A.H.⁷

➤ ***Al -Iksir fi Usul al -Tafsir***

The book written in the Persian language contains 126 pages. It is divided into three chapters preceded by a preface. The preface deals with the literal and legal meaning as well as importance of Tafsir. The first chapter is devoted to the principles of Tafsir while the second chapter gives an account of 1300 books on Tafsir along with the mention of the names of their authors. It was first published in 1291 A H at Nizami Press of Kanpur.⁸

➤ ***Ifadat al-Shuyukh Bi-Miqdar al-Nasikh wa-al -Masukh***

A Persian work of the author comprising 84 pages was first published in 1288 AH at the Nizami Press of Kanpur. It consists of two chapters preceded by a preface. The preface deals with the meaning of Naskh (abrogation) of Qur'anic verses and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad as well as the regulations related to it. The first chapter discusses the difference of opinion among the ' Ulama (Muslim religious scholars) regarding abrogation

of certain Qur'anic verses. The second chapter throws light on the abrogating and abrogated traditions of the Prophet. The total number of the abrogated Apostolic traditions has been described by the author to be twenty - four.⁹

➤ ***Fasl al -Khitab fi Fasl al-Kitab***

This book in Urdu containing 95 pages was published in 1404 AH at Matba ' Zahid Bashir Printers in Lahore. It deals with the merits and usefulness of the Glorious Qur'an in the light of the authentic traditions of the Prophet and sayings of the Imams. The accurate numbers of the chapters of the Qur'an and its verses along with their virtues have also been discussed in it.¹⁰

Conclusion:

From the foregoing pages it is quite evident that Nawab Siddiq Hasan Khan remained thoroughly devoted till he breathed his last to the cause of spiritual, moral and intellectual regeneration of the Muslims not only of the Indian sub-continent, but of the whole world. He sought to realize that objective by producing and popularizing authentic literature on different Islamic sciences in all the three major languages of the then Muslim world, i.e., Arabic, Persian and Urdu. He also contributed a great deal to the preservation of the chastity of the Arabic language by facilitating and popularizing philological studies at a time when the standards of Arabic studies had lowered to a deplorable extent not only in South Asia, but in the whole Muslim world.

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