

## *A Humanist Passes Away*

—Gp. Capt. S. F. Mahmud

Professor Hamid Ahmad Khan, scholar, educationist and a gentleman in the truest sense of the word, passed away on Friday, 22 March, at the age of 70 years and four months. With him ended an era.

He was of the generation which burgeoned in the twenties and thirties of this century. Those were the decades when Iqbal burst into glory and Hafiz and Josh sang of youth and beauty, when the Muslims of the sub-continent awoke from a long sleep, when a new concept of life was in the air, when the skies were loftier, the vistas more spacious and the atmosphere rang with the sound of golden bells.

Professor Hamid Ahmad Khan came of a distinguished family. His illustrious father Maulana Sirajuddin Ahmad Khan started the famous "Zamindar", which, in the hands of Hamid Ahmad Khan's eldest brother, Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, became a clarion call of liberty, of dignity, of national pride and of Indo-Islamic culture.

Hamid Ahmad Khan was educated at the Church of Scotland High School, Wazirabad and was a class-fellow of another scholar, later Judge, Mr. S. A. Rahman. The famous Dr. T. Grahame Bailey was the Manager of that School and Hamid Ahmad Khan's teacher.

Hamid Ahmad Khan went to Hyderabad Deccan for his degree. There his elder brother, Professor Mahmud Ahmad Khan was Head of the Department of Chemistry, later Registrar of the Usmania University.

Hamid Ahmad Khan obtained a First Class First in the University in his three year's Honours course. He took his M.A. English from Government College, Lahore. In 1934 he joined Islamia College Lahore as a Lecturer in English. Here he soon made a reputation as a great teacher and a profound scholar. He founded the Bazm-i-Frogh-i-Urdu and was later Chief Editor of "The Crescent", the College Magazine.



In 1945 he joined the Directorate of Education Delhi but came back to Islamia College after Independence. He went to Cambridge in 1952 and did his M. Litt. on "The Sensuous and the Mystical in Wordsworth". He told me on return that Professor Arberry, who was one of his Examiners and his own Tutor, pressed him to stay on for another year and enlarge his Thesis and they would recommend for a Ph.D. but circumstances would not permit such a course, and so he came back to his college in Lahore.

In 1958 he was made Principal. Even as Principal he did not forsake teaching, which was his primary level. He now devoted himself whole-heartedly to the task of raising the tone of Islamia College and soon made that institution the envy of all academic circles. In dress and deportment, in discipline and devotion to studies, Islamia College students led the younger generation

In 1963 he was appointed Vice-Chancellor of the Punjab University which post he occupied for six years. As Vice-Chancellor he worked almost twelve hours a day and ruined his health. I had to beg his wife many times to ask him to relax but his sense of urgency was so great that nothing would stop him from working even on holidays.

The love of Urdu was an article of faith with him and he was a fanatical devotee of Indo-Islamic Culture. He sponsored two scholarly and cultural Projects during his Vice-Chancellorship: The Majlis-i-Yadgar-i-Ghalib on Ghalib's Centenary and The Cultural and Literary History of the Muslims of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. He brought the first to fruition and lived to see fourteen volumes of the latter in print.

He was awarded Sitara-e-Imtiaz in 1962 and Sitara-e-Pakistan in 1967. For his great scholarship and ardent love of Urdu language and literature, he was appointed Director of the Board for Advancement of Literature in 1970 which office he held till the last.

Even an eventful life like this cannot describe the richness of his days. It was not the office, which made Hamid Ahmad Khan, it was he who distinguished the office.

As an educationist alone, he showed a vision and followed a course, which enlightened two generations. As a scholar his insight and depth of understanding, his meticulous eye and attention to detail were the despair of sluggish minds, as they were an inspiration to dozens who worked with him and under him.

Every word that he wrote, whether in English or Urdu, was weighed and measured and his Urdu prose scintillated as it informed. His sympathies were



so broad that whether he spoke on moral influences in education or cultural influences on the morals of the times, he gave a fresh slant to themes, which have been washed clean of meaning by demagogues.

It is difficult to assess the protean qualities of such a man. His love of Man was as great as was his love for Ghalib or Iqbal. His appreciation of secular or mystical verse was as profound as his veneration of the great Sons of Islam. Whether it was Jamal-ud-din Afghani, or Sir Syed, the Quaid-i-Azam or Iqbal, Ghalib or Goethe, he talked of them as if they were the finest flowers of Creation.

One would, however, be doing him an injustice, if one ignored the diplomatic services he rendered to his country, as a representative of Pakistan, at the Afro-Asian Islamic Conferences. I believe it was the lambent personality of the man, the cultural aura that he shed, the courteous air he had about him, the genuine humility that, he showed in whatever he did, that won the hearts of foreigners as well as his own countrymen.

I have known him for forty-five years, closely and intimately. I would say that his most distinctive quality was his courtesy. The goodness of his heart was a feature of his many-faceted personality which endeared him to thousands. His epitaph should be :

“Here lies a great scholar, who had true nobility of soul and who loved to do good: who was considerate to the lowliest as he was kind to all”.

---