

Nae'em Siddiqi 1916-2002

Poet, scholar and Seerah writer

In 1938 a little known, young poet left his home town Jehlum in the present day Pakistani Punjab and travelled to its capital Lahore to meet the famous philosopher poet Dr Muhammad Iqbal and then to see Maulana Mawdudi at Dar ul Islam in Pathankot (now in Indian Punjab); Dar ul Islam was then the newly established, unique training camp of the Islamic movement in Indo-Pakistan subcontinent. Meeting with Iqbal (d.1938) was brief, his first and last. But his encounter with Maulana Abul 'Ala Mawdudi (d.1979) turned into a life long companionship spanning almost four decades. When Fazalur-Rahman Nae'em Siddiqi, died on 25 September 2002, aged 86, he was known in the Islamic movement throughout the world as a renowned poet, writer, editor, biographer of the Prophet, *Sall-Allahu alayhi wa sallam*, and founder member of Jama'at-e-Islami and later Tehreek-e-Islami. He was also instrumental in the launching of Islamic literary movement, *Halqa-e Adab-e Islami*, in answer to the communist inspired 'progressive' school in Urdu literature.

Having come across in the 1930s early writings of Maulana Mawdudi on Islam and impressed by the lucidity of his language and force of his arguments, Nae'em Siddiqi made up his mind to meet him, who had then just settled in Punjab in 1938. On the invitation of Iqbal, Maulana Mawdudi had moved from the Muslim princely state of Hyderabad.

Once Nae'em Siddiqi spent a few weeks in the company of Maulana Mawdudi, he never looked back; it marked the beginning of a lifelong association with the Islamic movement. For him, the Maulana became not only a leader and a guide but also a teacher. 'I have spent all these years in a college like a student where Maulana Mawdudi was my tutor. Whatever I achieved, whatever I know, it is because of Maulana Mawdudi,' said Nae'em Siddiqi. But he was more than a teacher. Maulana Mawdudi was also 'like a gigantic tree' under whose shade, as Nae'em Siddiqi recalled, 'I rested when I felt tired and recouped my strength when I felt enfeebled.'

Nae'em Siddiqi became one of the

residents of Dar ul Islam. He migrated to Pakistan with Maulana Mawdudi in 1947 when the British unfairly awarded the district to India. Lahore was chosen as the new headquarters of Jama'at-e-Islami. With the emergence of Pakistan on 27 Ramadan 1366 - 14 August 1947 - a million Muslims made their way to their new homeland from all over India. Maulana Mawdudi and his Jama'at, although displaced themselves, plunged themselves into helping to bring relief to the broken and battered arrivals from across the border.

As Pakistan had been established as a country where Muslims could create a model Islamic society, Maulana Mawdudi launched the campaign for the adoption of Islamic constitution. Jama'at-e-Islami was relatively small but a very organised party. But the westernised secular ruling elite, alienated from their roots, saw Jama'at-e-Islami as a threat. They harassed the party, banned it and threw its entire leadership and thousands of workers into prison. Maulana Mawdudi himself was charged with sedition (for writing a short tract entitled, *The Qadiyani Problem*) and sentenced to death in 1952. The death sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment because of public pressure within the country and the Muslim world.

However, Islam which had been used to rally support for winning a separate Muslim state, was now being relegated into a private matter and having little to do with affairs of state. According to the new official line those like Maulana Mawdudi and others should now confine themselves to leading prayers in mosque and they should not dabble or interfere in politics and public affairs. But the poet in Nae'em Siddiqi would not accept being outlawed and excluded. If Islam is a crime, well, we admit to our crime, so ran the refrain of one of his most famous and popular poems, *Hum log iqrari mujrim hayn*.

Thanks to the sustained and dedicated struggle by the Islamic movement, Pakistan could not be turned into another Turkey. Even though the establishment paid only lip service to Islam it could never remove the prefix Islamic from the Republic of Pakistan. Jama'at-e-Islami and its followers paid

dearly for it.

