

# **A Tribute to Maulana Hafiz Sher Muhammad**

*(On the 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Ahmadiyya Case in South Africa wherein he played a leading role as the expert witness)*

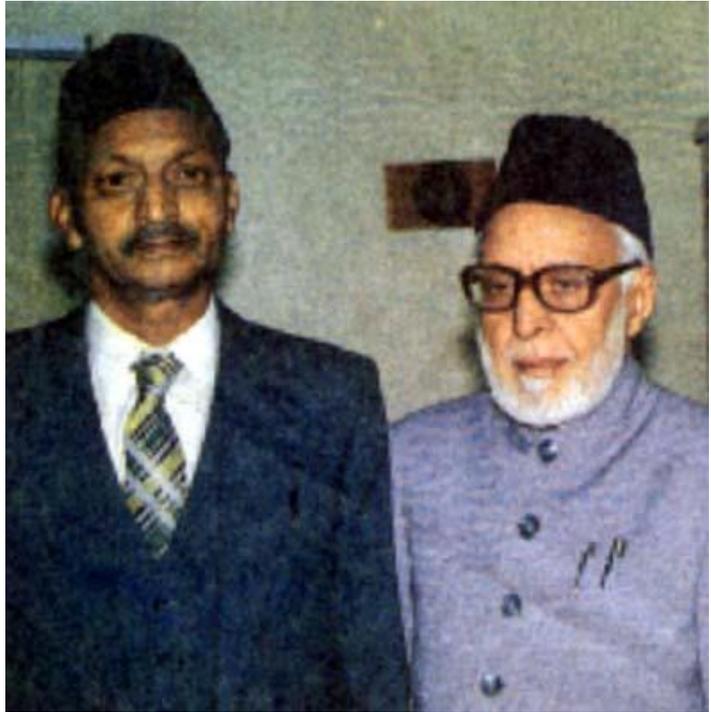
**By Ebrahim Mohamed**

**President Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore (South Africa)**

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## **Assalamu Alaikum WWB**

On the 20<sup>th</sup> November 1985, exactly 35 years ago, the judgement in the Ahmadiyya Case that played out in South Africa was issued. With the grace of Almighty Allah and the selfless efforts of Maulana Hafiz Sher Muhammad, the judgment was given in favour of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement, South Africa represented by Ismael Peck who was confirmed to be a Muslim. The voluminous evidence produced by Hafiz Saheb restored the truth, honour and dignity of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. This evidence is now a permanent court record and has



**Maulana Hafiz Sher Muhammad – right and Ismael Peck, Plaintiff in the South Africa Ahmadiyya Case, left**

been preserved in the book *The Ahmadiyya Case* compiled by Dr Zahid Aziz and thus accessible to all for many generations to come.

Maulana Hafiz Sher Muhammad of blessed memory came to South Africa in 1983 to represent the Lahore Ahmadiyya Anjuman as an expert witness in the Ahmadiyya Case. Because several High Court judges and government officials and clerics from Pakistan were listed as being

seconded to come to South Africa to assist the local clerics who had by then already garnered the support of all the local ulema bodies in the country, the Ahmadiyya Case hit the headlines in South Africa and other parts of the world. The name Maulana Hafiz Sher Muhammad, brave and valiant defender of the dignity and honour of the Mujaddid of the Age, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, soon became the buzz amongst religious scholars, academics, and the media here in South Africa and abroad. We could not help sensing a Divine Hand at play that pointed to a mission far greater than the court case itself. It was indeed Providence that restored the Maulana's health that gave him the strength and made it possible for him to travel to distant South Africa to carry out his mission to the best of his ability, a feat we now all know he achieved *par excellence*.

In fact, when we look back at the career of this noble soldier of Islam, we see such providential intervention steering the young Sher Muhammad in a very specific direction towards the Mujaddid of the Age. Maulana Hafiz Sher Muhammad hails from the little town of Khushab, situated at the foothills of a mountainous range in the Punjab Province of Pakistan. His ancestors were seriously engaged in imparting religious instructions to the Muslims residing in that area. They were from the Ahle Hadith, Deoband School. They built their own mosque and were highly respected in the area for their learning and piety. Sher Muhammad started memorizing the Holy Quran from the early age of four years. He was schooled in religious matters by his father and grandparents in their mosque. When he used to visit the local shop as a child, he always used to see the shopkeeper reading books. Out of sheer youthful curiosity he enquired from the shopkeeper what he was reading. The shopkeeper, an Ahmadi Muslim of the Qadian Jamaat, told him it was from the writings of the Promised Messiah and Mahdi. When he was about twelve years old, he asked the shopkeeper to lend him some of the books to read. The shopkeeper refused, but offered him a space at the back of the shop where he could read the books. On reading these books, Sher Muhammad became convinced that the traditional belief that the prophet Jesus was alive in the heavens and will return to earth was not true according to arguments presented by the Promised Messiah from the Holy Quran. It is said he convinced his grandfather and his father of this. At the age of fifteen, Sher Muhammad passed the Maulvi Fazal examination in Arabic and literature at the Punjab University. He then went to study at the Dar al Uloom in Lahore where he completed the Darsi Nizami course. At the time this was considered

