

## **The Literary Contribution of Bhopal**

### **An Historical Survey of the Role of Nawab Sidiq Hasan Khan**

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The state of Bhopal founded in 1772 by an Afghan immigrant Dost Muhammad Khan, became a nucleus of cultural and literary activities under the successive chains of Nawabs and Begums of this centrally located princely state in the Indian subcontinent. The Muslim scholars and literati from across the length and breadth of the country were driven to the court of Bhopal mainly due to the liberal patronization and encouragement of the reigning Nawabs particularly Wala Jah Nawab Sidiq Hasan Khan (1832-1892), husband of Begum Shah Jahan.<sup>1</sup> According to Syed Sulaiman Nadvi, there was a spurt of literary activities in and around Bhopal under the continued inspiration and influence of Sidiq Hasan Khan,<sup>2</sup> one who heralded a splendid era in the annals of Bhopal particularly in the field of literature, architecture and various other administrative measures. Being an outsider his indulgence in the overall affairs of Bhopal was not liked by the other members of the royal house. He was accused of exercising undue influence on his wife vis-a-vis the affairs of Bhopal by the members of royal family included her own daughter of first husband, Sultan Jahan Begum. Despite such accusations the state of Bhopal under the supervision of Wala Jah made progress particularly in the field of literature and it is not an exaggeration that it attained the status of a famous centre of literature after Delhi. The present article aims at offering a historical overview to the literary developments of this princely state under Wala Jah Nawab Sidiq Hasan Khan besides the socio-religio-political activities which mostly revolved around the royal house at Bhopal (where he spent the major portion of his life) are very significant in several respects in particular when Bhopal itself became a hub of activities where scholars and other men of dignities were attracted to

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serve in different capacities in the court of Bhopal. Delhi which earlier could boast of being not only the capital city of the Muslim rulers for centuries but also the highest seat of learning, however, lost its pre eminent position in the wake of the great conflagration of 1857. Thus the changes brought about in the body politic of Delhi had its influences on the Muslim India. Nawab Sidiq Hasan was a scholar, an erudite writer, an eminent theologian, a poet, a zealous reformer and above all one of the two founding fathers of the Ahl-i-Hadith Movement, an off shoot of the Wahhabi Movement of India. During his brief span he greatly contributed to the making of an intellectual history of the Muslims of India in general and those of the Muslims of Bhopal in particular. Unlike his counterpart Maulana Nazir Husain Muhaddith Dehlavi who spent more than five decades in Delhi imparting religious education particularly the Qur'an and the Hadith to students coming from across the length and breadth of the country, impelled scholars to find refuge in various Muslim courts with no exception to the court of Bhopal where Nawab Sidiq himself encouraged and patronized men of pen (*ahl-i-qalm*) especially those who followed the religious thought of the Ahl-i-Hadith of India as well as from other parts of the Muslim world. Unlike Nazir Husain, Nawab Sidiq mostly depended on the publication of his works, some of which of course, he got published in Egypt and other parts of Middle East.

Born in 1248/1832 at Bansbareilly from an elitist family, Nawab Sidiq claimed to be a descendant of Fatima, daughter of Prophet Mohammad from his paternal side.<sup>3</sup> His mother took him to Kanauj where his family had for considerable time been known as a respectable and prestigious one owing to the rank and attainments of his father, Syed Aulad Husain, a Shia by birth who later on accepted the Sunni creed.<sup>4</sup> The latter according to one estimate had as many as ten thousand disciples spreading beyond the confines of Kanauj. From maternal side too Sidiq Hasan claimed to be a descendant of a very respectable family. His grand father Mufti Mohammad Awaz, a learned man, was given due respect in the royal houses of Asif-ud-Doula, the Nawab of Oudh and Nawab of Tonk respectively. Such an aristocratic background indeed gives an impression that the earliest leadership of the Ahl-i-Hadith movement came from well born families. In the biographic

dictionary of the Ahl-i-Hadith for Delhi and United provinces for example, a full 1/5 were noted as Syeds, a strikingly high percentage of the descendants of the Prophet(SAAS), and a further 10% were of socially eminent families, among them descendants of Mughals and Oudh Nawabs and of wealthy zamindars. About 1/4 of the whole were in princely services all in very high positions.<sup>5</sup>