By early 1938, Nae'em Siddiqi had started to work as Maulana Mawdudi's assistant in editing the scholarly monthly *Tarjuman ul Qur'an*; he became its editor in 1979 after Maulana Mawdudi's death. However, 12 years later Nae'em Siddiqi quit the prestigious journal because he disagreed with the policies of Jama'at's new leadership which he thought were contrary to those originally conceived and laid down by Maulana Mawdudi. A while later, he resigned also from the Jama'at-e-Islami and formed a separate party, *Tehreek-e-Islami*. He acted briefly as its ameer, but left it soon after as he did not find the Jama'at-e-Islami of Maulana Mawdudi in this group either.

Throughout his association with the Jama'at-Islami, he carried on writing poetry in Urdu that he published in several volumes together with *ghazals and na'ats*. He founded the literary monthly *Sayyarah* which he edited for decades. His poetry was very simple yet powerful; it was a poetry of love and struggle; the love found sublimation in struggle and the struggle sublimed into love.

Na'at is a fine and delicate form of poetry devoted one's love and dedication to the person and example of Prophet Muhammad, *Sall-Allahu alayhi wa sallam*, but without the slightest touch of deification. Nae'em Siddiqi was eminently successful in giving the fullest expression to his love and devotion but keeping clear of the red line, deification.

However, his devotion to life and teachings of the prophet, *Sall-Allahu alayhi wa sallam*, was not confined to poetry alone. He wrote one of the best biographies (*Seerah*) of the Prophet, *Sall-Allahu alayhi wa sallam*, in Urdu titled *Mohsin-e-Insaniyat*. The purpose of his writing on the subject, as he described in the preface, was to recount and remind Muslims of the Prophet's life and example which will awake them from their slumber and put them on the path towards a just and noble society.

Maulana Mawdudi was a polymath who wrote on almost every aspect of Islam. After having completed his epochal six volume work, *Tafheem ul Qur'an* (Understanding the Qur'an) he wished to produce a similar work on the *Seerah* as well. He felt unhappy though because his declining health was not allowing him to do so and had almost given up hope of ever fulfilling his great wish when all of a sudden Nae'em Siddiqi presented Maulana

Mawdudi with a two-volume work *Seerah*, which he had produced together with Abdul Wakeel Alvi. However much to his pleasant surprise, they had produced the two volumes from Maulana Mawdudi's own writings on the subject but which lay scattered throughout his work.

Thus the fulfilment of Maulana Mawdudi's last wish had been made possible by Nae'em Siddiqi and Abdul Wakeel Alvi's quiet and diligent work, plus the editorial skill of Nae'em Siddiqi. These volumes were published under the title of *Sirat-e-Sarwar-e-'Alam*. Ill health forced Maulana Mawdudi to retire from the leadership of Jama'at-e-Islami, but he carried on editing *Tarjuman ul Qur'an* with the help of Nae'em Siddiqi. Nae'em Siddiqi was also one of the few people who had seen Maulana Mawdudi in the last weeks of his life in the US where he had been visiting his physician son.

The loss of Maulana Mawdudi was felt by hundreds of thousands of his admirers worldwide; but for Nae'em Siddiqi, in his own words, it was a great personal loss. He had lost not only his

leader, he had lost a great teacher and a great mentor without whom, perhaps, he would not have acquired such excellence or prominence as a writer, scholar and poet.

After the demise of Maulana Mawdudi, he gradually lost his Jama'at too. He became more sad and more unhappy as he felt that the Jama'at was failing to strike the balance between the demands of emergent political activism and the constant imperatives of a *da'awah* movement. However, instead of taking the path of conflict and crisis, he quietly left the Jama'at-e-Islami that he had helped to found 50 years ago. When I saw him soon afterwards he was sad but not bitter. With a few of his like-minded colleagues, he attempted to form a new old Jama'at-e-Islami and named it Tehreek-e-Islami. However it did not take him long to realise that time had moved on.

