CHAPTER VI

Conclusion.

On the basis of our discussion made in the foregoing chapters, it may be concluded that Mawlana Karamat Ali Jawnpuri undoubtedly was one of the most dynamic and resplendent personalities of Indian Muslim community particularly of nineteenth century. As an outstanding theologian, social reformer, sufi-saint, author and political thinker, he contributed much to the all round development of the Muslims of undivided India and other parts of the world. So far as the modest and symbolic life of Mawlana Jawnpuri and his manifold activities as a pioneer educationist and socio-religious reformer, are certainly beneficial and prototypical not only to the Indian communities but also to human society as a whole. Throughout his life, he endeavoured to remove the long-standing prejudices and un-Islamic practices that were prevalent among the Muslim society and played an important role in the process of modernisation of Indian Muslim community. Moreover, he was also one of the celebrated harbingers who tried their level best in bringing peace, progress and Hindu Muslim unity in India.

After his being born and brought up at Jawnpur, U.P., Mawlana Karamat Ali acquired perfect knowledge on various subjects of Islamic education and in due course, embraced the discipleship of Sayyid Ahmad Shahid of Rae-Bareli. He then started socio-religious reform works in Jawnpur and neighbouring places; but on the instruction of his spiritual mentor, the Mawlana arrived in Bengal in 1835 A.D. and spent the rest part of his life in the region where finally he expired at Rangpur in 1873 A.D. During this long period he made extensive tour programmes throughout the entire Bengal and different parts of Assam. Having travelled in Bengal,
the Mawlana found that Bengali Muslims were quite unaware of the creed of ‘Tauheed’ (Oneness of Allah). They knew nothing about the purity of Faith and the spirit of Islam. Some of the ignorant Muslims used to go to the places of idol-worship and bowed before the idols without any hesitation. Mass people were totally unmindful to their religious duties and most of them were plunged in various superstitious beliefs and unlawful practices. In short, the religious and social conditions of the Bengali Muslims were in worst order. Observing the pitiable socio-religious conditions of the Muslim community, Mawlana Karamat Ali took appropriate measures to improve the degraded religious, moral and social aspects of the people. He gave emphasis on the restoration of the original purity of Islam through imparting religious teachings to the masses and performing his reform works in the society. Accordingly, the Mawlana had achieved a marvellous success in purging the Muslim society of all those un-Islamic practices and superstitious beliefs which had grown out of the contact with Hinduism. He dignified the moral and spiritual position of men and taught them how one could purify his life, so as to enable him to attain success in this world as well as in the world hereafter. His teachings, demanding absolute loyalty to God, did not merely help to formulate intellectual position of men in relation to the strict monotheism of Islam but also imparted a realisation that true faith should be reflected in social life of the individual and that of the community at large.

However, his persistent efforts for the revival and restoration of the correct principles and practices of Islam, won a remarkable success among the ordinary Muslims of Bengal and Assam and unprecedented changes had occurred in the lives and thoughts of those people who had followed his preachings, in respect of Islamic life-style, culture and etiquette.
He not only elevated the common Muslims of Bengal and Assam to a better position of their religious lives; rather he upgraded the non-Muslim masses too to the status of human being in the real sense of the term by introducing the system of wearing clothes in a proper way. His teachings were so largely accepted by the people that there was hardly any village in Bengal where a few of his disciples could not be found. His success among the ordinary people, and the respect he received from all sections of the society, induced the government to think of utilizing his popularity for the furtherance of education among the Muslim masses. Besides, on account of his influential preachings and persuasive sermons, thousands of non-Muslim people had embraced Islam in his hand. Mawlana Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, a renowned scholar of twentieth century Islamic world, had been found to have mentioned that only in East-Bengal more than two crores misguided people had received right guidance from Mawlana Karamat Ali and more than forty thousand men had embraced Islam in his hand.

The Mawlana achieved a great name and fame as an orator and eloquent speaker. In eloquence and oration, he was a matchless model of excellence. His scholastic addresses were very often remembered with great reverence by the scholars of latter period. He had a deep insight in the prevailing socio-religious conditions of the country including its politics and took adequate measures as per demand of the situation. He also acquired a significant repute as a prolific writer in Arabic as well as Urdu. Some of his valuable works depict the vast horizon of his knowledge and wisdom in the various fields of Islamic learning. Particularly, he attained a great fame in writing the books on Islamic jurisprudence and accurate knowledge of ‘tajwid’ (art of reciting the Holy Quran). One of his works ‘Miftah al-Jannat’, has run through
numerous editions and is accepted in Indian sub-continent as a correct statement of Islamic principles. His writings are very simple and straightforward easy to grasp for the common people of little education.

