

# A Sketch of Muftī Ja‘far Ḥusayn’s Contributions to the Shī‘ī Community

Imām ‘Alī (a) spent his entire life, from his youth until his final breath, in the service of Islam. His life story provides abundant illustrations of moral rectitude from a variety of perspectives: he exhibited the highest ethical standards as a political leader, a scholar, an army general, a father, and in many other capacities throughout his life. It was because of these unique virtues that Imām Alī (a) served as the greatest role model for countless generations of Muslim scholars and leaders. A contemporary Islamic scholar who endeavored to follow Imām ‘Alī’s comprehensive example was Muftī Ja‘far Ḥusayn. He spent most of his childhood and youth studying Islam, to eventually actively serve his community by preaching and providing political leadership in difficult times; he gave many personal sacrifices for the greater good of the community through his years of service.

Muftī Ja‘far could have limited himself to the traditional roles of preaching, teaching his students, writing, or devoting himself to political work. Instead, he attempted to emulate Imām ‘Alī comprehensively; he dedicated his life for Islam, striving in the path of Allah, and became successful in various spheres of life. We may learn many lessons from his life, but among the greatest lessons are to dedicate ourselves to the path of Allah with pure intentions, to work sincerely, and to bear hardships patiently in His way. One should be willing to devote oneself to whatever is the need of the time rather than solely focusing on what one wants to do based on one’s personal taste.

Below is a brief summary of his life and some of his achievements along with translated excerpts from his work in Urdu, *Sīrah of Imām ‘Alī*.

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Muftī Ja‘far Ḥusayn<sup>[1]</sup> was born in 1914 in Gūjrānwālā, Punjāb. He learned Qur’ān and Arabic from his uncle, Ḥakīm Shihāb al-Dīn, from the age of five to seven. After that, he learned *ḥadīth* and *fiqh* from different scholars. Then he went to Lucknow, India and studied there for nine years in *Madrasah e-Nāzimīyyah*. In 1935, he moved to the *Ḥawzah* of Najaf, Iraq, and studied there for five years with various scholars including Āyat Allāh Sayyid Abū al-Ḥasan Iṣfahānī, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Rashtī, Shaykh Ibrahīm Rashtī, Sayyid Jawād Tabrīzī, Shaykh Mirzā Bāqir Zanjānī, and Shaykh Sayyid ‘Alī Nūrī.

After completing his studies in Najaf, he returned to Lucknow and then finally settled in Gūjrānwālā. He provided many services by imparting religious education and providing social and political leadership for the Shi‘ah community in the newly-formed country of Pakistan. Among his activities are the following:

- Establishment of the first Shī'ī school of learning, *Madrasah e-Ja'fariyyah*, in the town of Gūjranwālā, Punjab
- Ensuring the recognition of *Ja'farī fiqh* with governmental backing in Pakistan
- Formation of Shī'ī *zakāt* committees in order for the Shī'ah to be able to pay *zakāt* according to the requirements of *Ja'farī fiqh*
- Establishment of an organized press for the community and issuing a daily newspaper
- Prescribing separate curriculum for Shī'ī theology in schools, providing students a choice to study Shī'ī theology or Sunnī theology
- Removing the impediments to the observation of *'azādārī* by the Shī'ah Community
- Formation of a national Secretariat to coordinate with and guide the Shī'ah Community in an organized manner

As far as recognition of *Ja'farī fiqh* by the government was concerned, he traveled across the country, addressed press conferences, and met government functionaries to galvanize action toward the matter. He never compromised on his principles and, to achieve this lofty goal, he resigned from the membership of the Islāmī Nazāriyyātī council, thus giving up his honorarium, which was his only source of income at that time.

He was also famous for his literary works which included the Urdu translation of *Nahj al-Balaghah* and *al-Ṣahīfat al-Sajjādiyyah*. He also wrote a two-volume book on the *Sīrah* of Imām 'Alī (a). In this book, he gives a very detailed biography of Imām 'Alī (a) from his birth to the end of his life. The author touches upon his genealogy, his character and habits, knowledge, and bravery, and he presents details of many important events that took place in his life.

To conclude this brief sketch of Muftī Ja'far Ḥusayn's life, a few excerpts from his book on Imām 'Alī (a) are presented below. In addition to a biography of the Imam, the book discusses the eloquence of the Imām (a) in speech and writing, quoting some of the sayings which he introduced to the Arabic language and certain phrases which can be best understood by those familiar with Arabic literature.

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#### *Imām 'Alī (a) and Knowledge of Literature*

Imām 'Alī's (a) speeches and sermons played a major role in developing Arabic literature and making it reach great heights. He gave the language a new literary and expressive style, opened new pathways for eloquence, and taught the rules of Arabic grammar. He left deep impressions in all fields of literature; scholars consider his sermons and his words to be an inspiration for future orators and writers.

#### *Imām 'Alī (a) and Arabic Grammar*

Abū al-Aswad mentions that he once went to Imām ‘Alī (a) and saw that he was deep in thought. He asked him what he was pondering upon and the Imām (a) explained that non-Arabs were using words which were grammatically and syntactically incorrect. If attention would not be given to proper Arabic speech, it would gradually become difficult to understand what people were intending to say. After much deliberation, he decided to define the rules so that a distinction between correct and incorrect speech could be made. Abū al-Aswad then said to the Imām (a) that if he would do this, the Arabic language would live forever; otherwise it would digress from the language of the Qur’ān.

Abū al-Aswad mentions that he came to Imām ‘Alī (a) three days later and the Imām (a) gave him a leaf with the following written on it:

Words are of three types: nouns, verbs, and particles. A noun is a word which gives news about something named, a verb is a word which gives news about an action, and a particle is a word which neither has the meaning of the noun nor the verb.

Then Imām ‘Alī (a) said: “O Abū al-Aswad! You should know that things are of three types: Apparent, hidden or something which is neither apparent nor hidden (like demonstrative pronouns).” After this he defined some further rules and said: “Follow this path (*nahw*).” Because of these words of Imām ‘Alī (a), the rules of Arabic grammar are even today known as “*Nahw*.”

#### *Imām ‘Alī (a) and Poetry*

Imām ‘Alī (a) inherited the art of poetry and usage of words from his father, Abū Ṭālib. He has written poetry in the areas of asceticism and high morals. A few couplets from his poetry are presented below:

Peace on the people of the grave, the effaced,  
Like they had never attended any gathering,

And had not drunk cold water,  
And had not eaten ripe or dried dates,

Tell me which grave among you is lowly,  
And the one which is superior and honorable?

#### *Imām ‘Alī (a) and Writing*

Imām ‘Alī (a) was an expert in writing as well. Writing the verses of the Qur’an and recording traditions of the Prophet (ﷺ) are attributed to him. Not only did he guide toward the rules of grammar and the utilization of dots in orthography, he also presented other rules of writing as well.

To encourage good handwriting, he (a) said: “Write with good handwriting as it is among the keys of sustenance.” It is also recorded that he said: “Good handwriting is wealth for the poor, beauty for the rich, and perfection for a scholar.”

On another occasion, to stress its importance, he said: "Teach your children to write."

[1] More information can be found at: <http://www.islam-laws.com/marja/muftijafar.htm>