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Dr. Hoosain M. Kotwal's 'a Legacy not to be forgotten'

Rucshana Bhayat (producer). *The Life and Times of Dr. Hoosain Moosa Kotwal*. Cassette Disk 30 min. Cape Town: HM Kotwal Foundation. 2018.

Reshard Jedaar (editor). *Living Legacies: Honoring Dr. HM Kotwal and His Legacy (1925-1998)*. Cape Town: HM Kotwal Foundation. 2018, 146 pp. illustrated ISBN None

Moosa Vallie Ismail. *Understanding Beliefs and Practice of Islam*. Cape Town: Muslim Assembly. 2018, 410 pp. ISBN-10: 0-620-79144-1

Review Essay by Professor Muhammed Haron, University of Botswana/ University of Stellenbosch.

0. Introduction

The founding members of the Dr. HM Kotwal Foundation (est.2018) based in Cape Town agreed at the outset that they would want to produce a detailed biography about Dr. Hoosain Moosa Kotwal who was their inspirational mentor and stimulating guide. Reflecting upon their desire to do so, one should remember that writing a (social) biography, which is a method of recording history (Possing 2001; Possing 2012), is no easy task; it is one that depends on numerous factors that in turn hinge on two sets of elements. The researcher or scholar who sets out to pursue this biographical writing project will have to, among others, describe and analyze the individual's ethnicity, gender, class, language, age, and religion. Alongside these, the researcher would have to contextualize the person within his/her socio-economic and political environment; one in which he/she was reared and wherein he/she functioned for much of his/her life.

Though this reviewer does not intend to unpack or elaborate upon any of these elements in this introductory paragraph or in this review essay, he mentioned this so that the reader may understand that all of the things that have to be considered when writing or producing a biography (Zinn 2004). The Foundation's founders came to realize this after having consulted a few academics at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and the University of the Western Cape (UWC) respectively. They did not give up on this idea after having recognized the enormity of such a project and without wanting to distort Kotwal's memory (see Nourkova, Bernstein & Loftus 2004); they thus decided to put it aside and in its place produced two modest products that form part of this review.

From a purely technical perspective when one takes a close look at the three items that are being reviewed in this essay, it will come to the fore that none of them can be described as biographies and nor do they come close to such a genre. Biographical notes, however, appear in two of the pieces under review. The CD, for example, provided a summary of the life of Dr. Kotwal, and the one text, which contains a collection of accolades from admirers and a selection of speeches, offered one chapter that covered Kotwal's 'biographical notes'. And the third text is nothing else but a reworking and compilation of Kotwal's earlier writings by an ardent follower.

1. Dr. Hoosain M. Kotwal: Who is he?

At this point the questions that one may wish to ask are: Who was Dr. Hoosain M. Kotwal? What made him to be a significant figure or rather a social reformer in the Cape community in general and in its Muslim community in particular? And how did he effect changes in this community? Well to summarily respond to these is not easy as it may seem since one has to explain in some detail the last two questions; this review essay thus consciously avoids responding to the last two and returns to the first question. In short, Kotwal is of Indian origin and a Kolvid background whose immigrant parents settled in South Africa where he was born during 1925. After having studied in India's prestigious Muslim Aligarh University he returned to the country and eventually set up his medical practice in Cape Town.

From the time he settled in this coastal city, he adapted to its cosmopolitan environment that was respectively different from Johannesburg and Durban. Though trained as a medical doctor, he became gradually known for his striking efforts as socio-educational activist; someone who may be likened to Cape Town's Dr. Abdullah Abdurahman (d.1940) who too was a medical doctor and who had left a rich legacy as a socio-political and educational crusader (Wong 2016). Some might, however, argue against this comparison since the latter made a huge impression on the Cape society in all major social circles during the first half of the twentieth century while Kotwal's contribution was mainly restricted to the Cape Muslim community via the Muslim Assembly (MA). One should hastily add that Kotwal and the MA's inputs have not really been confined to the Muslims; they served the whole community.

2. The Dr. H.M. Kotwal Foundation: Continuing his legacy

As a result of Kotwal's legacy, his friends such as Judge Essa Moosa was of the view that the formation of the Dr. H.M. Kotwal Foundation would stand him in good stead; it would be a way of honoring his memory and continue his legacy. Since the family agreed, he and other MA members established it to fulfill Kotwal's vision. And as mentioned in the opening paragraph, its founders felt that an informed biography should be penned about their excitable, affable, and sociable mentor. For now that project is on ice and its members decided to restrict themselves to only two products that weren't too ambitious and manageable in the circumstances. The Foundation produced a CD and a booklet during 2018; at the same time, the current MA leadership under Moosa Vallie Ismail pursued a related publication but different from the other two; at this juncture it is important to review each of these.