Nawab Sidiq was in teens when he lost his father. He received the rudiments of Arabic and Persian from Mawlana Syed Muhammad Hasan at his home town Kaunaj.<sup>6</sup> In 1269 he proceeded to Delhi in pursuit of academic and spiritual education. Here he became a pupil of Mufti Mohammad Sadrud-Din Khan Bahadur (1789-1868), a theologian of repute who often shared the literary company of Shah Abdul Aziz. Besides him Nawab also remained in the company of Nawab Mustafa Khan Bahadur (who lived at Chilti Qabr in Delhi).<sup>7</sup> What is important to note is that his stay at Delhi which lasted for almost two years brought him into close proximity with the traditions of Waliu Allah family. Such traditions manifested itself in the writings of Nawab. Again, he was so much imbued with the literary genre of this great centre of Islamic east (Delhi) that he utilized his leisure time in copying the famous works of Imam Ghazali, Imam Abu Hujr Makki and so on. On reaching Bhopal he wrote commentaries on these works.<sup>8</sup>

Nawab Sidiq was brought to the fold of the 'Wahhabi' ideology in somewhat similar circumstances to that of his other colleague Mawlana Nazir Husian. The disciples of Syed Ahmad Shahid even during his life time had gone to different parts of India with a view to preach the message of Islam. Thus in their missionary tour to Bhopal, Mawlana Wilayat Ali (about whom Nawab Sidiq remarked that there was hardly any *alim* of such a stature in contemporary India who could be a match for him)<sup>9</sup> and Mawlana Inayat Ali succeeded in moulding certain individuals of repute towards 'Wahhabi' ideology, one such individual being Nawab Sidiq. The latter, on the advice of Mawlana Wilayat Ali studied *Balugul Maram* and subsequently wrote a monumental commentary on it in the name of *Masq-ul-Khatam*, a voluminous work on *ahadith* for whose publication he is reported to have spent a huge amount.<sup>10</sup> It was owing to this commendable work of extra-

ordinary scope that his literary acumen began to be felt in the Muslim religious circles in India and abroad.

A man with such an aristocratic background had to face tough times in life. Nawab was sufficiently poor when he reached Bhopal in quest of service during Nawab Sikandar Begum's rule (1844-1868).<sup>11</sup> Through the efforts of Munshi Jamalud-Din, Madr-ul Maham (Prime Minister), Sidiq Hasan was given a modest job at the monthly salary of Rs. 30 which subsequently was raised to Rs. 40 by the ruling Begum of Bhopal. It was only for his literary attainments that a title of *Mir Dubari* in 1855/1272, was conferred on him.<sup>12</sup>

A series of lectures delivered by Sidiq Hasan sometimes in the capacity of Imam at Masjid-I-Ibrahim Bhopal depicted his burning desire to inculcate the *tawhidic* spirit<sup>13</sup> among the Muslims, an aspect which had been lost sight of by an average Muslim owing to a number of reasons like heterodoxy of certain Muslim rulers in Medieval times. Highly disgusted with the religious milieu and behaviour of the Muslims, he stood for the reformation of certain customs, traditions, practices, rites, rituals, ceremonies, etc. which had penetrated deep into the Muslim society but actually had Hindu-Budhist roots. He insisted on a return to the norms of original message of Sunnah, the bed rock of the Ahl-i-Hadith religious ideology. Moreover, he wanted to give the Qur'an and the Hadith ascendancy over the law schools, which he believes appeared almost three hundred years after the original sources. Such reformative ideas did not find favour among the masses and the British officials turned against Sidiq Hasan. The fact is that the masses had been nurtured in such a custom-laden religious atmosphere that a mere ill will to the visit of shrines or any thinking with the rituals and ceremonies associated with the birth and death of a Muslim, were considered to be an encroachment upon the continued religious beliefs and activities of the Muslims. Viewed in this context, the attitude of the religious heads of the Muslims vis-a-vis his ideas was unsatisfactory. Having not found a fertile ground for preaching the reformative tenets at Bhopal on his first visit he proceeded to Kanpur which by this time had come under the grip of mujahaddin in 1857.<sup>14</sup> The chaotic and disturbed conditions here did not

