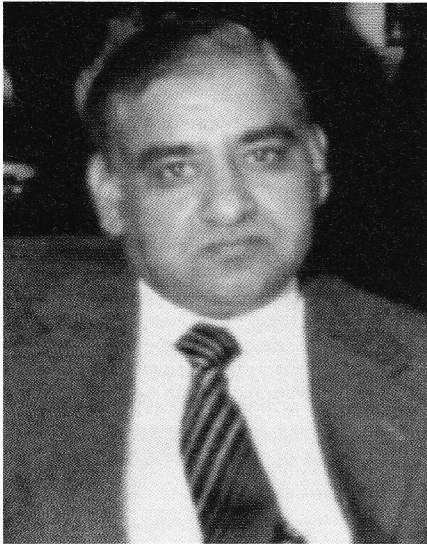


obituaries



Muhammad Ashiq Asghar 1935-2003

Part of impact's struggling history

Muhammad Ashiq Asghar, 68, died suddenly in a North London hospital, 7 March 2003. Rather quiet but quite committed when it came to Islam, Pakistan or Muslims, and he seemed to shun publicity keeping a low profile. This in spite of the fact that the Finsbury Park Mosque, in North London, of which he was the secretary and trustee, happened to have become the world's 'most famous' mosque. He never tried to make mileage for himself out of this world attention.

He had not been feeling well for the past few months; he had come out of the hospital only days before the midnight police raid on the mosque on 20 January 2003, but he remained optimistic. He believed the worst had come to pass and now that they had been forced to close the place because of health and safety hazards, they could look forward to the mosque functioning normally after it had been repaired and reopened. He wanted to regenerate the mosque into an active community centre, especially looking after the youth and helping them become useful members of society.

A man of hope and confidence indeed, but there is little doubt that managing the Finsbury Park Mosque had been wearing him down steadily, until the collapse came that Friday evening.

He had dropped in a week after the police raid, although he wore his usual smile and appeared fully confident, he did not look well. Two days later, I telephoned him to ask 'how did he feel', and suggested that he better took a short 'holiday' from both his business

and the problems of the mosque. He needed to give himself a break, but he said he felt fine; if I had thought he had looked a little off colour, it was only because he had to climb the stairs when he came to the office that day. He did look fine, though, when he dropped a fellow trustee, **Maulvi Shafiullah Patel**, at 33 Stroud Green Road and drove home, only to 'drop off' himself a little while later.

Born on 13 June 1935 in the East Punjab village of Jagrawan in Hoshiarpur district, his family had come to Pakistan in 1947 and settled in Gojra, Faisalabad (then Lyallpur). Invited by an uncle in Newcastle Upon-Tyne, and barely 14, Ashiq Asghar came to Britain in 1957. As was the case with all future Pakistani millionaires, he started the hard and modest way. He first worked as a bus conductor, learnt driving and drove the city bus in Newcastle Upon-Tyne and then in Sheffield where the wages were better.

In 1964, he married a cousin in Pakistan and moved to London, the same year, and into business. He was selling door to door *halal* chicken and things to the niche Indo-Pakistani consumer market. In London, he also took part in Islamic activities, Qur'anic circles, talks and discussions, especially around the East London Mosque (then at 448 Commercial Road). When these meetings led to the founding of the UK Islamic Mission, he was among its founders.

By 1968, he had set up his own *halal* meat and grocery shop. The business flourished, but his interest in the life of his community did not diminish. When, later in the same year, **Maulana Abul A'ala Mawdudi** (d.1979) came to London for medical treatment, he did his part of hospitality by providing almost all the meat and grocery during the entire four-month period of his stay. Among the very few who owned a car, he was also his 'chauffeur' at call. The Maulana would joking call him 'Little Lover' which is how the name, 'Ashiq Asghar', translates into English.

The crisis in East Pakistan (1970-71) led to the setting up of Pakistan Solidarity Movement comprising both East and West Pakistan with an East Pakistani writer and activist, **Abul Hayat**,

as its chairman. Ashiq Asghar was equally involved in it. The movement came to life yet again towards the end of the 1980s in response to political attrition and ideological confusion that was now gripping (West) Pakistan. However, it was renamed **Tahrik-e-Istihkam-e-Pakistan** (Pakistan Stability Movement); Ashiq Asghar was president of the UK chapter of the Tahrik.

The idea of *impact* had long been in theoretical planning and contemplation, at least since the mid 1960s. By the end of 1969, we were looking for an office, easy to reach by public transport and, quite frankly, as inexpensive as possible. Ashiq Asghar not only offered a two-floor space at the premises he owned – 33 Stroud Green Road – but in a sense forced us to move in and forced the pace upon us to bring out the magazine as soon as possible.

It took brother **AbdulWahid Hamid** (the writer and scholar) and his brother, **AbdulAhad**, another few months, to do up the place, filling the cracks with polyfiller, papering the walls, painting the doors and windows, thus giving it the looks of an office. The doing up took that long because the volunteers, AbdulWahid and his brother, could only do something during the evenings and weekends. After he had finally cleaned his hands off the paint and glue and taken off his apron, AbdulWahid sat on an old secondhand chair and desk as associate editor. Such is the modest history of *impact*, and Ashiq Asghar was part of this struggling history. The rent was modest and payment at leisure. The only time we had a little disagreement was when he wanted to raise the rent because he had remortgaged the building and had to pay a higher monthly instalment to the bank. But we did not always agree with his demand.