The British colonial administration in India and some administrative policies adopted by them brought various socio-economic and religious crises to the life of the Indian people, particularly of Muslim community. Specially, the revenue and the employment policies of the British government had begun to reduce the Muslims into poverty and submerge their higher classes in the lower social strata. After losing administrative power, being evicted from revenue-free estate, remaining at far distance from trade, staying far behind from modern education and being deprived of government jobs, the Indian Muslim community stood in a state of extinction. There was prevailing confusion and disorder in every sphere of their lives and the links that coordinated their material, cultural, intellectual and spiritual development, had been suddenly broken into pieces leaving the Muslim people perplexed and abashed without any sense of higher ideology. In short, under the British rule, the Indian Muslims were like the sheep without a shepherd. This deplorable condition was seriously observed by some thoughtful Muslim leaders which ultimately created strong resentment in them favourable to the growth of a revolutionary conception. As a result, the Muslim leaders of the time tried to overcome these crises by re-asserting the true spirit of Islam and by introducing socio-religious reform in the society. One group of the Muslim leaders took the decision to overthrow the British from India by developing a spirit of 'Jihad' amongst the Muslim gentry through imparting true Islamic education while another group favoured to carry on armed-struggle against them. On the other hand, Shah Abdul Aziz, the eldest son of Shah Waliullah who was a
renowned ‘alim’ of the time, issued a ‘fatwa’ in 1803 A.D. declaring all parts of India ‘Darul-harb’ (a country of enemy) as the country was conquered and ruled over by the British East-India company and thereby he recognized the legality of ‘jihad’ to defend the cause of Islam.

In this race of reform programme for the regeneration of Islamic spirit in the society, Bengal did not lag behind others and the Bengali Muslims also played a vital role in promotion of the socio-religious reform movements, emerged during the nineteenth century A.D. The reformist sentiment had become almost endemic in the Muslim society of Bengal and at least four well-organised reform movements had gained wide acceptance amongst the Muslim masses. These movements were (i) Faraizi (ii) Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah or Wahhabi (iii) Taaiyuni and (iv) Ahl-i-Hadith. Inspite of some fundamental conflicts among these reformist groups, all the movements mainly intended to purge the Muslim society of its age old un-Islamic beliefs and practices. But in course of time, the Faraizi and the Wahhabi movements were fully or partially influenced by the ‘fatwa’ of Abdul Aziz and directly or indirectly both the movements involved in an open conflict with the British government. They had begun to campaign for the holy war against the British which brought the doctrine of ‘jihad’ to great prominence and overshadowed other aspects of their reform programmes. On the plea of ‘Darul-Harb’, they also suspended the congregational prayers of ‘Jumah’ and ‘Id’ in Bengal and held that it was obligatory for the Muslims, either to migrate from the country or undertake the ‘jihad’ against the Christian rulers in India. Thus, both the movements came into direct conflict with the British administration. Then the British government took their anti-British hostilities more seriously and adopted a firm decision to suppress the movements with iron-hands by means of arrest, detention, trial
and decrees imposed on the accused for rebellion against the Queen of England. As a result, thousands of Muslim religious leaders were inflicted to capital punishment, transportation for life and heavy sentences of imprisonment. Many of the prisoners were kept in separate solitary confinement under inhuman conditions, some of them were hanged mercilessly and others were deported to certain horrible islands. Particularly, after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, the Muslims were ruthlessly oppressed and had been deprived of Government opportunities in every walk of life, as the Muslims had taken a more prominent part than the Hindus in the Mutiny. These bold steps taken by the British authority against the rebellious groups, had brought about a significant change in the attitude of some Muslim leaders and they repudiated the doctrine of ‘jihad’ and its validity in British India.