He spent the last years of his life quietly in Lahore where he had begun his journey 55 years ago. I met him several times in the last few years, and always returned from these meetings

with a wealth of knowledge, especially about aspects of Maulana Mawdudi's life and work which were known only to Nae'em Siddiqi.

Nae'em Siddiqi has left behind a rich and large collection of works of serious writing as well as poetry. Though a poet and writer *par excellence* he was indifferent to fame and formal recognition. His was a contented soul, with no regrets that he had dedicated his life to the further the cause and knowledge of Islam and not to furthering his own self.

Nae'em Siddiqi's last assignment was editing the (March-April 2002) issue of the literary periodical, *Sayyarah*. His departure marks the almost end of a long line of keen, dedicated, self-effacing and self-sacrificing Muslim scholars produced under the influence of the Islamic movement in Pakistan, who, through their endeavours, greatly enriched the cultural and intellectual life of the nation but without any reward or return for themselves. As for Nae'em Siddiqi, he only saw himself as an ordinary worker in the movement.

Javed Khawaja

Brunei lost one of its most popular and distinguished scholars when earlier this year Dato Dr Haji Mahmud Saedon bin Awang Othman died on 24 June 2002. He collapsed suddenly at a meeting of the Islamic Council of Brunei, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore (MABIM).

Son of a schoolteacher, Mahmud Saedon was born in Kampong Kianggeh. He went to study at Al Azhar University, but the government of Brunei withdrew his scholarship in 1962 after his uncle, the late **Shaikh Ahmad Azhari**, leader of Parti Rakyat Brunei, led a revolt and proclaimed the 'Northern Revolutionary State of Kalimantan'.

The young Mahmud Saedon, however, stayed on. After taking a doctorate in Islamic Shari'ah (1976), he joined the National University Malaysia (1976-83) and later the International Islamic University of Malaysia (1984-94). In 1991, he was promoted professor. As a foreigner in Malaysia, he kept his distance from politics but did not deprive his Malaysian colleagues of his irrepressible sense of humour. For example, he would tell them that God wanted Malays to join the ruling party, Umno, and point to the phonetic similarity between Umno with the

Professor Mahmud Saedon bin Othman

Distinguished Bruneian scholar

Qur'anic term '*Amanu*' which asked people to *iman*.

A most sought after scholar in Malaysia, Mahmud Saedon was recalled to Brunei in 1994 as an expert on Islamic law at the ministry of religious affairs. In May 1999, he was given additional responsibility as Vice Chancellor of the Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD). He set to empower the people of Brunei, who he believed, were fully capable of looking after their own affairs.

In appreciation of his services, the monarch, **Sultan Hassanah al-Bolkiah**, had conferred on him 'the Most Eminent Order of Brunei Darussalam, First Class' with the title of 'Dato Paduka Seri Setia'. Last May he was relieved from the university and asked to work on full fledged Islamisation of laws in Brunei.

Professor Mahmud Saedon authored more than 25 books and over 60 journal articles as well as served on various national and international

academic bodies, including the International Advisory Committee of the Markfield Institute of Higher Education, Leicester, England.

Among the thousands of people from all walks of life who paid their last respects to Haji Mahmud Saedon bin Awang Othman were members of the royal family, senior officials and foreign envoys.

Professor Shahed Ali

Towering literary figure

Professor Shahed Ali (1924-2001), 76, a towering literary figure of Bangladesh, died in Dhaka on 6 November 2001. A student and later teacher of Bangla literature, he had been closely associated with Islamic Research Institute during Pakistan period and later with the Islamic Foundation Bangladesh. He had been a member of the Tamuddun Majlis since it was set up in 1948. He took an active part in the language movement in 1952 and was elected to the East Pakistan Legislative Assembly in 1954. Author of over 50 books, Shahed Ali contributed to various dailies and magazines of Dhaka and Kolkata. He had received a number of national awards, including Bangla Academy Award, *Matribhasha Padak* and *Ekushey Padak*.