

AN AUTHENTIC ACCOUNT
OF THE
PONTIFICAL OFFICE
OF
DAI-I-MUTLAQ
AND ITS

Fifty-First Incumbent

HIS HOLINESS
SARDAR SAIYEDNA TAHER
SAIFUDDIN SAHEB

BY

SHAIKH DAWOOD MOULVI,
M. A. (ARABIC)

*Late Educational Inspector to
H. E. H. the Nizam's Government*

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In Commemoration
OF THE
Silver Jubilee

OF
His Holiness
Sardar Saiyedna Taher
Saifuddin Sahib

AS
Dai-l-Mutlaq

THE 5th DAI-L-MUTLAQ.



HIS HOLINESS SARDAR SAIYEDNA TAHER SAIFUDDIN SAHEB.
(1940)

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF
His Holiness
Sardar Saiyedna Taher Saifuddin Saheb
 The High Pontiff of the
 Dawoodi Bohra Community.

IT is not given to many outside the Muslim world intimately to know the noted celebrity in the person of **His Holiness Sardar Saiyedna Taher Saifuddin Saheb**, the Dai-l-Mutlaq, or the Mullaji Saheb as he is familiarly known, of the Dawoodi Bohra community. While it is impossible to do full justice, in a short biography like this, to the rich and useful life of His Holiness, it is hoped that the details given in the following pages will convey a pen-picture of His Holiness sufficient for the reader to appreciate the greatness of his divine personality.

His Holiness Sardar Saiyedna Taher Saifuddin Saheb

Time thus passed on and the mantle of the responsible and centuries-old duties has now fallen upon the shoulders of **His Holiness Sardar Saiyedna Taher Saifuddin Saheb**, the present illustrious and Fifty First incumbent of the Holy Dawat, whose life is the subject-matter of this booklet. His Holiness, like his renowned predecessors, notwithstanding his unique position, takes a keen interest in the events of the day and plays an important part in the public affairs of the country.

His Holiness was born at Surat on 5th August, 1888, and was called to the Pontificate in the year 1335 Hijrah (corresponding to 1915 A.D.) at the early age of 28. He had shone very brilliantly and given ample proofs of his sterling qualities for the dignified office of Dai-l-Mutlaq long before his accession to it. Although young in years, he was rich in attainments like his illustrious predecessors.

High Qualities and Attainments of His Holiness

The embodiment of unalloyed piety and sanctity, His Holiness has a heart endowed with the kindest sentiments and tenderest feelings for his followers over whose destinies he presides. As Spiritual and Temporal Head of the community, his love for his people and his solicitude for their welfare are akin to his love for his own children.

His Holiness is the fountain-head of enlightenment and guidance to his people, who do him regal honour and homage. They approach him not only for guidance in matters religious and secular, but in happiness and distress as well. They seek his inspired advice in every aspect of life. Their devotion to him is proverbial and their reverence for him is sublime.

His Holiness' rigid adherence to the religious tenets and beliefs are beacon lights to his people, who follow in his footsteps and implore his blessings. He insists on his followers adhering to their traditions and customs in the matter of dress and appearance.

His Holiness is the absolute authority in all matters pertaining to the Dawoodi Bohra community. His decisions and pronouncements upon questions, religious and social, such as laws of marriage, divorce, inheritance, settlements, trade and other kindred matters that arise in the community are final and are implicitly obeyed by his followers.

His Holiness possesses unique qualities of head and heart. He is also rich in the rare attributes of learning, far-sightedness, keen perception, statesmanship,

and diplomacy. He is richly endowed with all the cardinal and theological virtues. In courage and fortitude he has few equals, and his brilliant career of more than two decades is brimful of sterling accounts worthy of narration at length.