the highest course to study in religion and religious philosophy that qualifies a person to teach post graduate students. Now, well schooled in Islamic studies of the highest available rank, he kept studying the works of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad and was soon convinced of his claims as Mujaddid of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century Hijra, the Promised Messiah and Mahdi; but was still uncertain about ‘prophethood’ as expounded by his Qadiani friends. He once attended their Jalsa in Qadian. Not satisfied by their explanations of prophethood, Hafiz Saheb told his friend, the shopkeeper, that he will not join their Jamaat till someone gives him a satisfactory explanation for the word *nabi* and the doctrine of *nubuwwat* as followed by them.

On his way back from Qadian, Hafiz Saheb was waiting for a connecting train at the Lahore railway station where it just so happened that he met a Lahori Ahmadi from his village whom he knew who was also waiting for the same train with his family. On his enquiry as to what he was doing there, Hafiz Sahib told him the story of his visit to Qadian. That gentleman advised him to go seek an explanation of his queries from Maulana Muhammad Ali. Both postponed their homeward journeys and went to see Maulana Muhammad Ali at Muslim Town, Lahore. On Hafiz Sahib’s enquiry, Maulana Muhammad Ali explained in detail the concept around *nubuwwat*, the finality of prophethood and the context in which H M G Ahmad used the word in relation to himself. In a few minutes the whole matter became crystal clear to him. With this clarity of mind, he retired to the guest house for the evening. During the night he lay awake thinking about the logic and rationale of Maulana Muhammad Ali’s explanation and by the next morning he had made up his mind what to do. That day, without anyone making any suggestions to him, he took the pledge at the hands of Maulana Muhammad Ali and joined the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha’at Islam Lahore. He returned to Khushab and announced it to his family members and friends.

Hafiz Saheb served under Maulana Muhammad Ali and held many roles in the Anjuman as editor and author of several booklets and articles. He served as a missionary in Fiji for several years. In the end he served as the vice-president of the Central Anjuman before returning to his Maker, *Inna lil lahi wa inna ilayhi rajjioon!*

Maulana Hafiz Sher Muhammad arrived in South Africa in 1983. Despite huge logistical problems, he managed to bring with him a large amount of books and journals needed for the compilation of the monumental theological evidence. As soon as people came to hear of his presence in Cape Town, he received many visitors. Despite the enormity of the task that lay ahead, he never turned a visitor away and would welcome them with a pleasant smile accompanied by warm, jovial comments. Our greatest disappointment was the language divide. None of us knew any Urdu and could not communicate freely with him and we had so many questions to ask him. A good friend of the Jamaat that knew a bit of Urdu came to our rescue in the initial stages. It was much better when later Dr Zahid Aziz arrived as the official interpreter. Everywhere Hafiz Saheb went he was a veritable beacon of light and knowledge. He removed many misconceptions and doubts people had about Islam, the Ahmadiyya Movement, and its Founder. He exuded an excellent blend of knowledge, confidence, humility and sainthood and everyone that met him simply loved his company and talks.

However preparing for the trial was an arduous task that involved many late nights and often working throughout the night. Hafiz Sher Muhammad had a unique yet a very effective style that he adopted in his defence of H M G Ahmad. His approach was to directly explain the writings of Mirza Saheb according to Mirza's own interpretations and not rely on some self-styled third party interpretations taken out of context that caused so much misunderstandings and confusion. This gave him the advantage over his learned opponents in the South Africa Case, none of whom it later emerged had studied all if any of the actual original works of Mirza Saheb. Hafiz Saheb's extensive knowledge even transcended what was contained in the standard works of the Anjuman. He proved that the writings of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad encompassed all branches of Islamic theology, philosophy and metaphysics. Thus the challenges presented by the South Africa Case, no doubt brought out the best in Hafez Saheb that most probably would have been lost to the world. His prized evidence has been captured in an encyclopaedic book entitled *The Ahmadiyya Case* compiled by Dr Zahid Aziz for all to see; especially invaluable for religious and legal scholars.

