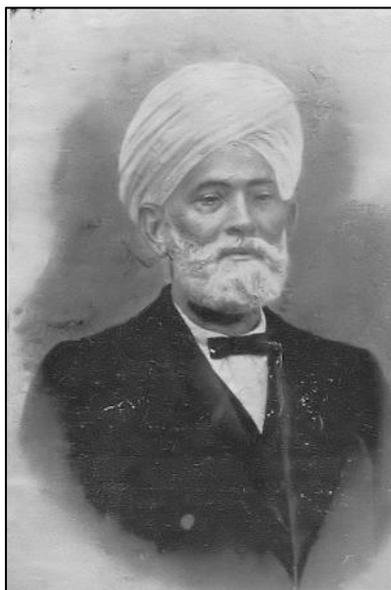




## Shaikh Rahmatullah



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Compiled by Dr Zahid Aziz

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### 1. Life Sketch

from the book *Yād-i Raftigān*<sup>1</sup>

Original writer: Maulvi Dost Muhammad<sup>2</sup>

The name of Shaikh Rahmatullah is foremost in the list of those persons who supported Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad from the earliest days of his mission, and for the rest of their lives they bore all kinds of difficulties for this cause and made sacrifices for it. He belonged to a respectable *qanoon go* family of the city of Gujrat in the Punjab, and was a well-known businessman of Lahore.

In the beginning he was a government employee on a monthly salary of ten Rupees. Later he opened a small shop in Anarkali Bazar, Lahore, which after some time was expanded into a larger business under the name of Bombay House. Due to his honesty and

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<sup>1</sup> *Yād-i Raftigān* is a compilation in Urdu of lives of prominent figures of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement, consisting of articles by different writers. Its first volume was published in 1964.

<sup>2</sup> The life sketch of Shaikh Rahmatullah was written by Maulvi Dost Muhammad (d. 1979), editor of *Paigham Sulh*, the Lahore Ahmadiyya Urdu organ. The writer had personally known Shaikh Rahmatullah and once travelled with him by ship to England, as he mentions in this account. A translation and adaptation of this article by Chaudhry Masud Akhtar of USA appeared in the *HOPE Bulletin* of the Lahore Ahmadiyya for April 2009, and some additions from it have been retained here.

well handling of business, Allah blessed his enterprise and Shaikh sahib rented a property on the Mall, Lahore, where he opened a store called 'English Warehouse'.

How his business was flourishing can be assessed from the fact that in July 1903 when *Sahibzada Abdul Latif Shaheed* was returning to Afghanistan, he, according to reports in *Al-Badar* etc., stayed in Lahore as a guest of Shaikh Rahmatullah, owner of Bombay House. The business in the Mall Road bungalow was started sometime after that date and by 1908 he had already purchased a commercial plot on the Mall Road where he had a plan to construct a two-storey building for his business. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad had promised to lay the foundation stone of the building but he passed away in May 1908. When the construction of the building was commenced in 1912, Hazrat Maulana Nur-ud-Din<sup>3</sup> laid the foundation stone in the presence of a large number of the Ahmadiyya community, and said many prayers for it. He said:

“My leader and my benefactor, the Promised Messiah, had promised Shaikh Rahmatullah that he would lay the foundation stone of his building with his own hands. It was the will of God that his promise should be carried out by a servant of his. The Shaikh sahib asked me to come. I am ill and in discomfort because of pain in various parts of the body, but there is an urge in my heart that I must fulfil the word of my beloved.”

He went on to add:

“There are other newly constructed buildings around this building and yet more are under construction but we have a special affiliation with this building. This relationship is both personal as well as community based. It is personal on account of the fact that the Promised Messiah had promised to lay the foundation stone of this building and a servant of his has fulfilled that promise. And it is community based on account of the fact that our *Jamaat* has a share in the building. Therefore, our members should pray from the depth of their hearts for its successful completion and that those who occupy this building may be righteous persons who love virtuous life. If they will be truthful, righteous, God fearing and believers, then Allah will multiply them and enhance their stature and as much as this building flourishes so much benefit our community will derive from it because there is a bond between the two”. (*Badr*, Qadian, 27th June 1912, p. 4–5).

In fact the business carried out in this building did prove much beneficial for the Lahore Ahmadiyya community, as is shown by the financial sacrifices made by the owner of this building and business.

