The death of Awrangzeb in 1707 A.D., is a turning point in the history of Muslim rule in India. Subsequently this situation not only had aroused the Muslims socially, they were reawakened intellectually and also politically. This reawakening ultimately took the form of a movement which laid the foundations for a Muslim resistance against the British rule in India. Shâh Wâli Allâh of Delhi and his family were the pioneers of this movement. Many other religious scholars and Muslim leaders of the time contributed to the movement. One of these was Mawlâna Siddîq Hasân Khân, Nawâb of Bhopâl, whose contributions have not been studied properly. The book under review is a serious attempt to evaluate the role played by the Nawâb in this respect.

Nawâb Siddîq Hasân Khân, who ruled the Indian state of Bhopâl for thirteen years (from 1872 to 1885 A.D.), was a man of very humble origin. His only asset was his hard-working habits. The perusal of his biography reveals that he reached the high position of the Nawâb mainly by dint of these habits. Inspite of the fact that he was educated in the religious schools of conservative type, his approach to different religious issues was highly progressive. For example, he was the first Muslim scholar of the Sub-continent who declared that not a single verse of the Qur'ân was abrogated (p.148). Today all the enlightened religious scholars uphold this view. He introduced Shawkânî, a progressive religious scholar of Yemen, to the readers of the Sub-continent. The liberal scholarship of Shawkânî can be judged from the fact that even today his books are the main pillars of the so-called progressive religious scholars.

Even before becoming Nawâb, Siddîq Hasân Khân had realized the weaknesses and deficiencies of the Indian Muslims, and was determined to reform them. As Nawâb his zeal for reformation became boundless. The administration of his State was under the direct control of ingenious British officers and to counter their craftiness it was necessary for the Nawâb to study thoroughly the nature of modern political institutions for which a knowledge of English language was a pre-requisite. However, he gathered around him conservative scholars most of whom belonged to his own school of thought i.e. Ahl-e-Hadîth. Although the Nawâb acknowledged their scholarship and sought their help for the reconstruction of religious thought in Islam, yet the sectarian leanings of the scholars of his school put obstacles in his way. This problem created misunderstanding about the Nawâb (p-93). The approach of the Nawâb and his party about taqlîd was not judicious. (Taqlîd is accepting blindly as final authority the opinion of one of the four celebrated Imâms of the Islamic Jurisprudence). He called upon the Indian Muslims to break the chains of taqlîd and hold fast to the teachings of the holy Qur'ân and the...
Sunnah. (p-90). Strangely enough these opponents of taqlid tenaciously stuck to some religious issues and unconsciously they themselves came to follow taqlid. However their sectarian prejudice at that time not only alienated the conservative Ḥanafite scholars but also some of the enlightened scholars like Mawlānā ‘Abdul Ḥayyi of Lukhnow. The Nawāb along with the party of his religious scholars compiled bulky Islamic literature; but unfortunately most of his scholars were not research-minded. They sought to refute their adversaries by weak and sweeping arguments. Naturally many discrepancies crept into these works. The offended Ḥanafite scholars, notably Mawlānā ‘Abdul Ḥayyi of Lukhnow, promptly pointed to a greater number of such discrepancies, and a controversy arose. (p-93). The objections of Mawlānā ‘Abdul Ḥayyi were so authentic that these opened the door of criticism against the Nawāb, thus damaging his scholarly status in the eyes of the majority of the Indian Muslims who were mainly Ḥanafites. This damage contributed to his deposition. Had the Nawāb made himself abreast with a knowledge of English language and the development of modern institutions, not only his approach to various religious issues would have been different but also the question of his deposition would have never arisen.

The deposition of the Nawāb was not an ordinary affair concerning a person or a family only. It was an important historical event. Although many charges were framed against the Nawāb, but their persual show that he was deposed because of his efforts to reconstruct the religious thought in Islam according to the dictates of his time. It is perhaps due to this importance of the issue that the author has devoted a separate chapter for the purpose and has tried to refute various charges brought against the Nawāb. No doubt the author has taken great pains in this respect but due to mis-arrangement of his material his effort has not yielded expected results. It would have been more appropriate to give a complete list of all such charges in the beginning of the chapter and then refuted one by one; instead the author chose to refute some of these charges off hand and without any order and then appended their complete list at the end of the book. (pp. 314 to 327). The reader who finishes the book with some pleasant memories is baffled when he comes across this lengthy list, especially when he finds that many serious charges have been scantly treated while the other equally important such as the Nawāb’s compulsion of princess Sultān Jahān to marry his eldest son (p-322) have not been touched at all. To absolve the Nawāb of these charges this chapter requires re - writing in a more scholarly way so that not a single charge is left unanswered. The proper place of the Nawāb in the history of Islamic Thought in the Sub-continent depends on the proper handling of these problems and their correct interpretations.

All the other ten chapters of the book are properly written and documented. They contain valuable material that explain many religious, social and political problems faced by the Muslims in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They also highlight the Nawāb’s contribution. It is a welcome addition to the scantly literature on this important subject; however a thorough revision of the third chapter will greatly enhance the historical and scholarly value of the book.

Gujar Khan

Rafīullah Shehāb

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