

THE BBC ON THE WOKING MUSLIM MISSION

by Muhammad Yakub Khan

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An Urdu-language broadcast of the BBC by the well-known writer and once front-rank Muslim League leader of Pakistan, Dr Ashiq Hussain Batalvi, traced the history of the Woking Muslim Mission and its service in the cause of promoting better understanding of Islam among the English people. Among the various workers who served the Mission two figures stood out prominently, said the broadcast — one Dr Leitner, a great Orientalist, once the Registrar of the Punjab University, who on retirement conceived the idea of building a Mosque in the suburbs of London, purchased a two-acre plot at Woking and built a beautiful little Mosque there in 1889. The other Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din of Lahore, an advocate by profession who, when he happened to be on a professional visit to London in 1912 stumbled upon this mosque and had the bright idea to make it the centre of a regular Islamic Mission to disseminate the light of Islam in those Isles, with a monthly magazine, *The Islamic Review* as its organ. Although full half a century had since elapsed, and many more mosques have sprung up over the length and breadth of that country, commented the broadcast, Woking remained the greatest attraction for Muslims in the UK, who flocked there in their thousands on the Eid occasions, forming a most picturesque cosmopolitan gathering, demonstrating the universal brotherhood of Islam transcending all bounds of race, colour or language. What specially impressed the BBC commentator, Dr Batalvi, about the Woking Muslim Mission was its completely non-sectarian presentation of Islam. It was “far above sectarianism”, said the commentary.

This is a fair appraisal and a well-served compliment. Long ago Maulana Abul Kalam Azad described the Woking Muslim Mission as the greatest event of the past half-century in the fortunes of Islam. What is not fair, however, both of the BBC commentator and the late Maulana Azad is to have blacked out the source from which came the inspiration that materialised in the form of the Woking Muslim Mission.

While commending this very fair appreciation of Islam's greatest institution, the Woking Muslim Mission, and the yeoman service it has rendered in re-orientating the whole of the West's attitude towards Islam, this story will be incomplete without mentioning a Third Figure, who constituted the main force and inspiration behind this historic development.

Besides Dr Leitner and Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din there is a Third Figure to whom is due the position of the hero in the Woking Story. That was the man, paradoxically, who was a complete stranger to the English language, who nevertheless dreamed the glorious dream of the sunrise of Islam from the Western horizon.

"I saw myself standing on a pulpit in London preaching the beauties of Islam, and catching white birds clustered around on bushes" — this is how Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam, depicted the scene he had been shown in a *kashf* or vision long before Leitner or the Khwaja were anywhere in the picture. This was the man who was divinely commissioned and charged with the mission to carry the light of the Qur'an to the West. Dr Leitner and Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din were both the instruments in the implementation of this Divine planning — the first playing that role unwittingly, the other deriving his whole inspiration from that Seer's vision.

It will be for the future historian, untrammelled by contemporary prejudices, to tell the whole story when he comes to write the history of the Islamisation of the British Isles, of which Islamic dawn, Woking came to be just the first streak. He will trace the genesis of the historic movement of the Islamisation of the West to the dreamings of this obscure Seer of Qadian, who, in the face of the storm of opposition from his own people, shouted at the top of his voice to a Godless age that the dawn of Islam over the West had already started and, though like the crescent of the first night the worldly minded could not see it, he had already had its glimpses.

By a strange coincidence, 1889, the year when Dr Leitner laid the foundation of the Mosque at Woking, was the very year in which the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement received the Divine behest that he had been commissioned as the *Mujaddid* and to carry out his mission he should found a regular organisation of devout Muslims pledged to make propagation of Islam the first and

foremost objective of the life, and make every sacrifice in that cause. Round about that very time, Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, who had graduated from a Christian College and had fallen so much under Christian influences that he was on the verge of being baptised, chanced to come across this man of God who instilled in him such deep conviction in and love of Islam, that from a would-be convert to Christianity he became the pioneer Muslim missionary to Christians. Providence, Who fulfils Himself in all sorts of uncanny, subtle ways, provided both the nucleus for the propagation of Islam in England in the form of the Mosque which Dr Leitner founded at Woking, as well as a consummate missionary in the person of an orator and writer like Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din.

