
It is the eighth and the last volume of the monumental and extensive biographical dictionary in Arabic of eminent scholars, divines, litterateurs, noblemen, politicians, statesmen etc. of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent who flourished during the 14th/19th-20th century. This volume was originally published in Hyderabad (India) by the Dā’irat al-Ma‘ārif al-‘Uthmāniyya in 1390/1970, but it was not available in Pakistan due to closure of trade between India and Pakistan following the 1965 war. Kārkhana Tijārat al-Kutub undertook to republish it by off-set for the benefit of scholars and research workers in Pakistan. Even the libraries of leading learned bodies of Pakistan like the Islamic Research Institute, Islamabad, the Panjāb and the Karachi Universities, the Pakistan Historical Society, Karachi, the Research Society of Pakistan, Lahore were without this particular volume.

The first volume in this series comprising the biographies of eminent persons who died during the 8th/14th century, which was in fact the second volume, was published, as a supplement to al-Durar al-Kâmīna fi A’yān al-Mi’āt al-Ṭhāmina by Ibn Hajar al-Anṣārī al-Saqalānī, in Hyderabad (India) in 1350/1931. After a gap of 16 years volume i, containing the biographies of Indo-Pakistan celebrities who flourished during the first seven centuries of the Hijra (7th-13th centuries of the Christian era), came out in 1366/1947. The third volume was published in 1371/1951, followed by the fourth (1373/1954), the fifth (1375/1955), the sixth (1367/1975) and the seventh (1377/1958), almost in quick succession.

Although numerous works on biography exist in the Arabic language including such classics as the Wafayā’t al-A’yān by Ibn Khallikān, al-Daw’ al-Lāmī by al-Sakhāwī ‘Imād al Sa’dā by Tāsh-Kubrāzāda, Khulāṣat al-‘Aṭhar by al-Muhībbī, Silk al-Durāt by al-Murādī, Zahr al-Riyāḍ wa Zulal al-Hiyād by al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī ibn Shaqdam, Sulāfīat al-‘Aṣr by Ibn Ma’sūm, al-Fāwā’id al-Bahiyya fi Tārājim al-Ḥanafīyya, Al-Ṭabar al-‘Aṣwāthīl fi Tārājim al-‘Aṣfīl by ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Anṣārī al-Laknawī, al-Nūr al-Ṣaffīr by ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Ayyūdha and a host of others, besides some standard works in Persian and Urdu such as Tabkhira-i ‘Ulamā’-i Hind by Rāhmān ‘Alī, Ma’āthir al-Kirām by Ghulām ‘Alī Azād Bilgrāmī, Lughat Nāma by Dih-Khudā, Ḥadā’iq al-Ḥanafīyya by Faqir Muhammad Jhelumi (maternal grand-father of the late Urdu poet Sirāj al-Dīn Ẓafar), yet there did not exist a single work which treated comprehensively of practically all the notable figures who contributed to various religious and secular disciplines thus promoting the vast and rich Islamic culture in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent.

The author, himself a very learned and widely-read man, has in compiling this great-biographical dictionary utilized more than 300 works many of which are still in manus-
'Aziz al-Tawârîkh, which H.M. Elliot utilized for his "Biographical Index" and which was declared to have been lost in the wake of the 'Mutiny' of 1857 duly appears among the sources of the author. It is indeed a huge store-house of information not found elsewhere. For instance it was through its notice on 'Allâmî Sa'd Allâh Khân (d. 1066/1655), the famous grand-vizier of the emperor Shâhjahân, that we learnt that Sa'd Allâh Khân, before his formally joining imperial service (as a rozindâr), was employed as a teacher in the madrasa attached to the well-known historic congregational mosque, built by Nawâb Wazir Khân (Hâkım 'Imân Anşârî of Chiniot), in Lahore. It was from this book that it was known that Luft Allâh Khân the eldest son of Sa'd Allâh Khân who was a minor at the time of his father's death was brought up along with his brothers, and sisters under Imperial tutelage. Nowhere else, including the Ma'âthir al-Umarâ', this information is found. Similarly it is stated only in this work that Mawlawî 'Abd al-Ḥaqq, author of Tafsîr Ḥaqqînî, originally belonged to Gumthala, a small village in the Ambala district of India from where he had migrated to Delhi. It is also for the first time that notices on the Moghul emperors and queens have appeared in Arabic in this series. Names of several compilers of the Fatâwâ 'Ālamgiri or the Fatâwâ al-Hindîyya, as it is known in the Arab world, came to light through this dictionary. With great difficulty and after extensive and painstaking research spread over several years I was able to discover the names of 24 of the compilers only, published in al-Islâm, a weekly of Karachi, now defunct, in several issues in 1953, in an article entitled "Aurangzeb and the Fatâwâ 'Ālamgiri". But a perusal of vol. vi of this dictionary revealed at least six more names which could not be met with elsewhere.