allow him to remain at ease. He thus moved to Tonk in 1858 where he was generously treated by Nawab Wazir-ud-Doula who also fixed Rs.5 as his monthly salary. It should be pointed out here that Muslim rulers in different parts of India often patronized and encouraged scholars by offering financial assistance.

The paramount consideration for Sidiq Hasan to come once again to Bhopal, a hub of literary activities, could have been on one hand, to preach the Ahl-i-Hadith tenets in an atmosphere of peace (as some of the areas in Northern India aftermath of mutiny came under the heavy hand of the British Government and Muslims were the main victims) and on the other to play a special role in the religio-political history of Bhopal. This time he was assigned the job of writing the history of Bhopal and making bye laws for conducting the general business of the state.<sup>15</sup> The management of Suliamania Madrasa was also entrusted to him. For discharging his duties efficiently and honestly he received the title of '*Khan*' and '*Mir Dubari*'.<sup>16</sup> Madrul Maham Munshi Jamal-ud-Din was so much impressed by his attainments and scholarship that he gave his daughter Zakiya in marriage to him.<sup>17</sup> This marriage provided very crucial in the sense that he began to enjoy not only the favours of top ranking officers of the state but sometimes even offered valuable suggestions to them for the smooth working of the state.

As an advocate of widow marriage, Nawab Sidiq himself set an example while marrying the ruling princess of Bhopal, Nawab Shah Jahan Begum (1868-1901). He lamented that Muslims included gentry under extraneous influence gave up the Islamic practice of marrying widows which he desired to revive. But we can not lose sight of the fact that his life had been made uncomfortable and miserable by his enemies including some of the members of the royal house who did not see the marriage with favour and thus accused him of harbouring 'Wahhabi' ideology at the court of Bhopal at a time when 'Wahhabism' was considered suspect to the extent of being treasonable by the British Indian Government.<sup>18</sup> In addition the adverse reports underlined in the slanderous letters addressed to the British officials against Nawab, created all impediments and blurred otherwise his significant role in the body politic of Bhopal. This also convinced British officials of their

continued apprehensions of his involvement in aiding and abetting 'Wahhabi' ideas in the State. The British had already come to understand the involvement of his father Syed Aulad Hasan in the 'Tariq-a-Muhammaddiya Movement' of Syed Ahmad Barelvi.<sup>19</sup> The British Government henceforth kept complete vigil over the activities of Nawab. Sir Lepel Griffon considered several of his works highly seditious that aimed at inciting Muslims to wage jihad against the British Government. Those works according to British officials included *Majmu Khataib*, *Hadiyat-us-Sait*, and *Rouz-ul-Khasib*. The first of these three works in particular was considered highly inflammable and provocative. Nawab tried to persuade the Government of British India that such a work was only compiled by him and it did not at all deal with the issue of jihad but subjects like *khusuf* (moon eclipse), *istaska* (rain), *nikkah* (marriage), etc. Nothing was written against the Government of British India, remarked Nawab. He raised certain points of vital importance that indeed for the time being served as instrumental in safeguarding him from the wrath and persecution of the British officials. He tried to persuade the British Government that books as dealing with jihad and its philosophy were published at Bombay and Calcutta by Hanafi ulama and scholars but no objection was raised against them by the Government nor were they dubbed as 'Wahhabis'. Jihad is one of the fundamentals of Muslim faith besides being described in the Qur'an and the Hadith, also finds ample references in the works of eminent theologians of the past. The Persian translation of '*Mishkat*' by Shaikh Abdul Haq also deals with jihad.<sup>20</sup> For raising such issues the purpose of Nawab seems to have been to distract the attention of the British Government by bringing the majority of the Sunni Muslims into the vortex of controversy in which he found himself, albeit did not succeed.

