

Book Review

Maqalat-e-Barkati [Ed.] Dr. Sohail Barkati, Lahore, 2018, pp. 550

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This book consists of the collected essays, reviews and interviews of Allama Hakim Mahmud Ahmad Barkati, including those which have been published in various journals, as well as those which remained unpublished at the time of his death on 9 February 2013. This treasure-trove has been very lovingly and caringly put together by a son of the Allama, viz. Dr Sohail Barkati, retired Professor & Chairman, Department of Zoology, University of Karachi.

Allama Hakim Mahmud Ahmad Barkati was a towering intellectual personality who, while being a most eminent practitioner of Oriental medicine [*tibb*], was also the embodiment of the traditional Islamic disciplines without which no education could be regarded as complete viz., the Quran, the Hadith, history, logic and mysticism, and allied sciences. In this respect, the Allama reminded one of the polymaths of old who were easily proficient in the Islamic sciences, while also specializing in a discipline of their choice. It speaks volumes for the indifference and barbarity of our present society, a society which was witness to the murder of this savant in the 86th year of his age.

The book under review is divided into two parts. Part One [which is the larger part] opens with an explanation of the design of the book by its editor, Dr Sohail Barkati. This is followed by an enthusiastic encomium by Dr Mazhar Mahmud Shirani - who has the distinction of being the Allama's oldest companion and native of his birthplace Tonk [the only Muslim state in Rajasthan in pre-independent India]. Dr Shirani has also edited several essays and printed material relevant to the productive

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intellectual career of the Allama. He concludes with a versified chronogram that gives the date of the Allama's martyrdom, viz. 2013.

This is followed by a memorial to the 50-year association with the Allama by Dr Moinuddin Aqeel, who recounts his fruitful contact with the Allama, the latter's love of books, his throwing open his large library to researchers, and his general kindness and amiability. Finally, there is a prose panegyric by Khwaja Razi Haider, Director, Quaid-i-Azam Academy, who also had a long and productive association with the Allama spanning several decades. The hall-mark of the Allama's distinction, according to Khwaja Razi Haider, was being totally devoted to scholarship [*fanafi'lilm*]. Coming as he did from a long and distinguished line of scholars and hakims, the Allama was the receptacle of a vast and unique reservoir of knowledge beyond the ken of common aspirants. At a time when the foremost ophthalmologists of the USA decisively said that his vision was lost forever, the Allama used his knowledge of *tibb* to restore his own vision and regain his sight. This was certainly an extraordinary phenomenon.

The first subdivision deals with a *hamd* [divine praise] and a *naat* [Prophetic panegyric] followed by two essays on the Holy Prophet. The last essay in this section is on Mary the Copt [wife of the Holy Prophet], in whom the Allama felt a unique interest in as she was the only 'foreigner' in Arab society at the time and the mother of his son, Ibrahim. While speaking of the lady to me, the Allama mentioned that he had visited the thatched cottage built for her protection against the great heat of Arabia.

The next subdivision deals with the Allama's area of expertise, i.e., Shah Wali Allah and his role in the Islamic renaissance in South Asia in the 18th century. He mentioned to me his visiting the tomb of Shah Sahib in the graveyard of the Mehendiyan in Delhi. This is followed by three essays on the scholar Fazl-i-Haq Khayrabadi, who also signed the declaration of jihad against the British in the War of 1857. The Khayrabadi school of logic and philosophy [of which Allama Khayrabadi was head] was also championed by Hakim Barkati, who was the last Imam [head] of this school [maktab-i-Khayrabadi].

Next, there is a section of 15 sketches dealing with persons of historical importance, as well as his own friends and admirers. In this roll-call of

honour, the first name is that of Tughril the Turk followed by Sultan Hyder Ali of Mysore. The Allama was a great admirer of Tipu Sultan and of the spiritual devotion he (Tipu) had for the Holy Prophet. Others mentioned are Dr Abul Khayr Kashfi [whose residence in the Defence area of Karachi I visited with the Hakim Sahib], and other friends from Tonk.

This is followed by a section of 14 essays on Islamic medicine [*tibb*]. It contains a remarkable survey of the treatment of cancer by Muslim physicians over the centuries. A very interesting and lively section is that which contains the various interviews given to journalists by the Hakim Sahib. It also has his stirring address on the occasion of his being awarded the degree of D.Sc. by Hamdard University. The section following this deals with reviews of various books on religion, philosophy and medicine. The second major subdivision deals with 17 essays – on Islamic topics, with three on *tibb*. The essays on *tibb* includes one which has a diagnosis of the last illness of the Holy Prophet as reported in various books of Hadith, and its medical aspects have been determined. This is most interesting - indeed thrilling - in its careful analysis and application of later terminology. Nine essays are on various personalities. This is followed by a comprehensive bibliography of Hakim Sahib's books and essays. The total number of printed books is 22 whereas 4 four books [including his massive history of *tibb*] are unpublished. This is followed by 4 four collections of essays and their contents. These amount to 84 essays. After this, the number of essays in various journals are 100 [published] and those put into the present volume are 13. Apart from these, there are 14 that are still unpublished. There may be other essays and written material that as yet are untraceable or perhaps lost. Nevertheless, the salvaging of so much material of value by Dr Sohail Barkati is a remarkable achievement, for which he deserves the full gratitude of the students, patients, friends and admirers of the late Allama Hakim Mahmud Ahmad Barkati. With the Elect in the Heavens!