CHALLENGES, ACHIEVEMENTS, AND LIFE OF SAYYID SAEED RIZVI, BY SAYYID MUHAMMAD RIZVI

Book Introduction; Reviewed by Dr. Muhammad-Reza Fakhr-Rohani

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This is a reliable biography of the great and internationally influential Indian Shi'i scholar and Mujtahid, the late Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi (1345-1423 AH/ 1927-2002). An accomplished and eminent graduate of Shi'i seminaries in India, he was indeed a personality whose deep knowledge enlightened the communities wherever he lived.

Born to a family of noble sayyid dynasty in Bihar, India, he made a renowned figure, like his father and forefathers. Studious and hardworking, he was an avid reader of Islamic religious classics, as he also learned several languages in addition to Urdu, eg, Persian, English, Arabic, and a few others.

Drawn upon written documents and research interviews, the book documents that the late Sayyid Saeed Akhtar received several invitations to travel to Eastern African coastline countries, eg, Tanzania, Kenya, and other places, as a Shi'i preacher.

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Contrary to the practices of many clerics and preachers, Saeed Akhtar never limited the scope of his preachings to the originally Indian immigrants who were there. He recognized it his mission to be in close contact with the indigenous Africans who mainly spoke Swahili. Soon after receiving a permanent home in Africa, he decided to learn Swahili. Through preaching noble Islamic teachings among both Indian immigrants and the native colored people, he was successful in proving the real transnationality discernible in Islamic teachings, as they appeal to all rational beings.

In addition to preaching, Sayyid Saeed Akhtar was active to pen articles, monographs, books, and producing fine and annotated translations of major Islamic classics. Accomplishing them almost single-handedly, he proved a conscientious and brilliant polymath whose writings have been translated into many other languages.

Prudent and sagacious enough not to give any political coloring to his activities so that he might be banned or deported back to his homeland, he educated many Africans and inspired them to make active voices of Shi'a Islam to disseminate the precious teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt here and there.

Constantly in contact with the leading Shi'i religious authorities in Najaf and Qom, if not elsewhere, he was always their confident representative in the exotic lands where other Shi'i clerics might not yearn to visit. Filled with the sincere spirit of serving those who desired to quench their thirst for religious knowledge from its true fountainheads, his name and tomb will be shining for ever as the standard-bearer of Shia Islam in Africa.

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This research-based and scholarly biography deserves not only being placed on the bookshelf of any serious scholar, it deserves another, certainly improved, edition as a college text.

Last but not least, there is a markworthy between-the-line in the book: it is not essential to have an enormous budget and government support to make an influential figure; it is knowledge, sincerity, and a sense of conscient.

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