The volume under review, as stated by the editor in his preface, was left incomplete by the author, barely touching upon the biographical notices of 559 persons. (The published version, however, contains 558 notices only). Out of these 350 notables died after the author had passed away. The incomplete notices comprised either a few opening sentences or at the most a paragraph. The editor, himself an erudite scholar and a worthy son of a worthy father, undertook to complete the notices. In some cases like that of Abû'l Kalâm Āzâd, he had to write out full five pages while the author had written only half a page. This notice tells us that at the instance of Mawlânâ Āzâd a school for Muslim children was founded in Râncî (Bihâr) where he was interned in 1334/1916. On his release in 1338/1919 he established a big religious institution in Calcutta in 1920. The editor, Abû'l Ḥasan 'Ali Nadwî relates that the late Mawlânâ Ḥusayn Âmâd Madâni who actually belonged to Tândã in Fyzâbâd district (India), when he was in search of the names and biographical details of his ancestors and could not find them in any book published or in manuscript, turned to this dictionary and was highly delighted to find the biographies of most of them included therein. The editor took some ten years to bring the manuscript up to date and it was ultimately published in 1388/1969 in Ḥyderâbâd (India).

Every notable person who made his mark in any branch of knowledge or attained fame in politics has found a place in this volume. Ḥâjî Ḥimdâd Allâh al-Muhâjîr al-Thânawî al-Makki (for him see my article in the Encyclopaedia of Islam, new edition, vol. iii), Mawlânâ Ashraf 'Ali Thânawî, Mawlânâ Ḥusayn Âmâd Madâni, Mawlânâ Abû'l Kalâm Āzâd, Muftî 'Azîz al-Râhmân Deobândî, Mawlânâ Nadhir Ḥusayn al-Muḥaddîth al-Dihlawî, Shaykh al-Hind Mawlânâ Maḥmûd Ḥasan, Rashid Aḥmad Gangohî, Khaîl Il
Abmad Anbaythawi, Ḥamīd al-Dīn Anṣārī al-Farāhī, and many others among the 'ulamā', have found full mention. It is, however, surprising that the names of Ḥājjī ‘Ābīd Ḥusayn, founder of the Dār al-‘Ulūm at Deoband and Mawlānā Shabbir Abmad ‘Uthmānī, the well-known divine and commentator of the Ṣahīḥ of Imām Muslim, are conspicuous by their absence.

Among the litterateurs, Altāf Ḥusayn Hālī, Muhammad Ḥusayn Aẓād, Amīr Minā’ī, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khān, Sayyid Ahmad Dīhlawi, author of “Farhang-i Afṣāfiyya”, ‘Ābīd al-Ḥalim Shāhār are included but here also Gḥālib, Ḏawq, Dāgh, Iqbāl have been omitted. Shibli and Sulaymān Nāḍwī have received the attention they richly deserved. The omission of the names of Muhammad Iqbāl and Shabbir Abmad ‘Uthmānī is all the more deplorable as they both are mentioned by way of cross-references. I do not know what explanation would the learned editor offer for these unwarranted omissions. No biographical dictionary of Indo-Pakistan celebrities, who flourished during the 19th-20th century, can be considered complete without the names of Muhammad ‘Alī Jinna, Muḥammad Iqbāl, Shabbir Abmad ‘Uthmānī and Ameer ‘Alī, to name but a few. Would that Abīl Ḥasan ‘Alī Nāḍwī considers issuing a supplement, written and compiled by himself, to make amends for these omissions.

