

Preface

It was a privilege and a pleasure to welcome Maulana Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi to the University of California at Santa Cruz from 27th to 31st October, 1987. To most Americans, including the highly educated, until about ten years ago very little was known about Shi'a Islam. Since then the name has become a household word which the media seem to have conspired to associate with hijacking and terrorism. The need of the American public to learn something about the glory and tragedy of Shi'a history and about the message of liberation and new life which Shi'ism brings, is desperate. Therefore we were fortunate to persuade Maulana to turn aside in his crowded North American schedule to stay with us here among the redwoods of the far Pacific.

As his name indicates, he is a descendant of the Holy Prophet of Islam through his daughter Fatima and Imam 'Ali. His family came to India from Iran centuries ago. He was born and educated in India in the old traditional schools of Shi'a learning and higher education at Varanasi and Lucknow. He has traveled, studied and taught in India, Pakistan, Dubai, Iran and Iraq but his main work has been in East Africa where he has labored since 1959.

There he organized the Bilal Muslim Mission which has reached out to Africans of all kinds in brotherhood. In recent years he has begun to take Europe and North American into his sphere of service and we look forward to his spending more time in the west. In each case the lectures were open to all, though the majority consisted of students and faculty. In each case "the floor was open", that is, a speaker is encouraged to state frankly his own views and the views of his group so that we may learn. The University of California does not hold itself responsible for views expressed; questions, statements of views by other, and discussion are invited and where time does not immediately permit, they are brought up at the next meeting of the class concerned.

At this point, I wonder if I may be permitted a kind of "word aside" to my colleagues who have joined in our very active UCSC research unit concerned with colonial and feminist discourse. The Maulana belongs to the group which never bowed to the British, it was the same group which produced Tipoo

Sultan, Siraj-ad-Daulah, and some of the leaders of the independence movement of 1857.

Also here you may meet directly a scholar of Islam who is no orientalist or westerner, looking in from within: even so he shows no atrophy of that methodological self-consciousness, analytical genius and ability to define of which western scholarship is justly proud. Though he speaks from within and is unconscious of the latest mines our trendy faddists have planted in academic language, he can show us what the traditionally trained mind can do to set forth the truth. His expressed respect for orthodox traditional scholarship in Judaism and Christianity may have a lot to teach us about true openness of mind and ecumenicity, no one asks us to agree with him, we do well to listen carefully.

In expressing appreciation to the Maulana and to the University I would like to thank all the helpers who have worked to make his visit a success. It was especially a delight to see the work on the newly constituted student organization, the Muslims of Umma, led by Ms. Zaynab Khan, a student of Natural Science who joined Islam some years ago. But it is to the Maulana himself with his amazing store of erudition, his command of English as well as Arabic, Urdu, Persian and Swahili, his undying patience and goodwill together with his wit and good humor, we owe the most. It is our great hope that after he has finished his immediate work in India, East Africa, and London, he will turn full time to work in this continent and include us in his regular lecture programs across the world.

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