This is a reprint of the Urdu translation (Bijnor 1947) by 'Abd al-Shahid Khan Shirwani of the Arabic “Risâla Ghadriyya” (christened Al-Thawra al-Hindiyya by M. Abul Karim Azad) which Mawlam Faḍl-i Ḥaqq Khayrābādī wrote during his imprisonment in the Andaman Islands (1859-61) where he was exiled on his conviction on charges of complicity in the military uprising of 1857 now rightly described as the first War of Independence by the Indo-Pakistani historians. The book comprising a tract in Arabic and two long poems, also in Arabic, gives a doleful but vivid description of the tribulations and sufferings to which the author as well as hundreds of those freedom-fighters who took part in the so-called ‘Mutiny’ of 1857, confined in the dreaded Andaman Islands, were subjected by the bloated British. As one reads through the mournful account of what the author went through, the extremely inhuman treatment and the insults which were heaped upon him by his captors, one cannot help recall the inhuman atrocities which the Nazis perpetrated on their victims during World War-II in the infamous concentration camps.

The book was published in its Arabic text with excellent and highly readable Urdu translation by 'Abd al-Shahid Khan Shirwani, almost after a century of its compilation, in 1947 for fear of the British authorities and their repressive law with which they governed their former colonial possession—the Dominion of (undivided) India. The language employed by the author both in prose and poetry shows what wonderful mastery he had over the Arabic language and how vast was his vocabulary justifying most appropriately the honorific of ‘Allāma conferred on him by his contemporaries and littérateurs. It is a pity that the book although a slender volume yet fit to rank with such famous classics as the Maqâmât Ḥarîl, Maqâmât Bâdî’ al Zamân al-Hamadhâni and the Ḥamâsa, could not be widely circulated in the Arab world so that the Arabs, now engaged in a life and death struggle against the Western powers and their stooges, could know how the British treated a century back, their co-religionists in India who like them were struggling to liberate their home-land from the foreign usurpers. The atrocities and excesses committed by the victors and harsh punishment which they meted out to the helpless and ill-starred “rebels” were extremely hideous.

Mawlam Faḍl-i Ḥaqq says that:

“When the British occupied Delhi in 1858, they started executing the élite of the city and the suburbs and looted their property, residential buildings, cattle, chattels, elephants, horses, camels, arms and household effects. Not only that they mercilessly put to the sword the women and children, outraged the modesty of thous-
ands of highborn ladies, although they had all of them submitted to the victors and had accepted them as their over-lords. Guards and pickets were placed at all points of exit to apprehend those who were running away for their lives. They were all captured, deprived of all they possessed—jewellery, gold and silver, loin cloths, chaddars, pyjamas and even the unsewn sheets which menfolk wear round their waists. After these inhuman acts of despoliation, men, women and children, young and old were all indiscriminately hanged and gibbeted. Thousands met their death in this fashion and most of them were Muslims—the Hindūs were generally spared". (pp. 269-270).

As already stated the book is a first hand source for the happenings in Delhi during and after the rising against the British by the native troops, both Hindūs and Muslīms, and gives a vivid description of the untold sufferings of the freedom fighters while undergoing their life sentence in the Andamans popularly called the kālāpāṇi. However, certain statements made by the writer of the foreword to the edition under review and the lengthy preface by 'Abd al Shāhid Khān Shīrwānī, the Urdu translator, have been criticized in certain circles. For instance it has been contended that the Mawlānā displayed exemplary courage and fortitude when he heard the sentence pronounced by the military court of transportation for life for his alleged complicity in the so-called 'Mutiny'. Mālik Rām in his lengthy article published in the monthly Takrik, Delhi [June 1960], has forcefully contradicted this statement and has said that Mawlānā Faḍl-i Ḥaqq did no such thing as he was deeply convinced that he had committed no such crime as high treason. At the most he was guilty of acting as an advisory to the mutineers, especially the queen-mother Begum Ḥaḍrat Maḥall of Awadh, was also a member of the Court of Administration set up by the last Mughal emperor of Delhi — Bahādurshāh Zafar. He had also contended that in view of his old age (he was 62 years old), minority of his children, straitened circumstances and extreme poverty to which he had been reduced he might be shown mercy and consequently released on compassionate grounds.

According to Mawlānā Imtiyāẓ 'Ali 'Arshi, the Librarian, Raza (sic) State Library, Rāmpūr (India) Mawlānā Faḍl-i Ḥaqq had also addressed three letters to the then pro-British Nawāb of Rāmpūr, Yūsuf 'Ali Khān (who had been his pupil in Delhi and with whom he had been earlier employed in various capacities), while he was facing the trial for high treason at Lucknow, in which he had implored the Nawāb to intercede on his behalf with the British and help secure his release. One of these letters has been preserved in the archives of the former Rāmpūr State while the other two are lost; either they had been forwarded by the Nawāb to the British Governor-General or most probably destroyed as these were from a "rebel" and could be a source of trouble for the loyal native ruler at a later stage.