The Muslim world, having been under Western domination for so long, and for that matter, infected with an inferiority complex vis-à-vis the West, is still incapable of rising to the height of vision that the white people might adopt Islam, and dismisses such talk as a mad man's raving. But the impact Islam has already made on the Western mind through this outpost of Islam at Woking has created a different impression among Western intellectuals and thinkers. Prof. Toynbee in his book *The History of Religion*, after surveying the possibilities of all the surviving revealed religions, cancels out all others in their bid to become world religions, except two, Christianity and Islam. Of these two again, he says, the chances are in favour of Islam to become the coming world religion, and in support of this apparently incredible forecast he refers the readers to the activities of the missionaries that come from Lahore. This is a pointed reference to the revolution that has been wrought in the whole outlook of the West on Islam as a result of the activities of the missionaries of Islam at Woking. The BBC commentator mentions a few of them by name as having done signal service to the cause of Islam in England.

The object of these lines is not to claim credit for what the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement has done to disseminate the light of the Qur'an in the West. The only object is to rouse Muslims who still doubt the possibilities of *Isha'at-i Islam* in the West and just sit on the border line as idle spectators of a big historic drama that is going on to see this writing on the wall in the West, and do their bit in the cause of propagation of Islam.

The Islamisation of the West is decidedly the greatest discovery of the age — greater even than the attainment of national independence of so many Muslim countries. The greatest object that man can set before himself is to make mankind God-minded. That can only be done through the light of the Qur'an. That is the deep conviction that inspired every member of the Ahmadiyya Movement. That is what has turned the eyes of the world's leading minds on the Woking Muslim Mission and the big possibilities, beyond our imaginations, which it symbolises for Islam becoming the future religion of the whole of mankind.

The Berlin Mosque

Next to the Woking Muslim Mission, which [the] BBC broadcast ... rightly described as a landmark in the onward march of Islam, comes the Berlin Muslim Mission, which has been keeping the torch of Islam burning for the last 40 years in the very heart of Christendom ... As a result, not only is there a steady flow of converts to Islam in both UK and Germany but, what is far more, and what really counts, there has come a reorientation of the entire outlook among the leaders of thought in these lands, both on Islam and Christianity. It is due entirely to the impact of these two Islamic missions and the thought-waves released from these centres that Christianity itself has gone through a process of self-liquidation, till, what is left of the Church creed is but an echo of the Qur'anic description of Jesus Christ and his teachings. This slow but steady process of pro-Islam sowing in Christian thought is fraught with possibilities of historical import to the whole future of mankind, and the day may not be far off when the disillusioned Western mind, doped for centuries with anti-Islamic propaganda, would awaken to the hard reality that the true position of Jesus Christ was none other than that given in the Qur'an, that for Jesus' true teachings also they must turn to the Qur'an, that, indeed, the Comforter foretold in the Gospels was none other than the Prophet Muhammad. These are big goings-on on the world stage, bigger in their repercussions on the whole future destiny of mankind than all the mighty discoveries in the field of nuclear science put together.

The Berlin Mosque was built by the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at-i Islam, Lahore 40 years ago. It is a symbol of the new vision and the new Islamic fervour and zeal which this Movement has released.

Those who witnessed the origins of the drive to build a mosque in Berlin will recall that even the women-folk parted with their jewellery to contribute towards the Berlin Mosque Fund.

We would earnestly beg of all sensible and fair-minded people in this country to ponder over the ill-founded prejudices that are allowed to be worked up against the only Movement which stands wholly and solely for just one ideal — the dissemination of the light of Islam throughout the world. The Ahmadiyya dedication to Islam, moreover, unlike some other organisations which also swear by Islam, is without any political strings. Why can not fair-minded men and women in this country which aspire to mould life on Islamic ideals, see that the Holy Prophet's sole mission was to carry this light of Heaven, the Qur'an, to a benighted humanity, and that the only organisation which has made that its sole object is the Ahmadiyya Movement, which has set up in the heart of Christian West such beacons of Islamic light as the Woking and Berlin Muslim Missions?

The politics-ridden Pakistani mind, however, has no thought to spare for this kind of activity, and even considers it a waste of precious foreign exchange to spend it on these missions, as another Basic Democrat told the National Assembly. The blunt truth is that it is a base betrayal of both Islam and Pakistan to indulge in tall talk about making this country a land of Islamic ways and values and at the same time turn a blind eye to the hard fact that the core of Islam lies in showing this Light from God to mankind. And worse still, the only organisation that is engaged in carrying on that true mission of the Holy Prophet is painted as un-Islamic.