3. Bhayat's CD

Ms. Ruchsana Bhayat, who is a practicing lawyer and – it is assumed - a Muslim Assembly member, was tasked to produce a half an hour CD that basically captured the life and times of Kotwal. She was assisted by a team of other individuals that included Mehboob Bawa, the narrator who is a Cape public broadcaster personality. In a summary form, the CD essentially narrated Kotwal's life. Before Bawa narrated Kotwal's story, the producer inserted a video clip of the first Athlone Trade Fair that was opened during April 1969 and that continued to take place annually thereafter; at the first event, the Cape Town's (Apartheid appointed) Mayor opened the event that was accompanied by lots of fanfare. As Bawa narrated Kotwal's life, it was complemented with a series of visual images. Among these were photographs of Kotwal with his family and Muslim Assembly members; and on another photo one sees him with Tan Sri Prof Ismail Hussein, the President of the Malaysian Writers Association, when he made his maiden voyage during 1992 to prepare for the 1993 Malaysia-South Africa academic meeting that took place at UWC (Haron 2018).

For some reason, one missed other memorable photos that could've enhanced the CD collection. One, for example, would like to have seen a photo with Kotwal and Prof. Ishtiyah Qureishi who was the then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Karachi and who had been selected by MA to be its patron; a photo of the latter appeared in the Jedaar edited publication that will be reviewed shortly. One also missed other photos of Kotwal with other prominent visitors to the Cape; the producer could've included Kotwal posing with local and national celebrities that shared his vision and mission.

Be that as it may, the CD contained excerpts of speeches of the vibrant and lively Kotwal; one of these was given at the Al-Jami'a Mosque located in Cape Town's Claremont. It is also strange that the script for this CD did not mention the association of Kotwal with Imam Abdullah Haron; the iconic religio-political personality who was killed in detention on 27 September 1969. One thought that, at some point, the CD's producer or for that matter the booklet's editor, Rashard Jedaar would have inserted a brief word about their relationship; this was not to be. In any case, after Bawa completed his narration, the CD ended off with two interviews; these were with two long-standing MA members. The second of the two was with Mr. Adam Bhayat who is the producer's father and the first of the two was Mr. Rashard Jedaar; the latter was a former principal of the Wynberg-based Mohamadiyyah Primary School that was located in Greater Cape Town's Southern Suburbs. It was Jedaar who was given the responsibility of editing the *Living Legacy* – which should be watched in tandem with the CD - and it is to this publication that this review now shifts its attention.

4. Jedaar's Edited Text

Mr. Jedaar, having acted as Kotwal's editor during the earlier days, assumed this duty and he edited a text that consisted of seventeen pieces. Though the reviewer wanted to avoid calling these entries as 'book chapters' since some do not exactly fit into this category, he had no alternative but to accept it as such. Nonetheless, apart from Jedaar's editorial comments, he structured the text somewhat awkwardly. Instead of dividing it into three/four thematic parts that consisted of Kotwal's biography, Kotwal's speeches, the MA's mission & activities, and its members' evaluation of Kotwal as an inspiring personality, he started with 'A Word from the Editor' (Ch.1). This was immediately followed by Dr. Mahmoud Patel's – an UWC academic - Foreword, Dr. Adam Omar's – the MA's former Chairperson - Message, and Prof. Allie Moosa's – a specialist in medicine in Kuwait and a supporter of MA activities – 'letter of support.' At this point the editor inserted his 'Introduction: Editorial' (Ch.5); related to this one would have thought that it was best had the editor collapsed the first piece (Ch.1) with this one; alas, this was not the case.

The book's contents consisted of, among others, the following texts: 'A Biographical Note' (Ch 6), a selection of Kotwal's speeches from Ch. 9 to Ch. 11, Kotwal's daughter's 'Family Memories' (Ch.14), Adam Bhayat's commendable comments regarding Kotwal and MA (Ch. 16) and Advocate Abu Bakr Mohamed's, who was one of the Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa's (est.1970) founding members (Tayob 1995), endearing remarks regarding Kotwal's legacy (Ch.17). For the record, Mohamed and Jadwat (2012) affirmed that Kotwal, who was a national inspirational leader, addressed one of MYMSA's first mass gatherings at the beginning of the 1970s.

Anyhow among these contributions was a lengthy essay (Ch. 12) by Judge Essa Moosa (d.2018); the latter described and discussed South African Muslims' role in the liberation struggle (circa 1950s-1990). Unfortunately, the editor was unaware that it was a speech that was delivered

at a Cape African National Congress forum that celebrated its centenary and that it has appeared under a different title in a special *BOLESWA* Journal issue that focused on Southern Africa's Muslim communities. Though for that issue the essay was corrected and edited by this reviewer (Haron 2012), it was observed that Jedaar did not go through it with a fine comb and hence the factual errors remained. One would have advised this essay to have appeared as the first chapter in Jedaar's publication; the reason for this was that since the author offered a satisfactory socio-political context within which the MA emerged and within which Kotwal was one of the prominent actors. Strangely, the judge's essay did not place MA in any context nor did he mention that Kotwal was accused by a few of the Cape's Young Turks for being in the forefront of the 'Wreckers of Unity' during the mid-1960s before MA's establishment during 1967.