In addition to giving discourses to his disciples in philosophy, science and various branches of learning at his headquarters or on tour, His Holiness devotes considerable time to the disposal of papers and other office work regularly every day. Every department of the Dawat receives his vigilant care and personal attention. He sedulously and very skilfully solves multifarious knotty problems that arise in the administration of the Dawat. He has the rare advantage of adding secular and western education to his vast spiritual and religious learning, and is thus in a unique position to improve the educational and commercial status of his community.

His Holiness a Patron of Education, Arts and Industry

Since his accession to the throne, His Holiness has initiated an active educational policy, establishing a separate department to carry it out efficiently in all its details. Under the control of his Education Department there are at present about 350 Madrasahs, including a number of High Schools, with hostels attached to some of them. At these Madrasahs free education is imparted to the children, according to a well-planned syllabus, in Arabic and religious subjects, as well as in those prescribed by the Universities and Education Departments of the various Provinces. His Holiness maintains

the celebrated Arabic College at Surat, *viz.*, *Daras-e-Saifi*, which dates back to about one hundred years, where nearly 300 students are provided with free boarding and lodging and taught in all branches of philosophy and science in Arabic. To this English education on modern lines has since been added.

His Holiness always patronises Industrial and Educational Institutions and has, with a view to gaining first hand knowledge of their methods of progress, repeatedly paid visits to many commercial, agricultural and engineering colleges and universities during his tours through different places such as Poona, Madras, Karachi, Calcutta, Hyderabad (Deccan) and Colombo. Advanced courses, on a similar basis, in secular subjects have been introduced by him throughout the Madrasahs and Schools which are under the control of his Education Department. He has, in addition to running Educational Institutions, established an Industrial Home in Bombay known as *Darus-Sanaatil-Burhaniyah*, where middle-class and poor people of the community receive free training in various arts and crafts.

His community is well-known for its commercial and industrial enterprise and is scattered all over the world—from Japan and China in the Far East to Aden, Africa and Madagascar in the West; and from Kashmir in the North to Ceylon in the South. Successful traders as they are, the Dawoodi Bohras are reputed to be law-abiding citizens, all over the world, and as such carry great weight with the authorities concerned. During the illustrious reign of His Holiness great progress has been made in English education, and to-day there is not a single branch of trade, nor any learned profession, legal, medical or mechanical, which is not