As already stated Shaikh Rahmatullah had taken the Pledge at the hand of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in the very early days of the latter's claim, whereafter he ever continued to

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<sup>3</sup> He was Head of the Ahmadiyya Movement from 1908 to March 1914 after Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad.

render services to the cause of the Movement by his donations. Besides the sacrifices he made from time to time for the financial needs of the Movement, he used to regularly send 100 Rupees monthly to Hazrat Mirza sahib himself. In addition to that, on every Eid or other special occasions Shaikh sahib used to send him a new set of clothes. He continued this practice for the family of Hazrat Mirza sahib even after the latter's death, so much so that even after the division of the Ahmadiyya community into two sections (Lahore and Qadian groups) in 1914 he used to send some money for his family. Some years later Mirza Mahmud Ahmad, Head of the Qadian group, refused to accept it.

When the Promised Messiah made an appeal in 1903 for the construction of *Bait-ud-Dua* (special room for prayer), Shaikh Rahmatullah bore all the expenses of its construction. He was always a willing and generous donor for the cause of Islam and needs of the Movement, and many times his donations were in thousands of Rupees. According to Maulana Muhammad Ali, his donations exceeded one hundred thousand Rupees. After the split and the foundation of the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam Lahore in 1914, it was generous donations by him along with those from Dr Syed Muhammad Husain Shah and Dr Mirza Yaqub Baig that made it possible to run the new Lahore section financially.

For his personal devotion to the Promised Messiah, his dedication to the success of the Promised Messiah's mission and for his piety and righteousness, Shaikh Rahmatullah was held in great esteem by the Founder. Whenever he visited the Promised Messiah, the latter would rise to receive him. The Promised Messiah once made the following observations about him in the early days in a book:

"Shaikh Rahmatullah is a young, righteous and straight-forward man. He has a natural aptitude for true and sincere following [of his spiritual master], and for thinking in a good way about others, to such a great extent that through the blessing of this quality he can make great strides in this [spiritual] path. By temperament he is extremely humble and respectful, and signs of virtuousness are manifest in his appearance. He remains busy in service to his best. May Allah grant him a great share of taste of Divine love by saving him from the distractions of abominable things. Ameen, again Ameen." (*Izala Auham*, published 1891, page 808).

When Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad wrote *Al-Wasiyyat* (The Will) in 1905 and established the Sadr Anjuman Ahmadiyya Qadian he appointed Shaikh Rahmatullah as a member of its Council of Trustees and thereafter he remained a member of that body till 1914, actively participating in the affairs of that Anjuman. In 1914, at split of the *Jamaat* into two sections, he became one of the founders of the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam Lahore and was elected its vice-president, the position which he held until his death. On account of his vast experience and wisdom of decision making as an entrepreneur, he was a source of blessing for the Anjuman. He had the ability of reaching to heart of the matter quite quickly and solving complicated problems in a fine way. Thus the Anjuman benefited greatly from his opinion in the matters of running its day to day affairs.

Shaikh Rahmatullah was a highly devout and God fearing person to the extent that, be it pain or pleasure, hardship or comfort, he never forgot to remember Allah. In addition to regularly offering the obligatory prayers, he used to say the voluntary prayers, in particular the *Tahajjud* (post-midnight) and *Ishraq* (midmorning) prayers every day without fail. The writer of these lines had the occasion once to travel with him for about a month in a ship to England and also to observe his circumstances in England for three to four months.<sup>4</sup> On this basis, it would not be the least exaggeration to say that Shaikh sahib remembered Allah much and his heart was ever inclined towards Him. He had a very strong faith in Allah, and as result of this strength of belief, in spite of his enormous wealth he never forgot Allah even for a moment, and his love and devoutness to Allah ever kept increasing.

He used to lay great emphasis on *dua* (beseeching Allah in certain matters) and would himself pray everyday for many members of the community by their names individually, so much so that he included the names of some of those who had chosen to become disciples of Mirza Mahmud Ahmad. Events proved that many of his prayers were granted.

In connection with his business Shaikh Rahmatullah used to visit England almost every year. He would have visited it 17 or 18 times. Consequently, he had married a woman in England, and from this marriage there were two sons and two daughters.<sup>5</sup> They were in addition to his five sons and one daughter from his wife in Lahore. His descendants from his sons in Lahore are doing well in business.