Important to note was that Kotwal was not as a member of any of South Africa's liberation movements; he was, however, apolitical and someone who seemed to have been more concerned with the Muslim community's socio-educational reform rather than their political awareness at the Cape. This was quite clear throughout the 1970s and the 1980s when MA undertook extensive social welfare work; laudable tasks that were spearheaded by Dr, Achmat Davids who became a notable social historian. Davids later wrote the oft-quoted *Mosques of the Bo-Kaap* (1980) and many other works that concentrated on Cape Muslim history, culture and language. In fact, he was among the pioneering scholars that did not write booklets that concentrated on Islam as was the case with the earlier Cape Muslim theologians; he was from a handful of secular trained Muslim scholars who critically evaluated the Cape Muslims' contributions towards language and other aspects of Muslim culture.

5. Ismail's Text

Now as far as texts on Islam was concerned, Kotwal was among those educationists - even though he was a medical doctor - who stressed the significance in reforming the curriculum of Muslim managed madaris (schools); as a consequence of his concern, he initiated with his MA colleagues a series of MA books that prepared and published booklets that covered divergent themes ranging from *tawhid* to cleanliness. Kotwal was indeed innovative in this sector in that he used to graphically design lessons that captured the salient ideas that he desired to share with those who attended his classes. He was committed to bringing about changes in the Muslim educational system apart from addressing the social welfare issues of the broader community (which included attending to the affairs of non-Muslims too). Most of these ideas and graphics have been included in the book that Moosa Vallie Ismail compiled.

Like Jedaar, Moosa V. Ismail is also a retired educationist who had been a MA member for many years. In Ismail's capacity as former MA director/chair, he decided to work on this project prior to the Dr. HM Kotwal Foundation's formation. He compiled, transferred, edited, and re-wrote information that appeared in 17 previously published MA booklets; most of which may be attributed to Kotwal (and others). As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Kotwal produced diagrams that were extremely informative and educational; one of the photos that appeared in the CD narrative showed Kotwal standing in front of the class explaining the diagram on *tawhid*; this and other diagrams were indeed wonderfully thought through and charted out.

Anyone involved in preparing texts such as this - for all and sundry - would know that this is indeed an onerous and a painstaking effort. Though Ismail did not state that he edited, re-wrote, and arranged the text's contents, this is what one can conclude based on one's knowledge about the series of MA publications. On the whole, Ismail published what might be described as a presentable, reader friendly text for adults. One would like Ismail to have categorically stated that

these were basically Kotwal's handy-work and that he just used his skills as an educationist to enhance Kotwal's outputs by placing them in one tome. He, regrettably, did not emphatically say so and for this reason one did not find Kotwal's name inserted in as the co-author.

Notwithstanding this concern, Ismail divided the text into twenty-three chapters that varied in length and coverage. When one compares this publication to other South African published texts such as Abu Bakr Fakier's *A Manuel of Prayer and Fasting* (1978) that cover specifics about Islam, then one may state that Ismail produced a wonderful companion on Islam for the general reader. The text opened with a chapter by engaging the reader to get to grips with the concept of *tawhid*. Ismail deliberately began with this concept since Kotwal laid a great deal of stress on its dissemination and pointed out that it is *the* foundation stone for all other ideas that one wishes to teach and share. The diagrams that Kotwal generated and that accompanied the notes showed how critical he considered this and other concepts; these illustrated to what extent he ploughed in all his energies to make certain that the adult learner who sat in his class had a comprehensive insight into these concepts' meanings; as far as Kotwal was concerned, anyone who grasps its nettle would have a fair understanding of all other aspects of human life.

Since it is well-nigh not possible to describe and discuss each and every chapter, the reviewer will only make a few brief comments before rounding up this review essay. Firstly, the text covered a range of themes and topics apart from *tawhid* and – as usual – the five obligatory rituals (Ch.6 - Ch.9). Secondly, it included topics such as the human personality's nature, growth and motivation (Ch.12), Respect, Duties and Responsibilities (Ch.15), and The Concept of *Taqdir*: Pre-measurement, Predetermination, and Destiny (Ch.22). Thirdly, while the chapters were adequately addressed, one noted that a few of the chapters appeared in telegraphic format; these he could have transformed into reasonable essays and here the important chapter on Sharia (Ch.11) comes to mind. And similar argument may be put forward with regards to the final chapter that provided a 'Synopsis of the Sirah' (Ch.23).

6. Round-Up

Even though these texts and the CD did not offer a detailed outline and insight into Kotwal's life as a social reformer, the texts – and to some extent the CD – revealed that Kotwal was an animated and an energetic character that had lots of ideas in terms of making and bringing about changes in and beyond his community. As far as all of his friends and students were concerned, the bald-headed Kotwal was a sincere inspirational figure; one who dedicated his time and energies to bring about the necessary socio-educational transformations. In their eyes, Kotwal was a committed person; one who literally slaved hard to see that the MA that he and others established achieved its goals. As far as they were concerned it did and in their informed opinion Kotwal stood out as a social reformer and had left a legacy that should not just be honored but one that should be emulated.

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