Due to the tireless efforts of Hafiz Saheb, the world now has clarity at their finger tips of contentious issues with regard to specific Islamic doctrines that have come into international

spotlight with the rise of an extremist culture in the form of terror groups such as ISIS and others we are all too familiar with. At last we have a clear, unambiguous definition of who is a Muslim and the true meaning of Jihad - that it does not mean aggressive, unprovoked violence with the aim to convert or punish!

After months preparing for the trial, the clerics on the morning when the trial started decided to throw in the towel and walked away in a state of self-inflicted, abject humiliation, on the grounds of a belated *fatwa* (legal opinion) that a secular court cannot determine who is a Muslim. A few years later they dismissed the validity of their own fatwa in a second case as we will see. However, although now not required by the Court to do so, Hafiz Saheb nevertheless decided to deliver his full evidence, for the record, in the Supreme Court of Cape Town, South Africa that now also served as an ideal open public forum for anyone to come and listen to his explanations of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's writings – that he did NOT lay claim to actual prophethood, period.

In the end, the Court ruled against the clerical body and others. Justice J. Williamson had the following to say about Maulana Hafiz Sher Muhammad:

**‘In my estimation the witness is a man of great learning and integrity. He gave evidence before me for some six days and created an extremely favourable impression. I accept his evidence without hesitation.’ – Judgement, 20<sup>th</sup> November 1985, Case 10058/82, in favour of the Ahmadiyya Movement.**

In a second Case, a local Sunni Sheikh, Muhammad Jassiem brought a charge of defamation against the same clerical body and its president Sheikh Nazim Mohamed. Sheikh Jassiem was defamed because he refused to debar Ahmadis from attending his mosque. This time the defendants, contrary to their own *fatwa* produced in the first Case, approached a secular Court to determine whether Jassiem who refused to call Ahmadis kafir was a Muslim. This time they brought an expert witness namely Professor Ghazi from Pakistan to testify on their behalf against the teachings of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. Professor Ghazi was from the International

University of Islamabad, Pakistan. And was later appointed as judge of the Shariat Appellate Court and still later became Federal Minister of Religious Affairs of Pakistan.

Maulana Hafiz Sher Muhammad was again approached to defend the beliefs of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad though no Ahmadi was a direct party to the case nor was the Court required to determine whether Ahmadis were Muslims or not. He was pitted against the best the opposition could present. On this occasion he gave extensive evidence from July to September 1987 under hostile cross-examination. In the end the Judge determined that it was not necessary to rule whether Jassiem was a Muslim or not as it was a clear cut case of defamation that he was subjected to by the head of the clerical body and for which he was awarded damages. However, in summing up the two expert witnesses the Judge had the following to say:

‘As a witness **Professor Ghazi** has the disadvantage that he correctly concedes that where the government of the day supports an idea – that idea flourishes...Of possible interpretations put on Mirza’s words and actions, he always chose the worst...his evidence was often illogical inferences, unjustified.’

‘**Sher Muhammad** who had to break down prejudice perhaps, not any identifiable opponent, impressed as more reasonable and tolerant (being interested in the spiritual advancement of Islam rather the Ahmedism as such) than Ghazi whose interest lie in politics rather than spirituality...’ – page 94 of Trial Court Judgement Case 1438/86.

If we now compare the respected Judge’s assessment of M H Sher Muhammad’s testimony with the following words of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad who said:

‘Our religion is the same Islam. It is not new. These are the same prayers, the same fasts, the same pilgrimage, and the same zakaat. But there is this difference that these duties had by now assumed outward forms only, without any true spirit in them; we want to infuse in them the spirit of sincerity.’ – (*Ruhani Khaza'in*, no. 2, vol. ix, p.312)

**...we see the great moral victory Maulana Hafiz Sher Muhammad achieved.**

Thus we say, Maulana Hafiz Sher Muhammad, Dear Sir, you have been an Excellent Ambassador of the true spirit of Islam as revived by the Mujaddid of the Age, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in such a way that you deservedly attracted the admiration of an unbiased judge and will continue to draw the admiration of all honest, fair-minded people around the world. We applaud you, Hafiz Saheb. You deserve a post-humous standing ovation.

May Almighty Allah, the Best of Judges, reward you abundantly! May your life's work be an everlasting charity and nourishment for your soul, Ameen!