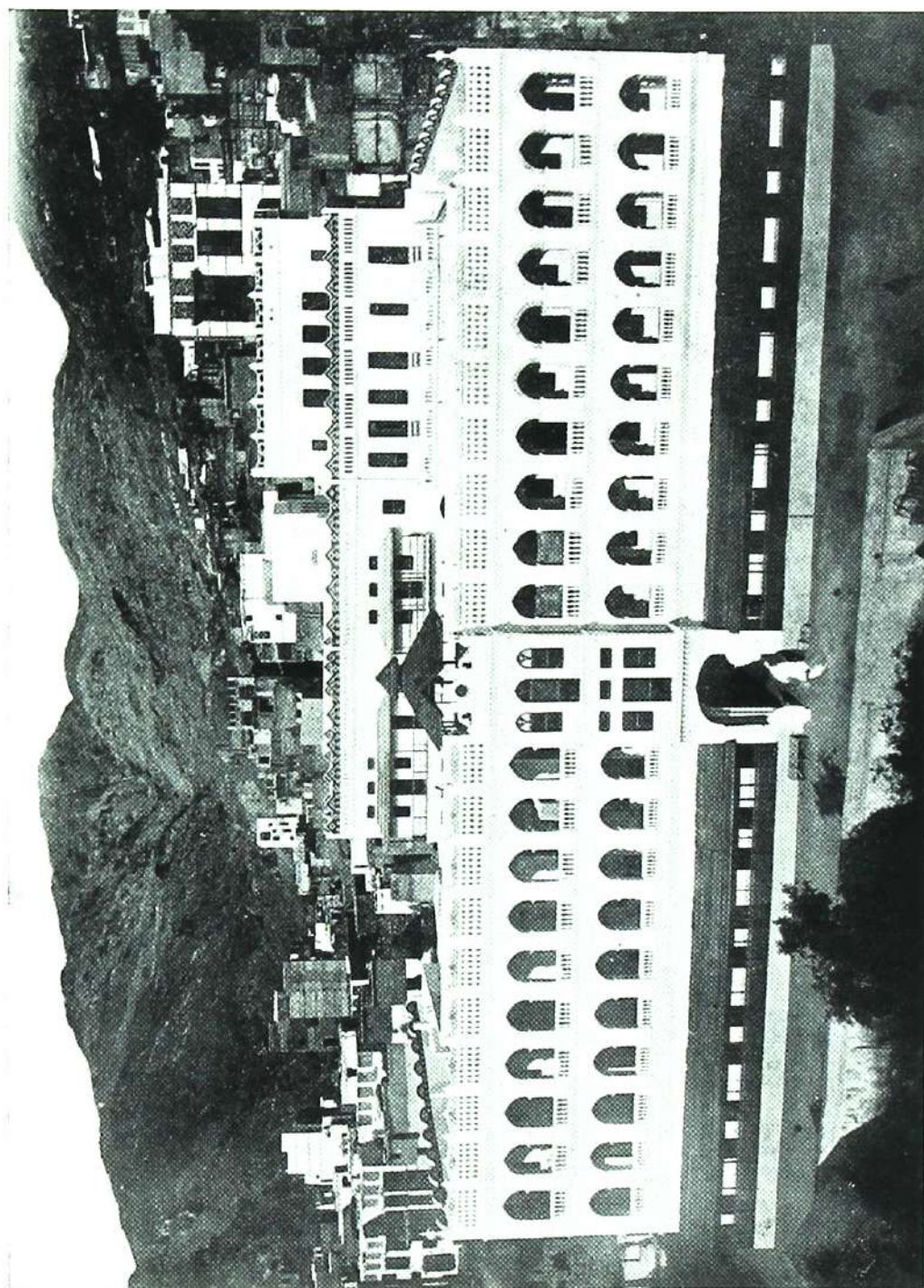
worthily represented by the members of the Dawoodi Bohra community.

For the proper conduct of the affairs of the Dawat, *i.e.*, an Imperial Establishment that commands Ecclesiastical and Civil authority, His Holiness has his own ministers and secretaries in charge of its various departments. His Holiness appoints his deputies, called Amils, in every city and town throughout the world where his followers live, and thus he personally maintains a direct and constant contact with them. Often high dignitaries are deputed on tours of inspection throughout the territories inhabited by the Dawoodi Bohras.