Anyway, after a deep consideration on the perilous situation of Indian Muslims, from about the middle of 1860 A.D. a section of Muslim socio-religious leaders of India, had started to reject the principle of ‘jihad’ against the British authority. They began to follow the new political strategy which was based on applying the principles of reconciliation and cooperation with the British government. In this context, the efforts of Nawab Abdul Latif Khan, Mawlana Karamat Ali Jawnpuri, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Syed Ameer Ali and Sayyid Amir Hussain, the personal Assistant to the commissioner of Bhagulpore, are worthmentioning. They took leading parts in denouncing the concepts of ‘Darul-Harb’ and the validity of ‘jihad’ against the British rule in India. They tried to convince both the British authorities and the Muslims that according to the Islamic law, ‘jihad’ against the rulers was unlawful, because the Muslims were mustamin or protected under the British administration.
The Ta’aiyuni leader Mawlana Karamat Ali Jawnpuri who was quite indifferent to the doctrine of ‘jihad’ and dissension against the ruler, after the failure of the great Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, had joined hands with the Muslim modernist reformers of Bengal and Aligarh. He was more moderate in his attitude and hence tried to steer a middle course between rigid fundamentalism and acceptance of current practices. He became afraid that if the Muslims continue their antagonism against the mighty British ruler, a day will come when the Indian Muslim community will be extinguished from Indian soil. Because, in one hand, the government had taken a revengeful policy to restrain the Islamic fundamentalism and other revolutionary activities with iron hand; on the other, due to the massive devastations, tortures, imprisonments and the suppression of civil and political rights, executed by the British ruler, a section of the Muslim intelligentsia wanted to migrate to other Islamic countries. So, after a profound deliberation on the critical situation on Indian Muslims, at the behest and patronage of the Muhammadan Literary Society of Calcutta, Mawlana Karamat Ali came forward to issue a ‘fatwa’ declaring India ‘Darul-Islam’ and at the same time ‘jihad’ against the British unlawful. He announced in the ‘fatwa’ — “Now, if any misguided wretch, owing to his perverse fortune, were to wage war against the Ruling powers of this country, British India; such war would be rightly pronounced rebellion; and rebellion is strictly forbidden by the Muhammadan law. Therefore, such war will likewise be unlawful; and in case any one would wage such war, the Muhammadan subjects would be bound to assist their Rulers, and in conjunction with their Rulers, to fight with such rebels.” Thus, in a crucial juncture of Indian Muslim community, the Mawlana in collaboration with Nawab Abdul Latif Khan Bahadur and others, persuaded the Muslims neither to carry on futile
antagonism against the British ruler nor to migrate from India, as the Muslims had not been obstructed from exercising their religious rights. He also strongly pleaded that since the Christian rulers did not obstruct the religious functions of the Muslims, the country continued to be 'Darul-Islam', as it was before the advent of the British; and hence there was no need of 'jihad' on the part of the Indian Muslim community. Amongst the Muslim theologians of India, the Mawlana appears to be the first to realise the futility of militant antagonism against the British rule and come forward to declare it openly in public. He, therefore, campaigned for loyalty to the established government and for reconciliation between the rulers and the ruled. At the academic level, he approved of studying the English language for Indian Muslims. He also advocated that acquiring the knowledge of western science and learning was the need of the hour.

It may, therefore, be easily concluded that Karamat Ali's reform movement as well as his historic 'fatwa' definitely had added a golden chapter to the intellectual history of Bengal, in particular and India in general, which requires volumes to assess its various effects on the religious, social, cultural and political life of the people of this Sub-Continent. The Mawlana was at a time, a great thinker, a prominent theologian, a devoted social reformer and an ardent educationist. He spent his entire life in the service of the people. With his dynamic and charismatic personality he infused new life into the Muslim society and awakened the people from ignorance and inertia. Both the Muslim as well as the non-Muslim scholars of India and abroad, appreciated his neutral and munificent services to all sections of people and his efforts for the progress of peace, equality, fraternity and universal brotherhood, which
the Mawlana himself and his disciples demonstrated in public and practised in their private lives, were acknowledged by them.

Anyway, the present work, though neglected hitherto by most of the scholars of India, is undoubtedly a tremendous work and it has been chosen by us not only as an interesting topic but also as the most beneficial subject for the people of India in particular and outside India in general. On the one hand, his manifold literary activities, socio-religious reforms, authentic preachings and sufistic sermons will be very useful for the inquisitive learners and the lover of knowledge on various branches of Islamic learnings and on the other, the peace-loving secular people will get ample inspiration from his magnanimous and impartial thought and outlook as well as his exertions for the cause of the national integration and communal harmony in the society. Moreover, his able leadership, prudence, perseverance and meaningful guidance would also develop plentiful mental dexterity in the intellectual capabilities of our young generation who will lead the human society in future. We hope and expect that the present work will certainly open the mind of enthusiastic learners and encourage them to undertake similar studies on some outstanding personalities, remained neglected by their predecessors.