Sidiq Hasan further argued that Bhopal was not a seat of religious controversy. Even in the dark days of 'mutiny' of 1857, the 'mutineers' whether Muslims or Hindus were handed over to the political agents for punishment. The foreigners viz, Arabs, Turks, Afghans and others were not allowed to stay at Bhopal for more than three or four days on the grounds that they might not disturb the peace and order in the state.<sup>21</sup>

A close examination of the source material reveals that immediately after Sidiq Hasan's arrival and subsequent elevation to the position of Nawab at Bhopal, not only had his magnetic personality attracted the scholars and ulama from various parts of India towards Bhopal but also succeeded in turning it to be a galaxy of ulama and *markazi-adab*, the centre of literature. It also became a safe haven for 'Wahhabi' activists who found refuge and also opportunities to occupy important positions in the state administration. This can be gleaned from the confidential report prepared by Ishree Prasad in 1875 which besides throwing light on several other issues, also reflects that Bhopal as one of the main centres of the 'Wahhabis' and the famous supporter of this ideology was Munshi Jamal ud-Din who married one of the late Begums of Bhopal. Among other prominent 'Wahhabis' reflected in the report and also quoted by Qeyammuddin, was Sidiq Hasan.<sup>22</sup> The latter was accused of bestowing favours upon such unscrupulous persons who did not show any interest in the welfare of the state but only kept themselves engaged in the propagation of the 'Wahhabi' tenets in the state.<sup>23</sup> As a corollary of mismanagement and corruption pervaded in all branches of administration. The British Government also charged him of misusing the state exchequer for the publication of his works of 'seditious nature'.<sup>24</sup> Little wonder, therefore, many works of Nawab were proscribed and confiscated. The British officials including Lepel Griffon continued to have apprehensions of copious pen of Nawab. This is the reason that the latter at times had been admonished by the British Court through its political agents not to publish material aimed at inciting the people against the Government or inciting the people to wage jihad against the Government or describe something adverse of the Government. Consequently, the copies of *Majumu Khataib* were destroyed in the presence of Colonel Bannerman in March, 1881.<sup>25</sup> Thus, in view of the strict vigilance kept over the activities of Nawab, the latter succeeded in publishing some of his works as mentioned earlier in foreign Muslim countries like Egypt and some parts of the Middle East.

A series of allegations leveled against Nawab intentionally meant to create wedge between him and his Muslim brethren who belonged to the

Hanafite school of thought and also between the latter and the Ahi-i- Hadith group of whose advocate he was. Among these allegations one being his deep contacts with Mahdi of Sudan (Mohammad Ahmad 1848-85) and his khalifa and successor Mohammad (1846-1899).<sup>26</sup> A description of such contacts was given by Lepel Griffon in his telegram dated 18<sup>th</sup> August, 1885. Again some of the 'Wahhabi' activists who were favoured in the court of Bhopal, was not liked by the British Government in view of the past history of the 'Wahhabis'. It is not beside the point that the 'Wahhabi' movement had for decades been a source of trouble to the Government not only in the North Western Frontier Provinces but also in the planes of India like Delhi and Patna.

Nawab Sidiq Hasan Khan's fame as an eminent Islamic scholar and theologian did attract many to come to Bhopal particularly from amongst the followers the Ahi-i-Hadith movement. Besides helping in the compilation of Islamic works these also staffed the bureaucracy of the state. Among those ulama may be mentioned Salamatullah Jairajpuri - former pupil of Maulana Nazir Husian who later on became the Director of Jama Masjid and supervisor of all madrasas of the state of Bhopal, Maulana Mohammad Bashir Sahswani, Alama Wahid-u-Zaman, Badn-u-Zaman, Maulana Faqr-ud-Din Barelvi (grandfather of Maulana Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi).<sup>27</sup>