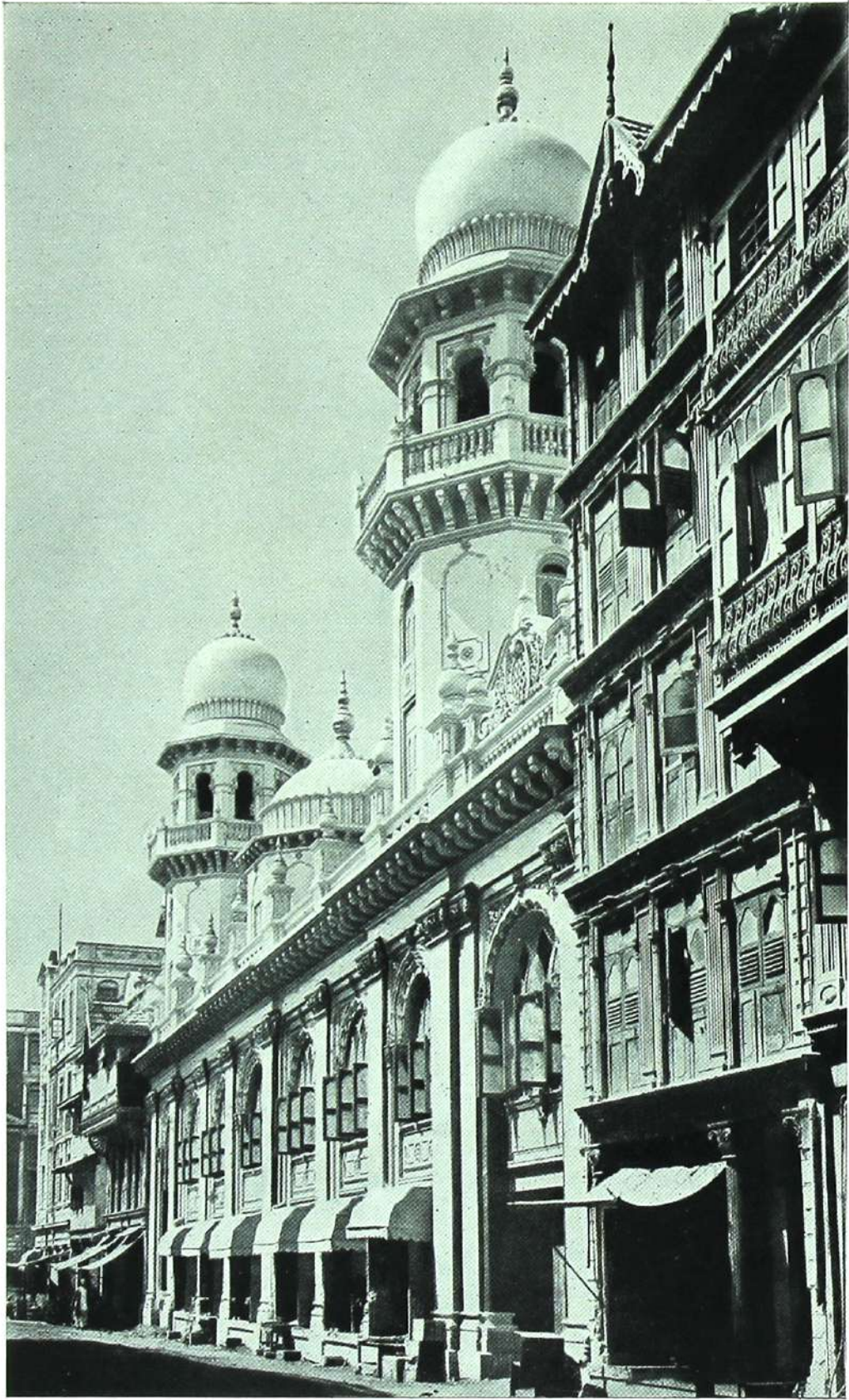
Arabic Treatises of His Holiness

In spite of his multifarious duties His Holiness writes every year, during the holy month of Ramzan, a brochure in Arabic, covering more than 200 pages, on religious and philosophical subjects for the benefit of his followers. These writings testify to his mastery over Arabic literature and Islamic culture, and in them he explains the mysteries of the faith in rich and eloquent language. They are marvellous masterpieces illustrative of his command over the Arabic language. The *initium* in some of them covers several pages without “*ALIF*” (the first letter of the Arabic Alphabet), while others are entirely devoid of dotted letters.

His Holiness has travelled extensively throughout the length and breadth of India—from Bombay to Calcutta and Kashmir to Colombo—and visited cities, towns and villages inhabited by his followers with a view to ministering to their spiritual and social needs.



El-Mahal-Us-Saifi, built at Mecca (Arabia) at a cost of seven lacs of rupees—134 Hippi.



Ghurrat-ul-Masajid, Bombay—1345 Hijri.