These shortcomings and defects apart this admirably well-written and ably compiled biographical dictionary is a vast improvement on works like An Oriental Biographical Dictionary of Thomas William Beale or his Persian work, “Miftāḥ al-Tawāriḥ”. Still for research workers in this field great compilations like the Maḏḥir al-Umlūm, the Dhakhirat al-Khawṣūnīn of Fand Ḍhakkan, Tadhkira-i ‘Ulmā’-i Hind, Maḏḥir al-Kirām, Subḥat al-Marjān, both by Aẓād Bilgrāmī, and many others will remain indispensable.

Based on this huge 8-volume work and C.E. Buckland’s Indian National Biography a National Biography of eminent persons who once adorned the mosques and maktabs, the schools and colleges, the platform and the pulpit, the khānsāhs and the monasteries, the imperial courts and the gubernatorial headquarters, the literary gatherings and academic conferences, in territories now comprising Pakistan, can be easily compiled. It is indeed the crying need of the day. Even in this field our sister country has already published two books namely: The National Biographical Dictionary of India (Delhi 1972), and The National Geographical Dictionary of India’ (Delhi 1972), both by J.S. Sharma. It is a pity that we have not been able to far so compile and bring out a full-length, well-documented, authentic biography even of the Father of the Nation, the founder of Pakistan, Qā’id-i Ā’ẓām, Muḥammad ‘Alī Jinnaḥ. Realizing the dearth of biographical literature on the ’ulamā’ of Pakistan the Maktaba-i Nabawiyya, Lahore published the Tadhkira-i ‘Ulmā’-i Aḥl Sunnat wa Jamā’at Lahore (Lahore 1975) and the Maktaba al-Ma’ārif, Lahore brought out a very neatly and nicely printed second enlarged edition of the Ḥadiqat al-Awliyā’ by the late Mufti Ghulam Sarwar Lāhory, author of the well-known ‘Khazinat al-Aṣfāya’, whose new edition, elegantly printed and duly annotated by a competent scholar, is also badly needed.

In the work under review, for reasons best known to the editor, the names of such great men as Zafar ‘Alī Khān, Ḥasrat Mohānī, Dr. Mukhtār Abmad Anṣārī, Qā’id-i Ā’ẓām Muḥammad ‘Alī Jinnaḥ, ‘Aṭā’ Allah Shāh Bukhari, Sir Muḥammad Shafi’, Sir
Faḍl-i Ḥusayn et al. have been omitted, while those of the author himself, Sayyid Ṭalḥa, late Professor of Arabic, Oriental College, Lahore, Sayyid ‘Ali Bilgrāmi, his brother Sayyid Ḥusayn Bilgrāmi, Waqār al-Mulk, Muḥsin al-Mulk, Mawlāwī Sāmī‘ Allāh Dihlawī, Ḥakīm Ājmāl Khān, Sayyid Barakāt Aḥmad Tonkī, Mirzā Ghulām Aḥmad of Qādiān, Mawlāwī Dḥakā’ Allāh Dihlawī, Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Jabbār Ghaznawī, M. ‘Abd al-Salām Nadwi, author of Shīr al-Hind and Imām Rāzī have been duly included. It appears from a perusal of the fihrist that the author only included Arabists or authors of published works in his dictionary. This has resulted in making this work rather unbalanced and consequently defective, but still its usefulness cannot be denied. The Pakistani publishers will do well to bring out a complete edition of this work as many volumes have gone out of print. A separate volume containing indices of all the eight volumes, including the Supplement when published, must also needs to be compiled thus enhancing the value of this undoubtedly great and monumental work as a book of reference. Would that the Islamic Research Institute, Islamabad, undertakes this job.