This letter was also published in the monthly Takrik [August 1957]. Its authenticity has been challenged only recently, although feeble doubts had been earlier expressed in certain circles, belonging to a particular school of religious thought, that this letter might not be a genuine document. As against this the question has been posed: who invented this forgery and why, and how it came to be deposited in a princely State library whose ruler was kindly disposed towards the Mawlānā and who had also employed him in his State and where his illustrious son, Mawlānā 'Abd al-Ḥaqq, had sought employment and taught long after the 'Mutiny' and the death in exile of his celebrated father. It is easy to say that a certain document is a forgery but it is difficult to prove it. Neither
external nor internal evidence goes to show that the document published by Mawłānā 'Arshi is historically not genuine. The contents of the letter are also supported by two or three appeals of mercy, as averred by Mālik Rām, which Mawłānā Faḍl-i Ḥaqq filed with the British authorities against his conviction. Unfortunately these appeals were all rejected.

Commenting on the efforts made by the Mawłānā to prove that he was innocent and that he had not done any thing which could prove him guilty of the charges laid against him and his general conduct during his trial Ḥakīm Māḥmūd Aḥmad Barakātī, a grandson of Sayyid Barakāt Aḥmad of Tonk, says in his Urdu book Faḍl-i Ḥaqq Khayrābādī Āwr San Sattāwan (Faḍl-i Ḥaqq Khayrābādī and the year fifty-seven) (Karachi 1975): “Whatever Mawłānā Faḍl-i Ḥaqq stated in the court in respect of his innocence and whatever he did to secure his release I say openly that this was not an act of fortitude and chivalry. Would that this page in the biography of Faḍl-i Ḥaqq had been blotted with ink” (p. 17).

During his employment as a sarishtadār with the British Resident of Delhi Mawļānā Faḍl-i Ḥaqq was not treated with the honour and respect which he richly deserved as has been stated by Mīrzā Ghālib in his Kulliyāt-i Nāthr or if Mīrzā Ḥayaran Dīlawī is to be believed, he was suspended from service for deliberately sitting on certain orders passed by the Resident on an application submitted by Mawłānā Ismā‘īl Shahīd against the gag on his sermons in the Jāmi’ Masjid, he had to resign his post and seek employment with the native chief of Jhajhjar (who was also hanged for his complicity in the ‘Mutiny’). This insulting behaviour of the Resident and the circumstances in which Faḍl-i Ḥaqq tendered his resignation must have rankled in his heart. It should be remembered that he was held in very high esteem both as a scholar and a nobleman whose father Mawļānā Faḍl-i Imām had been Ṣādṛ al-Ṣudūr of Delhi, whose uncle Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ was also in the employ of the East India Company as an official news-writer, whose brother Faḍl al-Raḥmān held a high administrative appointment in the Patiala State and whose another brother Faḍl-i ‘Āzīm was Deputy Collector of Sahāranpūr.

It may not be unsafe to conjecture that out of rancour or just to satisfy his ire against the British Mawļānā Faḍl-i Ḥaqq, after watching the progress of events for sometime, decided to lend his support to the freedom struggle only in August 1857 while the ‘Mutiny’ had actually erupted in May of the same year. His presence in Delhi in early May is, however, a disputed point. It still remains a fact that he was considered a terribly dangerous person by the British who were bent on punishing him for his various acts of omission and commission during his employment with them and especially his determination not to bow submissively before them, and not necessarily for his activities during the course of the ‘Mutiny’ which were considered not so dangerous as to imperil the very foundations of the British rule in India, as had been contested by the Mawļānā himself during his trial through his British lawyers. There is every reason to believe that the horrible punishment awarded to the Mawļānā was the result of malice that the British bore against him because, as he himself says in the Risālā under review, he was one of the leading ‘Ulamā’ of India, had been brought up in affluent circumstances, had lived a life of ease and luxury (he was gainfully employed by the British in a post which carried besides a handsome salary, social prestige and power). The British were particularly
hard on all those who had once been in their employ but had turned against them when the 'Mutiny' broke out. By punishing him the British wanted to set an example for those who were still employed with them in case they were also found guilty of gross misconduct.

In fact, the role played by the Mawlānā in the freedom struggle of 1857 needs to be thoroughly investigated before a judgement could be passed on him one way or the other. This should form the subject-matter of a doctoral dissertation in one of our universities. The books and articles so far published on Mawlānā Faḍl-ī Ḥaqq are so much conflicting in nature and content, are so much one-sided and prejudiced in their treatment that the average reader finds himself confused and perplexed and is consequently unable to reach a definite conclusion.

The two articles by 'Arshi and Mālik Rām paint the career of the Mawlānā in lurid colours while the booklet by the late Mufti Intiṣāmullah Shihābī (Badaun, n.d.), the one under review by 'Abd al-Shāhid Khān Shirwānī and the third by Māḥmūd Aḥmad Barakātī are more or less of an apologetic nature written with the sole aim of exonerating Mawlānā Faḍl-ī Ḥaqq from the charge of passivity during the freedom struggle. The Mawlānā, however, himself pleads guilty to the charge when he says:

"I continued goading the unwilling and weak-willed while on the outbreak of hostilities I myself sat back... I kept aloof due to lethargy and indetermination. In fact I committed a big crime; when godly persons called upon me to lay down my life in the path of God I did not respond; I was unlucky to achieve martyrdom while the lucky ones attained it."

His remorse is justified. In spite of his vast learning and erudition his services to the country or his nation were practically negligible. In fact all his activities centred on his own self rather than the community to which he belonged. While he delighted to indulge in polemics others plunged themselves in active politics which ultimately cost them their lives. We of the posterity have nothing but profound respect for both for all that they did in their own way for the freedom of their motherland.

Karachi

— A.S. Bazmee Anṣārī