PREFACE

“Why has the Islamic world not been providing men like Imam Ghazali since the fall of Baghdad”? The orientalists of the west are in the habit of wondering, not without a malicious glee, and it goes with out saying, not with out being echoed by their Eastern admires. What they have co for failed to notice is that by the early 17th century the centre of Islamic sciences had shifted to South Asia which was at that time also the seat of Mughal Empire, one of the greatest in world history, and of what is generally known as Indo-Muslim culture. It was this age which produced as great sholar and spiritual masters as Shaikh Ahmed Sirhindi, known as “Mujaddid-i-Alf-i-Thani”, and Shaikh Abdul Haq of Delhi, to be followed by Shah Waliullah of Delhi in the 18th century, and by his sons in the early 19th century. As British Imperialism tightened its grip on South Asia, the sacred task of promoting Traditional Islamic Sciences, and of renewing them which in this context can only mean, not fancifil innovation, but a re-statement was taken up by the world famous Dar- ul - Uloom of Deoband, under the guidance of Maulana Muhammed Qasim Nanautvi, Maulana Rasheed Ahmed Gangohi and Maulana Mahmudul Hasan, who were not only great scholar, but also great freedom fighter and spiritual masters.

It is this “golden chain” that Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi belongs. Born in 1863, at Thana Bhawan, a small Town to the east of Delhi, he received his education at Deoband, and at the age of twenty he himself started teaching Islamic sciences at Kanpur. Very soon he became famous as a teacher and as a spiritual guide, mainly through his sermons – hundrededs of which have since been appearing in a published form,
bringing knowledge and illumination to the Muslims of South Asia. But in 1898, retired to his home-town, and besides establishing a school of Islamic learning, revived the spiritual centre ("Khanqah") founded by his own master, Haji Imdadullah. For full twenty five years till his death in 1943, he led a life totally devoted to religious instructions and spiritual guidance, and to the writing of books in Urdu, Persian and Arabic – about a thousand, large and small – among which "Bihishti Zewar" is a household word among the Muslims of South Asia. His favorite subjects were the exegesis of the Holy Qur'an and Tasawwuf (Islamic esoterism), but he also made a valuable contribution to Islamic jurisprudence, to the science of (Ilmul Kalam). All in all, he emerged, in the sphere of Islamic sciences and Islamic spirituality, as great renovators (Mujaddid) specially meant to answer the intellectual and spiritual needs of the 20th century man.