The Munificence of His Holiness

The charity and benevolence of His Holiness know no bounds and he has always at heart the sympathetic consideration of the wants of the needy who approach him for relief. Amongst his charities for the benefit and comfort of his people, so dearly beloved to him, a palatial rest-house at Mecca and a great mosque in Bombay, *viz.*, El-Mahal-us-Saifi and Ghurrat-ul-Masajid respectively, are striking monuments of his princely generosity. The late Lord Headley, the celebrated Moslem peer of England, who was His Holiness' guest during his visit to India in 1928, paid a visit to the mosque and described it as one of the best specimens of Islamic architecture. His Lordship was particularly impressed with the arrangements made for ladies for offering prayers and attending religious congregations, in strict observance of the *Parda* system as enjoined by Holy Islam.

Every Islamic Institution, Madrasah or Orphanage in India or abroad, that has besought His Holiness' help, has invariably benefited by his cheerful and generous response. It is difficult in a brief sketch like this to enumerate all his bounties, so only a few of them are mentioned here.

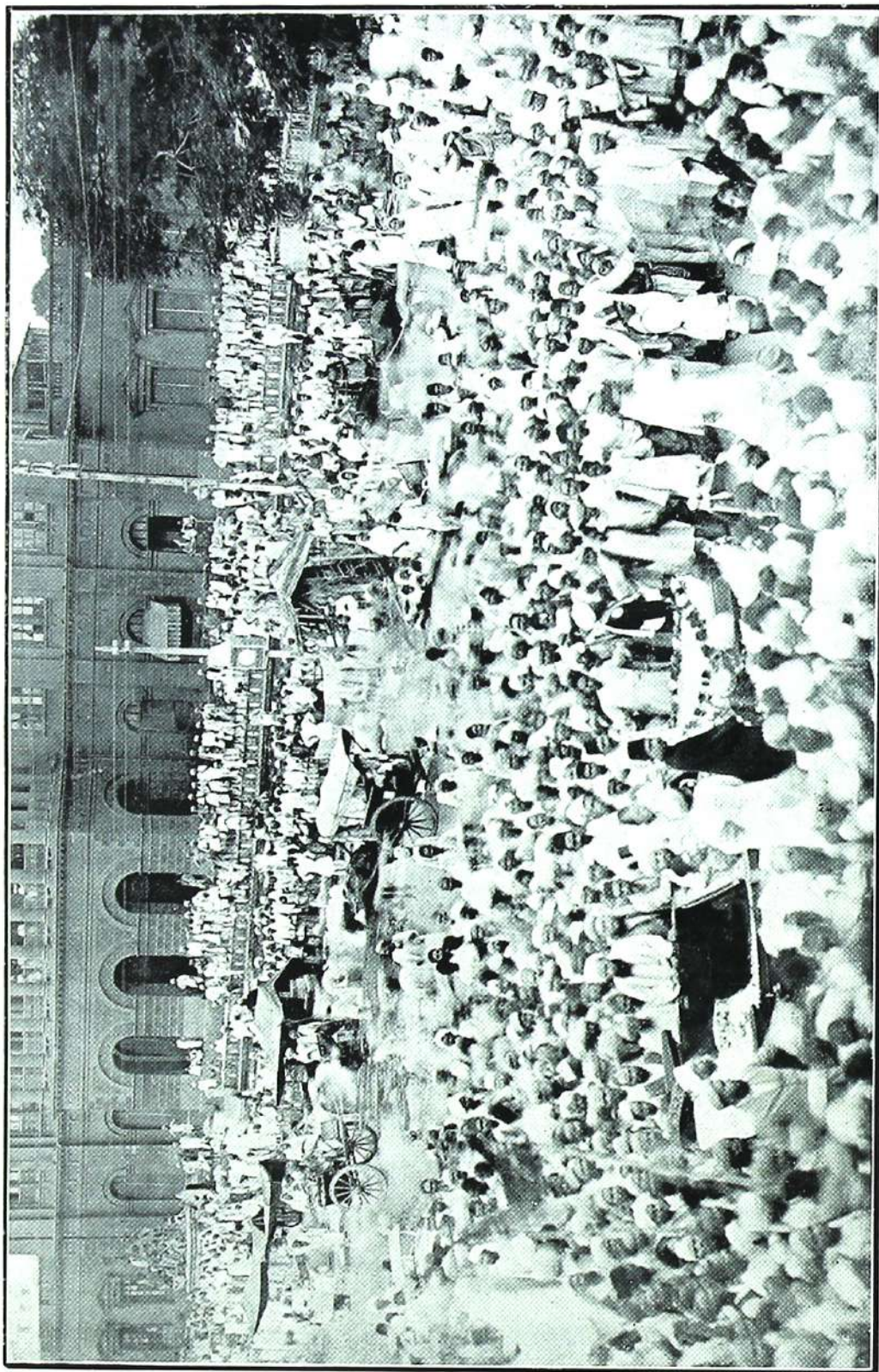
His Holiness contributed a large sum towards the construction of the Holy Masjid-e-Aqsa at Jerusalem and gave munificently to the Smyrna Relief and the Mopla Funds. The Muslim University at Aligarh, the Shia College at Lucknow, the Madrasatul Islam at Karachi, the Anjuman-e-Islam School and Orphanage at Madras, the Anjuman-e-Islam High School at Nagpur, the Islamic College and Orphanage at Calcutta, the Arabic and Oriental College, the Tibbi and Vedic College and