True that in view of his social position Nawab Sidiq could not enter into debates, discussions or polemical scenes with his rivals (a practice often followed by the rival in order to vindicate their point of view in an public gatherings) he, nonetheless, did contribute a good deal of socio-religious consciousness among the Muslims of India through his writing, on which he depended heavily. His writing besides emphasizing upon socio-religious reformation also occasionally reveals a profound sensitiveness to pain and suffering in this world and a pious apprehension of retribution in the world to come. It also reflects Nawab's formulation of pietistic ethics on the spiritual involvement with life after death, an apprehension of the approaching end of the world, and with the religion and moral duties of the Muslim to gain admittance into the paradise.<sup>28</sup> Besides, he also highlighted though cryptically the omissions and commissions of the Government.



The subjects on which he wrote extensively included tafsir-i-Quran, tafsir-i Hadith, fiqh, mysticism, literature, akhlaq, sirah, tawwarikh, biographies of Muslim scholars and poets. He is credited to have been the first scholar of India having written works on an alphabetical order and according to his biographer, there are 222 works which stand to his credit<sup>29</sup> These works were freely distributed during his life time among the people and hardly could there be any Muslim seminary in India and abroad not to have housed Nawab's collection. These works were written in Arabic, Persain and Urdu and were published from Egypt, Pakistan besides India.

It is worthwhile to mention here that Nawab's pre-delections and pre-depositions with the Ahl-i-Hadith thought of India was bound to evoke some reaction not only on the part of Hanafi muqallids but also from the British Government. The latter believed that his writing incited Muslims to wage jihad against their rule in India. Moreover, he was also charged to have connections with Mahdi of Sudan, Mohammad Ahmad (1848-1885) and is reported to have sent anonymous letters to him.<sup>30</sup> In addition, he was accused of having published works in support of the Mahdi of Sudan.<sup>31</sup> Though tried his level best to dispel such doubts from the British mind yet Nawab failed miserably. He made it clear in unequivocal terms that Mahdi of Sudan was a false pretender and ignorant and illiterate masses should not consider him as a promised Mahdi. The ruling Begum also tried on behalf of her husband, on the plea that British did not have any concrete documentary evidence instead bent upon to implicate Nawab in the affairs of Mahdi of Sudan. The sympathizers of Nawab like Abu Syed Mohammad Husain Batalwi, the editor of *Isha'at - u Sunnah* (the first Ahl-i-Hadith periodical of India) also through the columns of his paper tried to prove Nawab's innocence vis-a-vis Mahdi of Sudan<sup>32</sup> but the opinion framed by the British could not be changed.

The Nawab's involvement in inciting people towards jihad, his deep rooted connection with 'Wahhabi' leaders and the propagation of Wahhabi ideas, and turning Bhopal as a centre of Wahhabi thought his connections with the Mahdi of Sudan, grabbing of power and taking the reigns of

administration in his hands, confiscation of jagirs and so on ultimately convinced the British and as a sequel led the deprivation of his titles including Nawab Wala Jah Amir ul-Mulk in August 1885.<sup>33</sup> All sorts of persecutions, humiliations and maltreatment he bore with greatest fortitude and forbearance. He remarked such persecutions and sufferings were not unknown to the great figures of Islamic history.

It is worthwhile to mention here that Nawab's pre-occupations and pre-occupations with the Ahl-i-Hadis thought of India was bound to evoke reaction not only on the part of Nawab's opponents but also from the British Government. The latter believed that his writings incited Muslims to wage jihad against their rule in India. Moreover, he was also charged to have connections with Wahabi of Sudan. Mohammad Ahmad (1848-1885) and is reported to have sent anonymous letters to him.<sup>34</sup> In addition, he was accused of having published works in support of the Wahabi of Sudan.<sup>35</sup> Though tried his level best to dispel such doubts from the British mind yet Nawab failed miserably. He made it clear in unequivocal terms that Wahabi of Sudan was a false pretender and ignorant and his statements should not be considered as a historical Wahabi. The ruling British also tried on details of her husband, on the plea that British did not have any concrete documentary evidence instead best upon to implicate Nawab in the affairs of Wahabi of Sudan. The exponents of Nawab like Abu Syed Muhammad Husain Khan, the editor of *As-Sunnah* (the Ahl-i-Hadis periodical of India) also through the columns of his paper tried to prove Nawab's innocence vis-a-vis Wahabi of Sudan, but the opinion formed by the British could not be changed.

