

MUHAMMAD MANIR AL-DIN ANWARI

(B. 1888- D. 1942)

Mawlana Abul Fadl Muhammad Manir al-din Anwari was a preacher of Islam (*wa'iz*), a writer, editor of the weekly journal *Ahl-e Hadis*, a commentator of the Qur'an, a political activist and a freedom-fighter. He was born in the village of Ranipur (better known as Ranirbandar), in the sub-district of Chirirbandar, in the district of Dinajpur, North Bengal, on the 17th day of the rainy season in the month of Ashar in 1285 B.E. (Bengali Era), which corresponds to 1888CE. He became well-known in the province of Bengal and Assam as an Islamic scholar, Muslim activist and in his early life, as a nationalist politician affiliated to the Indian National Congress and later to the All-India Muslim League. In the course of his rather short life, he became well-known as the editor of a weekly newspaper, *Ahl-e Hadis*, which was dedicated to Islamic revivalism and reformism, and it was published from Number 1, Marquis Lane, Calcutta.

His family originated in a rural village called Ranirbandar, where his father Mawlana Mazhar al-Din was a Muslim theologian who trained as an Islamic savant under the famous scholar, Shaykh al-Islam Mawlana Mian Nazir Husain of Delhi. After completing his Islamic education in Delhi, Mawlana Mazhar al-Din returned to Ranirbandar, where he founded an Islamic Seminary called *Mazharul 'Ulum* in order to spread literacy among his fellow Muslim villagers in an area that became renowned for manufacture of textiles. Mazhar al-Din had four sons, namely Muhammad Manir al-Din Anwari, Muhammad Bashir al-Din Nuri, Muhammad Husain and Abid Husain, and two daughters, Zubaidah Khanum and Damirun Nisa. Of these children, the two younger sons died in early life. Mazhar al-Din educated his sons and daughters at home in Islamic subjects including

Arabic language and literature, the *Qur'an* and *Hadith* (Islamic Traditions). They then gained their primary education in Alokdighi Junior High School. When his sons completed their primary education, Mazhar al-Din sent them to a Dilalpur Madrasah in the Sawtal Paganah district of Bihar. When Mawlana Mazhar al-Din passed away, his younger son, Bashir al-Din returned from Bihar without completing his education, although Manir al-Din did complete his education, and then enrolled at Shahrampur Madrasah in the U.P. (Uttar Pradesh) in Northern India. From 1904 to 1911 CE, Manir al-Din Anwari studied at Shahrampur Madrasah and completed his Dars-i Nizami course. After graduating from the Islamic Seminary in Delhi, Manir al-Din Anwari returned to Ranirbandar as director of the *Mazharul 'Ulum* Madrasah, which had been founded by his father. After serving for many years at the Islamic Seminary, Anwari earned a reputation not only as an efficient organiser and teacher of the Madrasah, but also as a writer of Islamic literature in Bengali and a famous orator and preacher. For a few years he also taught religious education at Alokdighi High School as a teacher.

At the end of the First World War (1914-18) he took an interest in nationalist politics in Bengal and joined the Non-Cooperation (*Asahayug*) Movement and the Khilafat Movement, which meant that he had to resign from Alokdighi (also called Alokdihi) High School. He then joined the Gandhi-led Non-Cooperation Movement and Muhammad Ali-Shawkat Ali-led Khilafat Movement and went from village to village to address the public to raise funds for the Khilafat Movement whose organizers included Mawlana Abdullah al-Baqi al-Quraishi and Mawlana Abdullah al-Kafi al-Quraishi and Mawlana Muhammad Akram Khan. As a local leader, Mawlana Anwari transformed the *Mazharul Ulum* Madrasah as the regional Headquarters of the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movements. He was a political agitator and fiery orator on religious and political subjects and as such was imprisoned for six months in 1920 CE. After his release he resumed his political activities as the local leader of the Indian Congress Party, the Non-Cooperation Movement and the Khilafat Movement and gained popularity among the populace of Dinajpur district. Before the end of 1920 or early 1921, he was arrested again for anti-Government campaigning. When the news of Anwari's arrest and imprisonment spread in the Ranir-Bandar and Chirir Bandar villages, thousands of supporters in the Dinajpur town assembled in front of the prison and tried to snatch their leader from the authorities. As a result of this public agitation and demonstration, he was soon released from detention. This event was

recorded by local historians like Mehrab Ali and Muhammad Hemayet Ali. The contemporaries of Anwari often talked about this memorable event.

When the Khilafat Movement lost its momentum, Mawlana Anwari joined the *Anjuman-i Ahl-e Hadis* (the Organisation of the *Ahl-e Hadis*) of Bengal and Assam and became involved with the monthly *Ahl-e Hadis* journal (*Mashik Ahl-e Hadis Patrika*), the mouthpiece of the Ahl-e Hadis Movement, which had been published since September 1915CE. For two years, the joint editors of the journal were Mawlana Muhammad Babar Ali and Muhammad Abdul Hakim. In the seventh year of its publication, the name of only Babar Ali featured as editor. During the 9th year of its publication, its temporary editor was Muhammad Abdul Latif. When Mawlana Babar Ali fell ill, Mawlana Anwari became the manager and editor of the monthly *Ahl-e Hadis* journal (*Masik Ahl-e Hadis Patrika* in Bengali). From 15th December 1927 onward, this monthly literary journal was transformed into a weekly journal (in Bengali Language), and initially, both Babar Ali and Anwari jointly edited it until 1930CE. In its last decade to 1939, its editor was Mawlana Anwari. According to its editor, 'The purpose of the Ahl-e Hadis was to publish the proper perspective on Islam by exposing the superstitions, prejudices and misconceptions among its votaries. It is determined to awaken the Muslim community by discussing the lives of Muslim savants and literati, instead of writing fictional stories of imaginary characters. Besides these, the journal has the usual features of other newspapers and journals.' (Editorial of 13th Falgun, 1340 B.E. of the weekly *Ahl-e Hadis*).

