

Allama Azmi:

A Great Islamic Thinker of the 21st Century

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While the 21st Century has witnessed many Muslim thinkers who have turned out to be controversial, Allama Azmi has the significance of being a thinker without controversy. He was nurtured in Islamic education from an early age and received much of his religious education at Al Jamia-tul-Ashrafia (a prestigious University in Islamic Sciences) in Mubarakpur, India and the famous Nadwat-ul-Ulema in Lucknow, India.

He is renowned and admired for his public lectures which have inspired millions of young and old Muslims in the subcontinent, Middle East, Africa, Europe and North America. But he is also a great thinker and religious teacher who speaks with incredible intellectual energy. His lectures are extraordinary in terms of topics covered. No wonder the Times of India recently wrote on 2nd November 2010:

"There are two kinds of Sunni Muslims in the world: those who have met or heard Allama Qamaruzzaman Khan Azmi and those who haven't. His lucid speeches peppered with repeated references to Quranic commandments and the life of the Prophet and his companions have a charismatic effect; they go straight to the heart. Unlike many rabble-rousing parochial preachers and Islam-supremacist televangelists, Azmi uses words to calm nerves, close breaches and salve wounds. As Secretary General of the UK-headquartered World Islamic Mission, an organisation which inspires Muslims to anchor their lives around the Quran and Sunnah, Azmi is uniquely placed and is undoubtedly most sought-after preacher of Ahle Sunnat wa Jamat, the major sect in Islam".

In his speeches Allama Azmi successfully combines the thoughts of Muslim reformers, jurists, philosophers and Sufis. His primary concern is the revival of Islamic attitude. He believes that the future of the Ummah is in the hands of Muslims themselves rather than in the hands of Western scientific and technological arenas. Poverty and humiliation of Muslims in the contemporary world has always been a

prime concern for him, however he considers that Muslims themselves are largely responsible for this downfall due to a lack of education, activism and an aspiring soul.

Allama Azmi believes that the Seerah and Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon Him and His family) is the ultimate role model (Uswah) for the Muslim community and that profound respect and love for the Prophet (Peace be upon Him and His family) is the blueprint for a perfect Islamic society.

Importantly, and like many other thinkers and scholars, Allama Azmi believes that Muslims cannot be the followers of a static ideology. Although he refuses the idea of reopening the gates of Ijtehad, he accepts the organic process of change and progress while remaining firmly embedded in the fundamental principles of the Quran, Sunnah and theological authority of the Four Imams of Sunni jurisprudence.

He is evidently influenced by the teachings and thoughts of Aala Hazrat Imam Ahmad Raza Khan Qadri (1856-1921) and his charismatic and learned son Mufti-e-Azam of India, Hazrat Maulana Mustafa Raza Khan Qadri (1892-1981) who was also his spiritual guide (Pir). He passionately advocates their teachings and guidance (Maslak) as a creative and dynamic force for the moral and spiritual development of the Muslim community.

Allama Azmi's importance lies primarily in his awareness of the problems faced by Muslims when confronted with modernity. His familiarity with western philosophical and cultural ideas coupled with his vast knowledge of the Islamic sciences and orthodox as well as modern trends in Islamic thought has resulted in him being a figure of intellectual force in the field of a revival of Islamic environment.

He argues, along with many Islamic scholars, that Islam is neither irrational nor non scientific. That the growth in science and knowledge more generally does not come at the expense of religion but rather that they work together in helping us understand religion and its proper place in our society.

He also argues, as Phillip Lewis (1994) quotes Allama Azmi in his acclaimed book 'Islamic Britain: Religion, Politics and Identity among British Muslims', that Islam and secular society can co-exist and are not incompatible.

Phillip Lewis (1994) writes that Allama Azmi:

"considers that the widely shared perception that secular necessarily implies irreligion is simply wrong. In India, he contends, a secular state can offer security to Muslims since it is compatible with acknowledging that religion is important and, that in a religiously plural environment the state does not allow believers in one religious tradition to enjoy a privileged status. All are citizens with equal rights. Indeed, in India, Muslims are allowed to conform to their own Muslim family law." (see Phillip Lewis (1994) *Islamic Britain: Religion, Politics and Identity among British Muslims* (p.127. London: I.B. Tauris).

Allama Azmi has travelled widely and has engaged in direct and meaningful dialogue with a variety of faith leaders, professionals and representatives of many organisations and institutions. He has always impressed his counterparts through his thoughts and inspired them in their respective work. This practice remains active and on-going and we hope and pray to Allah Almighty that in the coming days and years he will continue his unique work of Dawah all over the world (Ameen).