The A. G. G. at Quetta invited His Holiness to a Tea-Party--1929 A.D.

several minor institutions at Delhi and elsewhere throughout the country have received and continue to receive his generous financial assistance either in the shape of scholarships or annual donations. He has contributed liberally to, and in some cases borne the entire cost of, many a conference, educational and otherwise, which has been held in Islamic interests. The Tabligh-e-Islam Movement, the Moslem Federation, the Muslim League and other Muslim political institutions have always received his hearty co-operation and goodwill.

The generosity and sympathy of His Holiness are not confined to his people or Islam alone. Non-Islamic Institutions have also had their full share of his bounty. His handsome donations to the Sarvajanic Education Society of Surat, the Vanita Vishram Girls' School of Ahmedabad, the Government High School at Surat and Sir J. C. Bose's Research Institute at Calcutta are a few striking examples. In 1926 His Holiness contributed Rs. 51,000 towards the Bombay Hospital Fund, with the stipulation that, in spending it, Islamic susceptibilities should be fully respected. The Viceroy's Quetta Relief Fund, the Gujerat Flood Relief Fund, the Silver Jubilee Fund and diverse other Public Funds of varying importance have all received his hearty response from time to time.



The Procession in honour of His Holiness at Delhi—1930 A.D.

By Courtesy.

Delhi and Simla welcome His Holiness

In the year 1930, when His Holiness went to Simla to meet His Excellency the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, he was the recipient of a princely welcome from the public. Many functions were organised in his honour, such as presentation of addresses, At Homes and Tea Parties, which were attended by distinguished personalities present in Simla, including His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief, high officers of the Imperial and the Punjab Governments and several Ruling Princes. His Highness the Nawab of Malerkotla's party at Mashobra and the public function at the Cecil Hotel were the most noteworthy.

On his way back from Simla on 2nd August, 1930, His Holiness was given a great public welcome at the Imperial City of Delhi. There was not an Anjuman or Association, Organisation or Committee of an Islamic body, that was not represented in the grand reception. The platform of Delhi Central Station was one mass of surging humanity and those who could not get standing space climbed on to the roofs of carriages of the special train conveying the honoured guest to have a glimpse of his divine person. He was received by the Muslim leaders, Government officials and other leading personalities of Delhi, and was taken round in procession

