

BOOK REVIEW

Dr Afzal Iqbal, *Life and Times of Mohamed Ali*. Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1974. xii, 443 pp. Glossary, Chronology of Significant Events, Select Bibliography and Index. Rs 40.00.

Published after more than four decades of the death of Muhammad Ali, the book is a first ever full-length biography of a man who was a nightmare for the British rulers of India during his entire active life. Muhammad Ali (1878-1931) was brought up by his illiterate widow mother who carved out a courageous freedom fighter from an easygoing son of a courtier. After early schooling, he went to M.A.O College, Aligarh, where he passed out, with aspiration of becoming a civil servant. He went to England for taking the competitive examination, but was not selected. Though a shocking disappointment at the moment, it proved to be a blessing for the Indian Muslims, for an ICS Muhammad Ali would have died an obscure death with out contributing much to the independence of his country. For seven years he remained in the civil service of the Nawab of Baroda, but his restless soul took him to Calcutta where he founded a weekly, *Comrade*, in 1911. Soon he realised the need of addressing his countrymen in their own language and started the daily *.Hamdard*. Muhammad Ali was burning with an ardent desire to get his country out of the foreign domination. But his freedom of expression was unbearable to his foreign masters and he and his brother, Shaukat Ali, were interned for over four years. On their release the Khilafat question was in the air. Muhammad Ali at once took up the mission of defending the Khilafat. Khilafat Movement was launched for arousing masses to the support of the Muslim Khalifah. Hindu-Muslim unity was fostered and the Indian National Congress shared the Muslim struggle for the defence of Khilafat. Muhammad Ali, along with other nationalist leaders, was imprisoned. On their release, the termination of Khilafat by Mustafa Kemal gave a shattering blow to all who had struggled so hard for it.

Once Khilafat was a far cry, Muhammad Ali devoted himself to the question of freedom for his country. Despite an extremely bad health and financial fragility, he kept the flag flying till the last moments of his life. His involvement in the freedom struggle was so intense that in his last address at the Round Table Conference in London, he refused to go back to a slave country. His desire was fulfilled when he died in London and was buried in

Jerusalem.

The work under review is an eloquent commentary on the hopes, fears and aspirations of Muslim India during half a century Muhammad Ali lived. The study is both interesting and authentic as it has drawn from the contemporary evidence including private papers of many eminent personalities of the period and the official record of India Office Library. The study portrays the mind of British bureaucracy which was ruling India in those days. The reports of the Intelligence Department, and the office notes which were written for "official use only" have been cited frequently giving an insight into the "inside stories" of many decisions which influenced the Indian political history. It is also interesting to note that the British servants in India, to please their foreign masters, often tried to become more loyal than the ruling class by fabricating baseless reports against Muhammad Ali and other nationalist leaders. This also provides an essential clue to the British policy of "bringing up a class of loyals" from amongst the local population by granting them liberal donations.

The book is interesting in another respect. It studies the British mind in its international dealings. One is shocked to learn that lovers of freedom and self-determination for themselves, they were so shamelessly inclined to keep others under their subjugation. The policy of double standards was adopted by the British Government at all such occasions when it suited them.

Although Muhammad Ali's struggle cannot be termed as un-rewarded, his life was a calendar of disappointments. Now from hindsight we can see that his analysis and judgment about Turks, Hindus and Indian Muslims failed him on more than one occasion. The book would have been more useful had it analysed in greater detail the rationale of Muhammad Ali's viewpoints on different questions. The essential question why Muhammad Ali took up a stand which brought him little success needs to be explained to the new generation who have not lived in British India. Similarly, a short note on the overall contribution of Muhammad Ali to the freedom struggle would have been a welcome addition.

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