It is only after his death that I learnt that he had not pursued his education beyond matriculation. One always assumed that he was at least a graduate. He is survived by his widow, **Razia Begum**; five married daughters, **Tahira**, **Zahida**, **Musarrat**, **Sarwat** and **Nusrat**; son, Saleem; and five grandchildren. ■

M H Faruqi

Annemarie Schimmel 1922-2003

German mystic and friendly orientalist

Prof Dr Annemarie Schimmel was born in Erfurt, Germany in 1922. Educated in an atmosphere of religious freedom, permeated with poetry, she received her PhD in Islamic studies (in Arabic, Turkish and Islamic history) from the Berlin University at the unusually early age of 19 – started studying Arabic at 15. It was an auspicious start to a brilliant academic career.

A profound scholar and a prolific writer, she produced numerous publications in a variety of languages. The remarkable breadth of her linguistic expertise included English, German, French, Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Turkish, among many other languages; the span of her academic interests encompassed subjects ranging from Islamic calligraphy to the study of Muslim mystical poets of the South Asian subcontinent.

Her main interest – one can say her heart – lay, however, in the translation into German verse of Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Urdu poetry, a pursuit that won her acclaim and formal recognition. She received international medals for outstanding translations.

Schimmel was engaged in her post doctoral thesis during the Second World War, when she worked in the translation bureau of the foreign ministry. After the war she moved to Marburg University where she was assistant professor of Islamic Studies. Between 1954-1959 she taught at the University of Ankara, Turkey, as professor of History of Religion. Schimmel returned to Germany as associate professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Bonn (1961-65). Since 1967 she also taught at the Harvard University, USA; she became professor of Indo-Muslim Culture in 1970 and retired in 1992. On her return to Germany Prof Schimmel worked as the honorary professor of Islamic Studies, University of Bonn,

until her death.

Her interest in Iqbal studies dated back to her student days. To quote her, 'my long lasting love of Iqbal (which began when I was a student in Berlin during the war) has led me to publish a number of works which are more or less relevant for a study of his contribution to Muslim thought.' In many articles, I have tried to show Iqbal in the context of Islamic modernism, or deal with his imagery'.

Since the publication of her first article on Iqbal in (1954), she wrote on him in various languages and on different aspects of his thought and art. But her translation of *Bal-e-jibreel (Gabriel's Wing – A Study into the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal, 1963, rpt. 1989)* is still the finest specimen of her erudition and insight in Iqbal studies and Islamic thought in general. She explained it herself:

'The number of books and articles about the great poet philosopher has grown tremendously, with contents varying according to the literary stances of each author. Despite this plethora of material I hope that the present book will still retain its value as it tries to put Iqbal into the framework of the general history of religions which enable us to see him as one of the most fascinating figures, if not the most original Muslim thinker and poet in the twentieth century.'

This book has certainly retained its value. It has also stood the test of time and of the critical evaluation of numerous committees and panels of judges of the First International Presidential Iqbal Award, constituted for evaluating and selecting the best book

on Iqbal studies in foreign languages. This is testified by the fact that from among a large number of books written in the major languages of the world, *Gabriel's Wing* was declared the best work on Iqbal studies, in the international languages, for the period 1947-81.

In the preface to the *Festschrift (Fest, festival or celebration and schrif, writing)* in honour of Professor Schimmel on her 70th birthday in 1992, 'God is Beautiful and He likes Beauty', entitled in German, *Gott ist Schön und Er liebt die Schönheit* (1994), Dr J Ch Burgel, the editor and one of her pupils, described her as a 'writing machine' since she used to write 30 or more pages daily. Her astonishing output includes one hundred books, innumerable articles, book reviews etc. She funded the Annemarie Schimmel scholarship for Women Studies in Pakistan and Pakistan bestowed on her the second highest civil awards, 'Sitara i Imtiyaz'.

Through her life of unflinching devotion to the study and scholarship of Islam, Pakistan and the Islamic civilisation, she built bridges between East and West to foster dialogue across cultures. She thus made an immense contribution towards a healthy change in the attitudes, relationships and understanding between the western people and the non-western world.

This doyen of Iqbal Studies and the internationally renowned scholar of Islamic civilisation, Professor Doctor Annemarie Schimmel met with a serious accident recently. After a major surgery, she went into a coma and passed away on 25 January 2003. ■

M S Umar

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Begum Anwara Zaman

Islamic da'wah work

Begum Anwara Zaman, 66, widow of the famous East Pakistani scholar, Professor Dr Hasan Zaman, died in Jeddah, 28 December 2002, and was buried in Makkah al-Mukarramah the same day. After the passing away of Dr Zaman in 1981, then a professor at King AbdulAziz University, Jeddah, she dedicated herself to Islamic da'wah work. She was also associated with the London office of the Pakistan-based World Muslim Congress (Mutamar al-

Alam al-Islami). Begum Zaman is survived by three sons, **Tasneem**, **Tanweer** and **Tanzeem** and one daughter, **Tazeen**. ■

P T Abdurrahman

Bang-e-Dara in Malayalam

Malayalam poet and lyricist and one of the noted exponents of Muslim literary tradition in Northern Kerala, South India, P T Abdurrahman died, 62, in Calicut, 9 February 2003. He had composed over a thousand such lyrics, Mappila songs; many were popular hits

and some of became film hits too.

He had published about a dozen collections of his poetry and some won state and private awards, including the coveted poetry prizes, 'Changampuzha Award' and the 'Kakkad Award'. One of his works, about Seyedna Bilal, *Radi-Allahu anhu*, has also been translated into English under the title 'Black Pearl' and two into Hindi. In his latter years, his works had acquired a more pronounced Islamic flavour and he did a versified translation of Iqbal's (1877-1938) *Bang-e-Dara* in Malayalam. P T Abdurrahman survived by his widow, **Ayisha**. ■