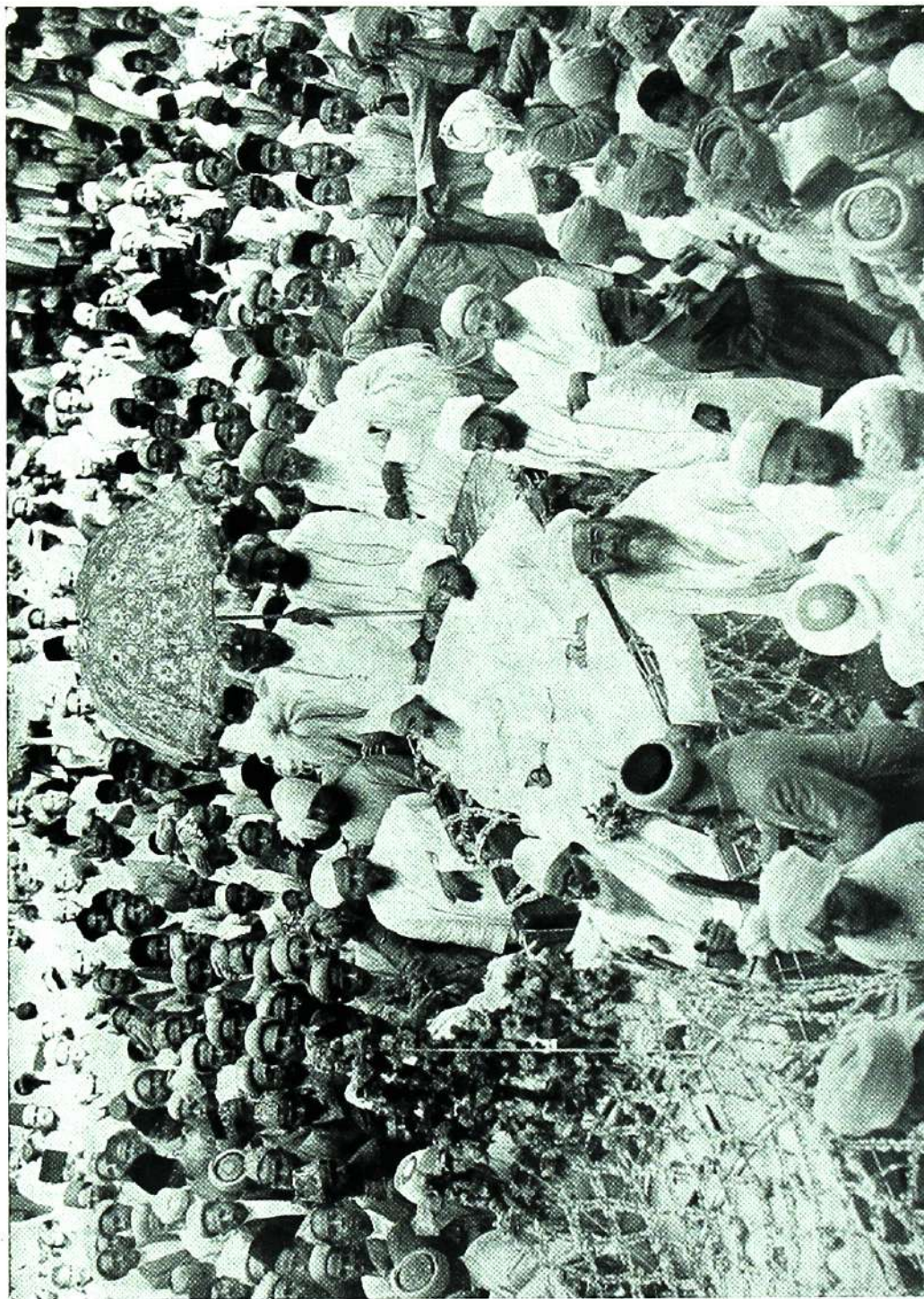
in a decorated car through the principal streets and bazaars of the city. The eager public came to see him in their thousands and gave him a thunderous ovation. The Jungi Lath Saheb's Kothi, (the former residence of H. E. the Commander-in-Chief) where he stayed, was, day and night, the scene of innumerable visits from leaders and public men. His programme of engagements during his short stay in Delhi was crammed with various public functions, such as Tea and Garden Parties and visits to educational and industrial institutions.