A few days before his passing away, Shaikh Rahmatullah prepared a will whereby he declared all his children in Lahore and England as his heirs, who would receive their shares according to the Islamic law of inheritance. He also left a portion of his property as a gift to the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam, Lahore.

At the time of dictating his will, he addressed his sons in these words:

“The business I did was with Allah and I reaped great benefit from it. If you also do business with Allah, you too will benefit from it.”

Shaikh Rahmatullah suffered from diabetes since many years and used to take medicines for its treatment quite regularly but ultimately diabetes took its toll and became the cause of his death. A few days before his passing away, one day he had difficulty urinating, as a result of which poison spread in his body. Even in such a condition of severe discomfort he was so content that when asked how he felt and he would respond: “I am not suffering anything and I do not know why I am lying in bed.”

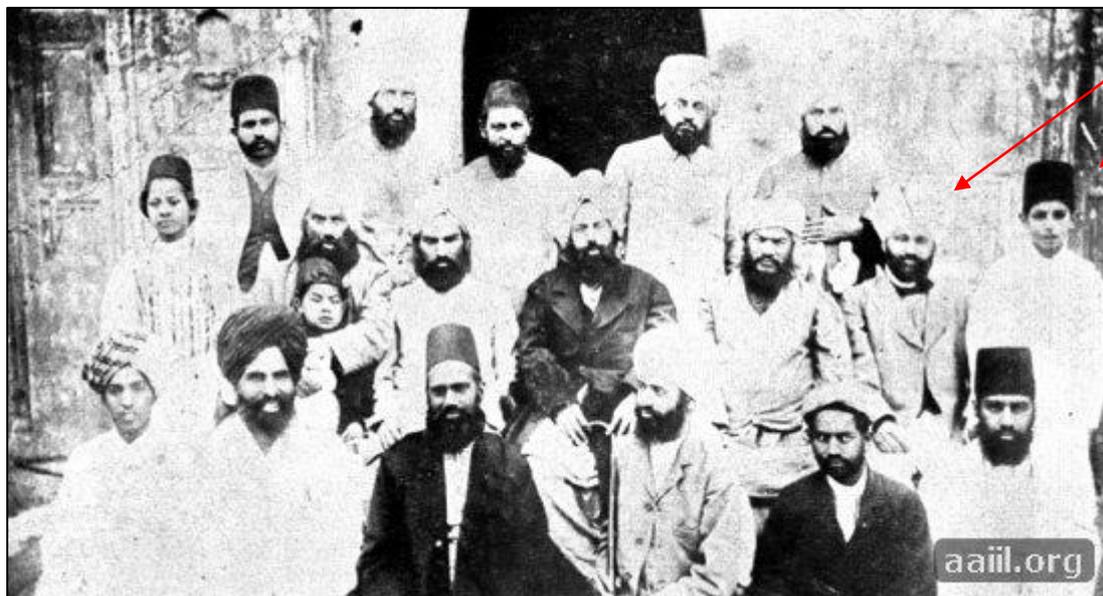
Before his death he was semi-conscious for some time and his near ones and friends were reciting the Holy Quran by his side when he breathed his last in a state of complete

<sup>4</sup> The “writer of these lines” was Maulvi Dost Muhammad. The occasion he mentions would be during 1919–1921.

<sup>5</sup> For more details about his wife and children in England, see later in this document under ‘4. Information on his British Family’.

calm and quiet. May Allah shower His choicest blessings on the soul of this servant of His religion and grant it rest in His highest bliss. *Ameen.*

## 2. In group photograph with Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad



*In this photograph Shaikh Rahmatullah is seated in the second row, in the right-most seat.*

*Standing next to him, wearing cap, is his son Shaikh Abdul Hameed.*

*Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is in the centre of the same row. The photograph was taken in Qadian, most likely taken between 1899 and 1902.*

## 3. Obituary in the *Islamic Review*

In the journal of the Woking Muslim Mission, the *Islamic Review*, published from the Woking Mosque, Surrey, England, the following obituary note was published:

### **In Memoriam Shaikh Rahmatullah**

We record with the deepest sorrow the death of Shaikh Rahmatullah, Vice-President of [Ahmadiyya] Anjuman-i- Isha'at-i-Islam, Lahore, who departed this life on the 2nd of March, 1924, at 12.45 p.m.