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### Notes and References

1. The Muslim rulers since thirteenth century i.e, from the inception of the Muslim rule in India continued to grant the Muslim intelligentsia comprised ulama, scholars, theologians etc, the scholarship by way of granting them *madid-i-ma'ash*, the revenue of a particular parcel of land.
2. Syed Sulaiman Nadvi, *Hayat-i-Shibli*, Azamgarh, 1970, PP186-187.
3. Nawab Sidiq Hasan Khan, *Ibqaul Minan Wa Baqaul Mehn*, 1305, p. 7; *Abjadul Ulum*, Vol. III, p. 990.
4. Razia Hamid, *Nawab Sidiq Hasan Khan*, 1983, Bhopal, p. 61.
5. Abu Yehya Imam Khan Naushaharvi, *Tarajam-i-ulama-i-Hadith-i - Hind*, Delhi, 1937. quoted in Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India, Deoband, 1860-1900*, New Jersey, USA, pp. 268-269
6. Syed Mohammad Ali Hasan Khan, *Ma'sir-i-Sidiqi*, p. 48.
7. Ibid, p. 10.
8. Ibid, p.12.
9. Nawab Sidiq Hasan, op.cit, p. 12; Razia Hamid, op.cit, p22
10. Nawab Sidiq Hasan, op.cit, p.12; *Rouz-ul-Khasib*, 1292, p.162. This voluminous work in Persian is considered to be a comprehensive work on Ahadith. Its popularity is evidenced by the fact that it has run into several editions.
11. Nawab Shah Jahan Begum, *Taj-ul-Iqbal*, 1289, Kanpur, p. 27-28.
12. Ibid; Mohammad Ali Hasan, op.cit., Vol. II, p. 19. 13. Mohammad Ali Hasan, op.cit, pp. 21-22.
14. Ibid. Vol. III. pp. 23-24.
15. Nawab Sidiq Hasan, op.cit, pp. 38-41.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Nawab Shah Jahan, op.cit, p.27.
19. Razia Hamid. op.cit, p. 21.
20. Nawab Sidiq Hasan, *Defence of Sidiq Hasan*, Calcutta, 1888, pp.13-18
21. Ibid.

22. Qeyammuadin Ahmad, *The Wahhabi Movement in India*, Calcutta, 1966, p. 305.
23. These persons have been referred to as Ahl-i-Hadith in *Siraj-ul-Akbar*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Sep., 1895, p. 11.
24. Nawab Sidiq Hasan, *The Defence of Nawab*, op.cit, p. 8.
25. Ibid p.17.
26. *Isha'at-u Sunnah*, 1879, p.81.
27. Razia Hamid, op.cit., p. 169,223.
28. Nawab Sidiq Hasan, *Mutaqad al-Muntaqad*, Delhi, 1887 quoted in Aziz Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan*, London, 1967 p 117.
29. Syed Akbar Alam who translated *Tarjuman-ul-Wahhabiya* into English with the title of *An Interpretation of Wahhabism*, writes that Nawab Sidiq Hasan Khan is a man of vast literary acquirements. I doubt, if there is any 'alim in India who could approach the author in the profundity and depth of Knowledge of Arabic, Persian and Urdu.
30. *Isha'at-u Sunnah*, 1879, p.81
31. *Isha'at-u Sunnah*, 1888, pp. 74-5
32. *Isha'at-u Sunnah*, 1885, pp. 74- 75
33. Sa'duallh, *The Life and Works of Nawab Sidiq Hasan Khan*, vide Razia Hamid, op.cit, p. 101.