

BOOK REVIEW

Title: Shaykh Ismail Hanif Edwards

Author: Mogamat Hoosain Ebrahim

Publisher: Mogamat Hoosain Ebrahim, Primrose Park 7764, South Africa

Year: 2004

Shaykh Ismāʿīl Hanif Edwards was born during a time that could be considered a watershed in the history of Muslims at the Cape. A transition from an insular to a more inclusive phase was dawning in which people like Dr Abdurahman saw the need for alliances with other oppressed people in the country. This issue will be highlighted when we analyse his experiences in the Arab World. For now, the cardinal questions are: Did Shaykh Ismāʿīl perceive the stupendous challenges that confronted any Muslim scholar in that milieu? Did he successfully resolve them?

Before providing answers to them, the author in Chapter One sketches a general history of Muslims in the Cape as regards their: political, socio-economic, religious and educational conditions, and also outlines the contributions of some prominent Muslim personalities of that era. Chapter Two provides details about our subject's birth, family background and early Islamic education in Cape Town.

Chapter Three probes his studies in Makkah and Egypt. It is manifest that, in terms of his knowledge of Islamic Law, his formative education in Cape Town would have exposed him mainly to the views of the predominant Shāfiʿī School. He would have been less familiar with the Hanafī School which had been supported by Abū Bakr Amjadi (Effendi) after his arrival in 1862. His studies in Makkah exposed him to the Hanbalī / Wahhābī influences. In Cairo, he learnt about extensive reforms to the religious curriculum taught at Al-Azhar. People like Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Maḥmūd Shaltūt featured prominently in this regard.

Politically, Egypt was witnessing anti-colonial campaigns while the secularisation of that country was vehemently opposed by religious luminaries like Rashīd Ridā and Hasan al-Bannā. These experiences revealed to him some international trends confronting traditional, religious communities in colonised societies. Their impact upon him became evident in some of the decisions he took after returning home.

One of his most outstanding literary contributions was the translation of *al-Muqaddamah al-Hadramiyyah* into Afrikaans written in Arabic script while he was still a student at al-Azhar University in 1928. Ebrahim comments:

While Afrikaans was still not recognised as an official language in South Africa the "Arabic-Afrikaans books were being printed in Cape Town and also in Istanbul, Bombay and Cairo. This was the work of an intelligent man with immense foresight. He did not waste any time while studying in Cairo, but engaged in rigorous study and translations (p. 145).

Chapter Four details Shaykh Ismāʿīl's life at the Cape after his return from Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The author gives three examples of the Shaykh applying himself independently to legal and theological matters: in the first of these, he preferred the Hanafī ruling about a woman's capacity to contract marriage without the help of a guardian; the second case dealt with his preference for abandoning the *Ḍuhr ḥalāl*

after the *Jumu#ah #s#alah*; in the last case he found no scriptural justification for observing the night of the fifteenth of *Sha#b#ān*.

His legal opinions were also influenced by the broader socio-political conditions prevalent in the country: He was the only *imām* in Cape Town to recite *qunūt* during a *Jumu#ah #s#alah* after the victory of the apartheid National Party regime in 1948. Some measure of political activism is obvious here.

Chapter Five clarifies Shaykh Ismā#īl's intellectual legacies by firstly mentioning his influence upon Muhammad Cassiem (an Islamic teacher), Imam Haron (a political leader) and Imam Johnstone (an Arabic teacher); thereafter his role as *imām* at the *Nūr al-Islām Masjid* in Buitengracht Street, Cape Town, is detailed.

His greatest contribution were the approximately thirty works published as textbooks initially for his students and subsequently for the general public which deal with topics like Islāmic Law, Arabic grammar, Qur'ānic recitation, Qur'ānic commentary, ethics, theology, Prophetic guidance and invocations. They have been written predominantly in Arabic-Afrikaans, but also in Arabic and Afrikaans.

The Conclusion sheds scanty light on Shaykh Ismā#īl Hanif Edwards' piety, social justice, family life and love for the youth.

Overall, the book reflects an academic tenor. Controversial matters are evaluated. The bibliography is impressive for a work that has relied upon many previously untapped sources. Illustrations, photographs and annexures are appropriate and rich. The layout of the book is good.

This work will be of immense interest to historians and general readers who are keen to know more about the history of Islam in South Africa.

The value of future editions will certainly be enhanced by a solid index of names of personalities, places and events.

Reviewer: Prof Yousuf Dadoo

Head: Religious Studies & Arabic, Unisa, P O Box 392, Pretoria

E-mail address: dadooy@unisa.ac.za