

Book Review

**SIR SAYYID AHMAD KHAN ON NATURE
MAN AND GOD**

by
Dr Abdul Khaliq

Today one can easily find translations and commentaries of the Holy Quran in a number of national and international languages. But there was a time in the intellectual history of the Sub-continent when Shah Wali Ullah was accused of being an apostate by the orthodox religionists when he translated the Holy Book into persian. This betrays the tenor of the intellectual life in the time of Shah Wali Ullah. Iqbal rightly holds that Shah Wali Ullah was the first thinker (of course, in the Sub-continent) who felt the need and importance of delivering the Muslim mind from the quagmire of dogmatism and orthodoxy. But Shah Wali Ullah did not give a comprehensive and effective programme of rationalizing religious dogmas. His greatness lies in the fact that he condemned and abandoned the out-dated attitude of *Taqlid* and initiated the tradition of rationally interpreting and explaining religious dogmas and beliefs in accordance with the changing contemporary demands-the tradition which was upheld in the past outside the Sub-continent by Al-Ghazali, Ibn-Tamiyyah, Abu-Hanifa, Abdul Wahhab and others.

The revivalist tradition of Shah Wali Ullah, in its true spirit, was continued by Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and was so expanded and enriched that it exercised a powerful and far-reaching influence on the social, religious, educational and political uplift of the depressed and the demoralized Muslims of the Sub-continent.

The corner-stone of Sir Sayyid's revivalism and rationalism is the belief that natural law reigns supreme in the

universe. God is the creator of the world. This is His work. At the same time he has given verbal guidance (the Qur'an). This is His word. There is complete harmony and corroboration between the two. These do not contradict each other. The work of God can be rendered understandable by science. Hence the world of God should be interpreted in the light of science and reason. Sir Sayyid writer's.

"I found to the best of my understanding that if we keep in view the principles deducible from the Quran itself we shall find that there is no contradiction between the modern sciences, on the one hand, and the Qur'an and Islam, on the other."

This may not sound queer to a Pakistani today. But, during the period when Sir Sayyid enunciated this view, this provoked a very hostile reaction amongst the orthodox and conservative religious circles. Studying science and even learning English language were generally equated with irreligion and infidelity. Under these circumstances Sir Sayyid's views were regarded as highly radical and revolutionary. Sir Sayyid had to face the worst type of criticism and severest opposition. But he did succeed in his venture and Shah Wali Ullah's dream found its fuller expression in his thought and deed. It is the revolutionary vision of Sir Sayyid that had made possible the advent of an Iqbal, a Khalifa Abdul Hakeem and a Sayyid Maudoodi in the Sub-continent. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, with his revolutionary ideas is still like a beacon-house, imparting guidance to the Muslims of the Sub-continent.

It is a matter of great satisfaction that an authentic and well researched-out book has been brought out by Bazm-e-Iqbal, Lahore. This book is titled "Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan on Nature man and God". The author of this book, Prof. Dr. Abdul Khaliq, is a veteran teacher of Philosophy who has been disseminating knowledge at the Department of Philosophy University of the

Punjab for the last three decades. In this book, as in his other works like 'Muslim Philosophy', 'Problems of Muslim Theology' and 'Logic of the Quran' he has creditably endeavoured to bring out and highlight the contours of Muslim rationalism in an historical continuity.

The book under reference consists of ten chapters. First chapter 'Historical Situation and the Climate of Opinion' presents the socio-political and religious scenario against which Sir Sayyid proclaimed his revivalist rationalism. Chapter II is 'Concept of God'. Chapter III is titled 'Concept of Nature and the Phenomenon of Miracles'. Chapter IV is extension of the chapter III and bears the title of 'Miracles --- A Philosophical Approach'. Chapter V & VI 'Islam and the Natural Religion' and 'The Phenomenon of Religious Consciousness', respectively, deal with Sir Sayyid's religious views and are titled 'Exposition of Basic Ehtical Concepts' and 'Ethics and the Laws of Nature'. Chapter IX, 'Institution of Prophethood and the Meaning of Revelation' is very important insofar as it explodes a number of superstitious and mythological beliefs. In Chapter X, 'Recapitulation and Some Concluding Remarks', the author has given his overall estimation of Sir Sayyid's system of thought.

The most important feature of this book is that it links Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan with the world tradition of Muslim rationalism, on the one hand, and demythologizes the supernatural references of the Holy Quran, on the other. Thus one can easily discern its cotemporaneous relevance in so far as it is the furtherance of Sir Sayyid's (and for that matter Iqbal's) objectives. It is written in terse English couched in religio-philosophical terminology. The 232-page and well-documented book makes a very interesting and illuminating study both for a common reader and a research scholar. The author has given a comprehensive bibliography and an index of proper names at the end for reader's convenience and furthe guidance. Price of the book is Rs. 150.

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