

AN OBITUARY FOR PROFESSOR HAMIDULLAH

Muzaffar Iqbal

It was a damp Paris morning. I had wandered through the streets for almost an hour and had finally found the apartment where Professor Muhammad Hamidullah, the renowned Islamic scholar, lived a solitary life. It was 1983. I knocked at the door but there was no answer. I waited for a while and knocked again. No answer. I left a note and returned to my hotel.

Later that day, I went out for a long stroll and then visited some book stores. When I returned to my hotel, there was a small note on my door: "I am sorry to have missed you. I was in my apartment, but my hearing is not good anymore. Please accept my apologies. Hamidullah."

I was surprised by the humility of tone and by the fact that the old Professor had taken to trouble to come to my hotel and leave the message; we had never met.

I went back to his apartment and had a memorable 2 hour meeting with him. He as lucid in his thoughts and his grasp of contemporary situation of the Muslim world was amazing.

Yesterday, (December 17, 2002), 94 year old Professor Hamidullah woke up in Jacksonville, Florida, USA for Fajr prayer and then after breakfast went to sleep never to wake up again. He was laid to rest in the Muslim cemetery in Jacksonville, with funeral prayers led by his friend and admirer Dr. Yusuf Zia Kavakci.

Born on February 9, 1908, in the Princely State of Hyderabad, Professor Hamidullah studied law and became a professor in his native city. Later he settled in France where he taught at Sorbonne University; he came to the United States in 1996.

Among Professor Hamidullah's 250 books and articles is a French translation of the Qur'an. He also discovered a very old hadith manuscript in a Damascus library. This he published in the Urdu language known as *Sabifa*

Hamam. In 1935 he obtained his doctoral degree from the University of Bonn, Germany, and an doctoral degree from France's Sorbonne University in 1936. During 1946-1948, Dr. Hamidullah was actively involved in the struggle against the Indian occupation of the State of Hyderabad. After the fall of the State of Hyderabad to the Indian military, Dr. Hamidullah opted for a life of exile in France. He was a scholar par excellence who was fluent in 22 languages besides his mother tongue Urdu.

In the early 1950s he helped draft the first Islamic constitution of Pakistan but resigned from the commission over differences with vested interests. He was awarded the highest civilian award of Pakistan in 1985, but turned over the cash award to Islamic Research Institute, Islamabad.