Whilst in Delhi His Holiness was invited by Sir Muhammad Sulaiman (then a Judge of the Allahabad High Court) to visit the Muslim University at Aligarh, and by Shamsul-Oloma Moulvi Syed Najmul-Hasan to visit the Madresatul-Vaezeen at Lucknow. Owing to some pressing engagements in Bombay, however, His Holiness had most reluctantly to decline both the invitations.

His Holiness' Silver Jubilee

The 54th birthday and the Silver Jubilee of His Holiness' accession to the Pontificate were celebrated with great joy on 6th January, 1940, in all the important cities of India. Processions and congregations were organised and mosques and houses everywhere were brilliantly illuminated.

To commemorate the event his followers have established a Saifi High School in Bombay and funds have been raised in almost all the cities and towns



His Holiness with his Heir-Apparent, Prince Mohammedbhai Sahab Burhanuddin, in a Silver Jubilee Procession at Bhendi Bazar, Bombay—1940 A.D.

inhabited by the Dawoodi Bohras to erect fitting monuments. A hall is to be constructed in the Quadariyah High School at Burhanpur. At Poona and Sidhpur, foundations have been laid for erecting new buildings for their respective High Schools. In Ujjain, Cambay, Rutlam, Indore and Ahmedabad, either Maternity Homes or Hospitals are to be opened.

Such in brief have been the 25 years in office of **His Holiness Sardar Saiyedna Taher Saifuddin Saheb**, the Guide, Philosopher and Spiritual Father of the Dawoodi Bohra Community, whose kindness of heart and sympathy are universal in their application. His Holiness, a savant of extreme piety, mellowed by vast erudition and ripe experience, has verily outshone the long line of distinguished Dais. Long may His Holiness, the FIFTY FIRST Dai-l-Mutlaq or the Spiritual and Temporal Ruler of half a million of the Dawoodi Bohra Muslims, continue to be a shining star in India's spiritual firmament.



"Saifi-Mahal", the Residence of His Holiness in Bombay.

About the Author

 HAIKH Dawood Moulvi, M.A., the author of this booklet, died at the ripe age of 80, just before it was ready for publication. Providence decreed that this short, yet vivid, biography of **His Holiness Sardar Saiyedna Taher Saifuddin Saheb** should be a posthumous work, hence the proud privilege of fulfilling the last wish of the author to see to its publication has devolved upon me.

Up to the age of 22, the late author devotedly attached himself to the task of acquiring literary and theological education in Arabic and later entertained the idea of securing modern education in English. He matriculated in the year 1888 and joined the Aligarh Muslim College, passing his M.A., with honours in Arabic, in the year 1896 from the Calcutta University.

With these qualifications, he joined the educational service of His Exalted Highness the Nizam of Hyderabad, and served that State from 1896 to 1923.

Being a very broad-minded, kind-hearted, far-sighted and clear-headed worker for the community, he, after his retirement from the Nizam's service, devoted himself entirely to the educational uplift of his community.

Ever since his retirement, he had been contemplating to write a biographical sketch of the distinguished life of the present incumbent of the Holy Dawat. His idea was to bring out an authentic account showing the relations of His Holiness—firstly, with the Holy Dawat and the members of the community—secondly, with the

official and political world—and thirdly, with Islam and the general public at large.

A devout follower of the holy religion and an ardent believer in its established principles, his admiration for His Holiness virtually amounted to worship. Notwithstanding his advanced age, he spared no pains in collecting material for this book, which in itself will testify to the elaborate labour that he went through in its compilation, and also to his love and adoration for the Spiritual Father of the community. Verily, this last work of his life will ever remain a memento of his attachment to the Holy Dawat and its illustrious Head.

ABDULQAIYUM MULLA HABIBULLAH,

M.A., LL.B.

November, 1940.

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