Among the biographies of Muslim savants, Mawlana Anwari wrote and serialised the biography of Imam Ibn Tayyimiyyah in 1933. The weekly *Ahl-e Hadis* was also to publish *Tafsir* (literally 'Commentary') on various Chapters of the Qur'an in conformity with Prophetic Traditions (*Hadith*, plural *Ahadith*). Mawlana Anwari himself serialised his *Tafsir* of a number of Chapters of the Qur'an, namely *Surah Al-e 'Imran* (Chapter on the House of Imran, Chapter 3); *Surah al-Nisa* (lit. Chapter on Women, Chapter 4); *Surah al-Ma'idah* (lit. the Table, Chapter 5); *Surah al-An 'am* (lit. On Cattle, Chapter 6), which were published between 1930 and 1937 in the weekly *Ahl-e Hadis*. The journal was closed down in 1939 due to financial difficulties and Mawlana Anwari returned to his village in Dinajpur and devoted himself to social welfare work and the propagation of Islam. He also founded some local institutions such as the Village Welfare Library (*Palli-*

Mangal Pathagar), which became the precursor of the *Nazrul Pathagar* (i.e. Kazi Nazrul Islam Library), which is located in the Ranirbandar Bazar (Market) since the late 1950s. Its founders were Mr. Aftabuddin (Ahmed) Master, B.A., and his brothers and friends, including S. M. Mahtab Beg, a para-military commander of the Ansar, from the village of Gachhahar, Dinajpur. Anwari also founded the Ranirbandar Charitable Dispensary for the medical care of the poor and the needy.

Among his many published writings are his longest poem entitled ‘Why should we be left behind?’ (in Bengali: *Mora Kena shudhu rahib pare?*), which was published in the monthly *Ahl-e Hadis* in 1917; this was probably his earliest dated publication. Among his many published essays were (1) The divine religion of Islam (*Oisharik dharma Islam* in Bengali) published in monthly *Ahl-e Hadis* in 1918 C.E. (2) *Islam -o- Ahl-e Hadis* which was published in the weekly *Ahl-e Hadith* in the 1930s; it was a well-researched essay, which probably had an influence on Mawlana Abdullah al-Kafi, who published a more detailed study of the concept of *Ahl-e Hadis* in a book entitled *Ahl-e Hadis Parichiti* (An Introduction to *Ahl-e Hadis*) in the 1950’s. (3). The Prophet is our best role model or supreme ideal (original in Bengali titled *Nabi-i Amadear Jannya Uttam Adarsha*), which was serialised in 1930-1932. This discourse was a critique of *Taqlid* (blind imitation) of ancient practices of Muslims and the necessity for *Ijtihad* (exercise of independent research and application of independent juristic discretion) in Muslim society. It was around this time that Sir Muhammad Iqbal also discussed the necessity for *Ijtihad* in his ‘Six Lectures on the Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam’; (4) *Muharram* and *Ashurah* festival and the need for sacrifice for the sake of Islam; this was his favourite theme of public lectures in religious gatherings; (5) *Musalmander Udashinata* (the indifference of the Muslims) in the weekly *Ahl-e Hadis* in 1933; (6) Preaching of the Truth (*Satyer Prachar*) and (7) The ancient history of Dinajpur (*Dinajpurer prachin Kirti-gatha* in Bengali) which was read out as a Presidential Speech in a conference in Dinajpur. The Speech was published in the *Jagaran* (lit. awakening) Journal, vol.1 No.1, Calcutta in 1341 B.E. (circa 1935 C.E.). Besides these writings, Anwari also wrote essays and anecdotes from modern Middle Eastern Arab history, such as (8) “A Page from the new history of the Arabs” (“Nabnya Arab itihaser ek-prishta”) and (9) ‘The administration of justice by Sultan Ibn Sa’ud’ (Sultan Ibn Sa’uder Subichar” which were published in the weekly *Ahl-e Hadis* in the 1930s. These discourses indicate that Anwari was aware of the new and exciting political and social developments in the newly-

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founded (in 1932) Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Mawlana Manir al-Din Anwari passed away on 22 November 1942 C.E. (3 Magh 1349 B.E.) His sudden death was viewed by some of his contemporaries as martyrdom. He suffered sudden heart attack in a religious gathering while he was passionately lecturing on the significance of the *Ashurah* on the 10th of Muharram evening at Balurghat in west Dinajpur. His body was carried from the religious gathering to Dinajpur town for funeral (*Janazah*). He was buried in front of the *Mazharul Ulum* Madrasah, which is also known as the Congress Madrasah in Ranirbandar.

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