Shaikh Rahmatullah was among the most devout Muslims of our time, and the story of his career is full of instruction — as illustrating in a singularly striking manner how true religion and unswerving probity may yet go hand in hand with commercial prosperity. Starting with a salary of less than one pound per month, he gradually built up a colossal business, of which the cost of the premises alone ran into many thousands of pounds.

He was the founder of the now famous Bombay House and English Warehouse at Lahore, and of other outstanding industrial activities, and — what is particularly remarkable,

and may be commended as a concrete example of the essential truth of the message of the Holy Quran — he never took interest, or employed usury in any shape or form in any of his dealings. This, with him, was an abiding principle which Allah, in His mercy, amply justified.

Shaikh Rahmatullah visited England on no fewer than eighteen occasions. Not only was he an ardent supporter of the Mission [i.e., the Woking Muslim Mission], but it may almost be claimed for him that he should stand side by side with Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, the Mission's saintly founder; and while Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din was doing all the work of the London office of the *Islamic Review*, from editor to clerk, address-writer and stamp-sticker, Shaikh Rahmatullah was working in a precisely similar manner in the office at Lahore.

Until quite recently he acted as Honorary Treasurer of the Woking Muslim Mission; and it was the burden of advancing years alone that at length compelled him to relinquish that onerous responsibility.

His last words of advice to his sons — we may say to us all — were: "I started 'trading' with God, and He made me successful; and if you also will do the same, He will make you successful."

The outstanding feature in the noble life of Shaikh Rahmatullah was his sincerity. Simple in his habits, his religion and his daily life were one. He died respected by all — loved by all.

—*Islamic Review*, April–May 1924, p. 130–131.

#### 4. Information on his British family

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement, has mentioned Shaikh Rahmatullah's marriage in England at least twice.

1. In the compilation of the Founder's daily talks,<sup>6</sup> under the date "Friday, 21 November 1902", there is an item under the heading:

"The first Muslim child to be born in England"

It is reported there that the Founder "was enquiring from Shaikh Rahmatullah about his journey". It goes on to say:

"Shaikh sahib has been given another son by Allah, from his European wife. He has been named Abdullah in accordance with the advice of the holy Hazrat. After asking about the child, he [Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad] said: He is the first Muslim to be born in England."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> During his life these were published in the Ahmadiyya community newspapers every week or two weeks. Many years later these reports were collected in book form under the title *Malfuzat*.

<sup>7</sup> *Malfuzat*, v. 2, p. 537. Reported from Ahmadiyya community newspaper *Al-Badr*, dated 21 November to 5 December 1902.

2. In his book *Barahin Ahmadiyya Part 5*, written in 1905 and published in 1908, at one point Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad mentions names of various people in the West who had joined his Movement. Here he writes:

“The wife of a friend of mine, whose first name was Elizabeth, who is an inhabitant of England, has also joined this Movement.”<sup>8</sup>

We received an e-mail through our websites in August 2006 from Susanne Kumar, a paternal grand-daughter of Shaikh Rahmatullah from his English wife, enquiring about any information about him that we may hold. Later in August 2012 we received a similar enquiry from Sandra Hasan, one of whose mother’s cousins was married to a daughter of Shaikh Rahmatullah from his English wife. From these contacts we learnt the information, new to us, that the name of Shaikh Rahmatullah’s British wife was **Elizabeth Thomas**. They had two sons and two daughters whose names were: **Abdullah, Youseff, Saida and Maida**.

Susanne Kumar’s father was Youseff and she recalls: “My father told me that he used to stay at the Mosque in Woking as a young boy when his father came from Lahore.”

The UK Census record for the year 1911 shows an “Elizabeth Rahmatillah”, aged 34, along with others of the same surname (including Abdullah and Youseff) living in Llandoverly, Wales.

Through the kindness of these two contacts we received a photograph of Shaikh Rahmatullah taken in England and one of his wife Elizabeth. These are shown below:



<sup>8</sup> *Barahin Ahmadiyya Part 5*, p. 81 of the first edition.

Susanne Kumar also supplied us with the following photograph of the 'English Warehouse', the store on the Mall Road in Lahore owned by Shaikh Rahmatullah:

