

Some Aspects of Islamic Thought and Movements in the Sub-continent During 19th Century

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Despite the vicissitudes of Muslim political power in the sub-continent, Islam continued to sustain and reform itself. Undaunted by the local difficulties and changing circumstances the reformists, '*ulamā*' as well as *mashā'ikh* endeavoured to vivify Islamic thought from time to time. The role of Shaykh Abdul Haqq Muhaddith of Delhi, Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi and Shah Waliullah is unparalleled and significant in the development of Islamic thought in the subcontinent. It is because of their relentless perseverance of Shari'ah and efforts to dispel 'ignorance', pristine Islam became firmly rooted in the succeeding generations and continued to resist against the heretic and deviatianist tendencies. They sought to sweep away the theological and legal incrustations of the intervening centuries that had covered the true faith. The movement initiated and programme of reformation delineated by those above mentioned *mujtahidūn* for the resuscitation of Islamic thought and the social and moral uplift of Muslim society in the subcontinent, was continuously followed in later ages. At least they succeeded in kindling the flame that lighted the way of many who came after them and worked in different as well as difficult circumstances of their times for the preservation of religious beliefs and the ideological entity of the Muslim community which was in constant danger of being overwhelmed by an environment that could be described as an anathema to their cherished ideals. Hence in this paper we intended a brief exploration into the role and endeavours of the Muslim scholars for the revivification and their contribution

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in the development of Islamic thought and movement in the subcontinent.

After the death of Shah Waliullah, the religious mission was carried on by a band of pupils and disciples, which he had left behind, including his own sons, who were fully charged with the spirit of his movement. Shah 'Abd al-Aziz (1746-1824/1159-1239), the eldest of Shah Waliullah's four sons was able to succeed his father at a very young age of seventeen as the head of their ancestral college (Madrassa Rahimiyah). Like his father he was not only an eminent scholar, engaged in teaching, writing and training his pupils but was also anxious to reform his people. His younger brother Shah Rafi al Din (d. 1817) Shah 'Abd al-Qadir (d. 1814) and Abd al-Ghani, co-operated with him in resuscitating and strengthening the cause of Islam. Shah Waliullah's successors did not contend themselves with the placid mission of popularizing religious knowledge among the masses and imparting mystic insight to a chosen few. Nevertheless, they did their best to keep alive the idea that the system of *shari'ah* (law) was and should be the main foundation of Muslim society. They turned to the study of the Qur'an, popularization of religious knowledge, the creation of a new aspiration to study, understand and live according to the doctrines of the *shari'ah*. In order to disseminate and popularize the teachings of Qur'an among the less educated sectors of Muslim society, Shah Waliullah, who translated the Qur'an into Persian and his son's Rafi al-Din and Shah 'Abd al-Qadir translated the same into Urdu.¹

Shah Abdul Aziz vigorously followed the traditions of his father. However, the circumstances in which Shah Waliullah had carried on his movement had changed considerably. The evils against which his efforts were directed became more firmly rooted in the succeeding generations. The rapid political disintegration and social degeneration of the Mughal empire, taking the advantage of weakness of the central authority and disunity among the ranks of Muslim chiefs, Marathas, Jats, Rajputs and Sikhs in the northern western regions carved out independent potentates and dominated the scene. Besides a new threat to Muslim society was posed by the expanding power of the East India Company. No doubt emperor Shah 'Alam who had come under the influences of the company authorities had now freed himself from their "custody" and returned to Delhi early in 1772; but in the last quarter of the eighteenth century they were able to strengthen and consolidate

their hold on the extensive territories of Bengal and Bihar in the north and parts of the Deccan in the south. Under Wellesley (1798-1805), British imperialism became a vital force in the political life of sub continent.

Haydar 'Ali of Mysore and after him Tipu Sultan, symbol of resistance against British imperialism and zealous fighter in the cause of freedom, was defeated and killed in 1799. Then in the first decade of the nineteenth century, the successive victories of the British over the Sindhia enabled them to establish their influence at the imperial court in Delhi. In 1803 General Lake who commanded the British Army defeated Sindhia and offered to undertake the responsibility of protecting the emperor who was at the time under his influence, (Marathas who had previously exercised control over the emperor) and thus managed to enter the Mughal capital. It was soon realised by the emperor that he had been tricked, but it was now too late; almost every day witnessed a diminution of his power and dignity. In lieu of the crown lands, which were taken over by the company, he received an annual stipend or pension² (*Pishkash*). In the course of time Shah 'Alam and his successors were so completely demoralised that the Mughal court was soon reduced to a mere shadow of its former glory.

This cataclysmic loss of the Mughal power enervated the Muslims of sub continent, early efforts by Shah Waliullah to instigate Muslim rulers of the sub continent as well as neighboring rulers to make an concerted attempt to regain the control failed to produce desired results. Now the establishment of British authority was sure to kill the chances of the restoration of Muslim ascendancy which Shah Waliullah had been trying to make effective through an extensive programmes of political and socio-religious reform. "The emasculate throne of Delhi had been reduced to a mere legal myth but still considered the fountain of honour by Hindus and Muslims, and a patent of nobility under the imperial seal was as highly prized in the remotest provinces of Deccan as it had been in the days of Aurangzeb"³. Not with standing, Shah 'Alam and his successors Akbar Shah II (1806-37) and Bahadur Shah II (1837-57), completely demoralized, and in state of penury and helplessness, were inept and unable to lead and give direction. Realizing the lack of political authority, Muslim populace were confused about the legal position. Shah Abdul Aziz with his penetrating judgement and keen sense of observation,

removed the ambivalence about legal myth of Mughal sovereignty by issuing *fatwa* that the subcontinent was no longer *dār-ul-Islam*, a land where Islam enjoyed sovereign authority and political power, he declared that they were now in a land of warfare, *dar al-harb*. Owing to the fact, that the emperor [Imam al-Muslimin] at Delhi wields no authority and is utterly helpless and the real power was in the hands of the British. If certain areas had been left in native hands for administration, it was only because the British found it politic to do so. There are, indeed, certain Islamic rituals, e.g. Friday and 'Id prayers, *adhān* and cow-slaughter, with which they do not interfere. But that is of no account. They did not interfere with the observance of Muslim rites and practices because they did not want to but they had the power to do so, if they desired.⁴ By declaring sub continent *dar al harb* a land where Islam was not free.⁵ Shah Abdul Aziz cleared the perplexity, gave a clear direction for future action by bringing it to the notice of the Muslim population that they have been subjugated by Britishers. Implying that it was the duty of every Muslim to make all effort to restore former status of *dār al-Islam*. In no case should Muslim cooperate with the British in propagating false beliefs and un-Islamic practices and it was a mortal sin to help them to destroy Muslim lives or further subvert Muslim authority.⁶

This *fatwa* declaring the entire territory held by the British to be a *dar al-harb* was significant proclamation in the history of Islam in the sub continent. For the first time Muslims were facing such situation. After being for centuries the only full citizens of the state, Muslims discovered that they were an unpopular and vulnerable minority. This *fatwa* by Shah Abdul Aziz was in a way clear development in the Islamic thought itself. It gave a clear direction to the Muslims of sub continent for future action which according to Shah Abdul Aziz, is Islamically desirable, what is to be understood from the a *hadīth*, and in accordance with the principle of following the lives and actions of the venerable Companions and pious Khulafa.⁷ This *fatwa* against the British imperialism transpired into *Jihād* movement led by his pupil and disciple Sayyid Ahmad Shahid and Ismail Shahid (newpew of Shah Abdul Aziz).

Sayyid Ahmad (1201 - 46 / 1786 - 1831) was born at Rai - Bareli, lost his father Sayyid Muhammad Irfan, very early when he was only thirteen years. He

showed a little interest in reading and writing, spent considerable portion of his youth in sports and physical exercise. Early death of his father made it necessary for him to earn a living. At the age of eighteen he accompanied by a party of seven others young men related to him, went to Lucknow in search of a suitable employment. After three or four months of fruitless effort he left for Delhi with the intention of getting enrolled as a disciple of Shah Abd al-Aziz, who received him kindly and entrusted him under the care of his brother Shah 'Abd-ul-Qadir for receiving education. Where he studied elementary works on Arabic grammar and Hadith. The Sayyid did not distinguish himself as a scholar; but he had a power and cultivated intellect as his later discourses and letters testify to it.⁸ Shah Abdul Aziz in 1804 himself gave him spiritual training and guided on the path of the 'Chishtiyah', 'Qadiriya', and 'Naqshbandiyah' orders. In this spiritual field Sayyid Ahmad made remarkable progress; excelled within a short span of time and developed into a "mystic" of great eminence.⁹

After completing the course of Sufi training and discipline he left Delhi and returned to Rae Bareli. He did not stay here for long, ultimately in 1810 A.D decided to join the forces of the Pathan Leader Amir Khan in central India, and obtained considerable training and experience in guerrilla warfare. It is not easy to determine his motive, which promoted Sayyid Ahmad to join Amir Khan's service where he spent more than seven years and participated in real fighting. However, the thought of joining Amir Khan's camp come to Sayyid Ahmad after his spiritual training had come to a satisfactory level under Shah Abdul Aziz. And one does not find the burning desire for *Jihād* in the future leader of the movement before his attachment to Shah Abdul Aziz.¹⁰ It seems plausible that Sayyid Ahmad intended to give practical shape to the *fatwa* of Shah Abdul Aziz and organise *Jihād* movement against the imperialists. It was the independent position and army of 8000 men of Amir Khan, which drew Sayyid Ahmad to join him.¹¹ If it had been simply earning a livelihood, Sayyid Ahmad would not have abandoned the service of Amir Khan soon after he surrenders and made peace with the British. At the time of his departure from the Amir Khan's camp, he informed Shah 'Abdul Aziz that no useful purpose would be served by his further attachment to Amir Khan¹² and made a bee line to Delhi to have rendezvous with Shah Abdul Aziz. Whatever

may be the reason of his joining the Amir Khan's service, it certainly whetted his appetite for launching movement of *Jihad* on his own.

— Sayyid Ahmad reached Delhi on May or June 1818, by that time he possessed the necessary competence and experience as a soldier and had achieved reputation as an experienced mystic.¹³ Shah Abdul Aziz gave him warm welcome and found in him necessary qualities to lead the movement and execute the plan, which he had envisaged for the reassertion of Muslim faith and power in the sub continent.¹⁴ In order to further the leadership of his protégé, Shah Abdul Aziz directed everyone who approached him with the request for spiritual guidance to take an oath of fealty at the hands of the Sayyid Ahmad.¹⁵ First it was Mawlana Muhammad Yusuf of Phulat, who was a great son of Shah Waliullah's elder brother, Shah Ahl-ullah. After he reported that the Sayyid Ahmad was a competent preceptor, Mawlana 'Abd-ul-Haiy, son in law of Shah Abdul Aziz and Shah Ismail, son of Shah Abdul Ghani, entered the Sayyid's discipleship. Evidently, their enrolment as his disciples augmented considerably the position and prestige of Sayyid Ahmad and had tremendous impact upon the people. Furthermore, it was necessary to associate with him men who were among the foremost religious scholars of the sub continent commanding considerable respect for their erudition and would constantly offer him counsel.¹⁶

Sayyid Ahmad accompanied by his disciples seeking permission from his spiritual mentor Shah Abdul Aziz, who accordingly robed the Sayyid in his own apparel [white gown and black turban] set out on his first missionary tour.¹⁷ Like a roving missionary, he visited a number of towns in modern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Bengal (Northern India)¹⁸ and exhorted the people to live according to the *shari'ah*. According to his analysis of the situation the main cause of the degeneration of the Muslims lay in their getting away from the path of the real teachings of Islam. This in its turn was the result of the adoption by the Muslims of un-Islamic ideas and customs, borrowed from the Hindus and highly exaggerated, almost unbalanced, notions of some of the Sufi doctrines and practices. Thus went forth to preach against the abuses that had crept into the faith and practice of the Muslims of the sub-continent. His social and religious reformist movement received overwhelming response of the Muslims. Wherever he went people turned out in hundreds to

receive him, listened his sermons; magnetized by his charismatic personality, acknowledged him their spiritual guide by performing *bayat* (took oath of allegiance). Thus number of people became his disciples, throughout the north of India. Sayyid Ahmad's missionary endeavor of reformation produced encouraging results. 'It brought release from superstitious idiotic or economically ruinous practices, the number of which had been increasing; it promoted a rational way of looking at the affairs of life. In the field of religious observance, it swept away the objections to the performance of the pilgrimage. In social life, it initiated the struggle against the sentimental objection to widow remarriage, which had almost acquired the force of law, and it was a courageous and stimulating reaffirmation of the Islamic doctrine of equality. It began, in fact, a movement of reform, whose momentum lasted for generation.'¹⁹

Sayyid Ahmad on 30 July 1821 set off for *hajj* accompanied by a large party including a number of women. He made this journey much publicized, invited his disciples from several places and opted to go via rather longer route of Calcutta. For the first time in history of Muslim India, *hajj* was performed with such a splendor and enthusiasm, with an intention to revive this obligatory practices which in India had long passed into desuetude.²⁰ Soon after his return in 1824 he started his preparations for *Jihād* against the imperialists in sub continent. Finally in 1826 Sayyid Ahmad along with his disciples left for North West Frontier (now Pakistan) to establish military base for launching campaign, seems strategically appropriate, and there could had been no politically as well as geographically better starting point.²¹ They took on the Sikh kingdom of Punjab first which had been widening there controls over the area; were extremely oppressive and had persecuted and vilified the Muslims of the region. Sayyid Ahmad's *Jihād* movement obtained considerable success in early skirmishes against the Sikhs. They tried to reform the society on the *shari'ah* lines, and proclaimed the Islamic caliphate in the area under their influence. But apathy towards the implementation of *shari'ah* rules; tribal jealousy and covetousness of the local leaders, on whose support Mujahideen were rather supposed to relay, sapped the vitality of Mujahideen forces. With the result Mujahideen forces had to suffer many losses. Sayyid Ahmad disgusted by the machination and perfidy of tribe's men of Northwest frontier, decided to shift

his base to Kashmir and Hazara. Finally *Jihad* movement, after five years of long and assiduous struggle in May 1831 culminated in the martyrdom of Sayyid Ahmad and Shah Ismail along with hundreds of disciples at Balakot. History bears evidence that the soil of the sub continent had not witnessed the real Islamic *Jihad* before them.²²

The *Jihad* movement of Sayyid Ahmad Shahid and his disciples directed initially against the Sikhs (usurpers of power and perpetrators of excesses against Muslims in Punjab and surroundings) but intended, ultimately, to be converted into war against the British imperialists in sub-continent. The Military campaign of Sayyid Ahmad Shahid, however, apparently failed to attain the larger objective but it triumphed in keeping alive the smoldering embers of hatred against foreign rule. In Bengal Mir Nithar 'Ali commonly known as Titu Mir, a well known Calcutta wrestler led similar resistance movement. The landlords imposed a tax, which was quite heavy for a poor peasant on each of them, which came to be known as the Beard tax, for all of them wore beards. Titu Mir, who reportedly had come under the influence of Sayyid Ahmad Shahid, led a campaign which gave rise to a number of minor riots and ultimately Titu Mir fell fighting against a British military contingent which has been sent to crush his uprising. Later *Jihad* against the British occupation was carried on intermittently for long even after the 1857-8.

The movement initiated by them can still be seen at work in the sub continent. This movement became a thorn to the British rulers, who labeled it "wahabis". To forbid people from joining Mujahidin forces; and create confusion and split because 'Abd ul Wahhab and his followers had incurred opprobrium in the Muslim world including India, predominantly Hanafi.²³ The European historians especially W.W.Hunter in his book *Indian Musalmans* had dubbed, a derogatory label 'militant reformist movement' of Sayyid Ahmad as 'wahhabi' and 'wahabism as synonymous with rebellion against the British government'. They held the view that while performing *hajj*, Sayyid Ahmad Shahid fell in with the teachers of the 'wahhabi' sect and was deeply impressed by the doctrine preached by Muhammad ibn 'Abdul Wahab.²⁴ Sayyid Ahmad's had pilgrimage to Mecca in 1822-23, ten years after Muhammad 'Ali of Egypt had conquered and petered out the so-called 'Wahabis' and suppressed their impact. Any body subscribed to Wahabis' was severely

punished.²⁵ Although some of the Sayyid's ideas are strikingly similar to the 'Wahabi' doctrines, Yet, both the movements seek to reform Muslim society in their respective lands in a different way. The Sayyid Ahmad's movement was based on Shah Waliullah's ideas, but in different circumstances and with a greater emphasis on the 'purification' of Islam from un-Islamic beliefs and practices, especially those borrowed from the Hindu society. Further more Sayyid's *Malfuzāt* (utterances) edited by Mawlana 'Abd al-Hayy and Shah Ismail, and latter's own work *Taqwait al-Imān*, which are our main authorities on his teachings had already been compiled before he left for Hijaz. The two reformist movements of 'Arabia and India differed on some important issues which cannot be overlooked by any historian. While the former movement totally rejected mysticism, denouncing it as a later accretion, the Indian revivalist movement represented by Shah Waliullah and Sayyid Ahmad Shahid was nourished by rich traditions of *tassawwuf*. The followers of Sheikh Muhammad Ibn 'Abdul Wahab were almost Hambalites, which those of Indian reformers belonged to the Hanafite school or accepted the principle of the primacy of the *Hadīth* over the rulings of all the four juristic schools of Islam. Thus the views expressed by some writers, notably William Hunter, that he took inspiration from 'Wahabi' is not tenable. Reformist movements from Sayyid Ahmad on wards, Faraidi's as well as Karamat Ali's movements in India are loosely spoken of as Wahabi. But this is without warrant. None of them was organically connected with the movement, started in Arabia by Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab (1703-87), which sought its inspiration from Imam ibn Tayyimah of the Hanbali school of thought, who was a literalist and puritanical in tendency. Many of the Indian movements followed the Hanafi and the Shafii school and expressly disclaimed or even criticized or attacked the 'wahabi' rejection of *tasawwuf*.

The significance of the political aspect Sayyid Ahmad Shaid's movement in its historical perspective has completely overshadowed the importance of his efforts to introduce socio-religious reform. It was, however, only in the last five or six years of his life that he devoted his exclusive attention to organizing the campaign against the Sikhs and that too under the urgency to stop their persecution of Muslims. Intrinsically, a reform movement which culminated in *Jihad*. A careful examination of the Sayyid Ahmad's *Malfūzat* compiled and published under the

title, *Sirāt-al-Mustaqim*, edited by Mawlana Abd al-Hayy and Shah Ismail, leaves no doubt that he was a Sufi Shaykh both by belief and practice as Sir Syed Ahmad Khan who wrote in his *Athar al sa nadid*²⁶ Only fifteen or sixteen years after his death, he was included in the list of the leading mashaikh of his time. According to Sayyid Ahmad Shahid's analysis of the situation, like Shah Waliullah, the main cause of the degeneration of the Muslim lay in their getting away from the path of the real teachings of Islam. As a result of adoption of un-Islamic ideas and customs by the Muslims borrowed from the Hindus notions of some of the sufi doctrines and practices got spread by irresponsible pretenders who are referred to as "polytheists behaving like Sufis".²⁷ Thus according to him, the resuscitation of Muslim society in all its phases could be achieved only through a campaign of socio-religious reform.

Among many other topics *Malfuzāt* contains a good discussion on their spiritual mode of Islamic thought, "*tassawwuf*", believed to be permeable to heretic and pernicious ideas, and responsible for the ruin of Muslim society. Therefore, its reformation indispensable. In the first chapter of this book the author elaborates the distinctive features of the two paths *tariq-i-nubuwwah* (way of Prophet) and *tariq-i-wilāyah* (way of the *wali*). And the follower of the path of *tariq-i-wilāyah* which is also referred as *hubb-i-'ishqi* dissociate himself from everything except his beloved. He shows the lack of interest in mundane things. His excessive devotion to his *murshid* (guide) not because he was his guide and source of Allah's grace on him but because it was the demand of love.²⁸ Reference is also made to the fruits of the *hubb-i-'ishqi* of which the most significant is the attainment of the state of *fana'* when a person feels bound to have a faith in the doctrine of *wahdat al-wajud*.²⁹

Tariq-i-nubuwwah, according to him, arises from the consciousness of the fact that for the fulfillment of his needs and requirement man depends entirely on the grace of Allah, the real giver. Thus while concentrating on the study of his word, which enlightens his intelligence and consciousness and purges them from evil ideas and desires to commit sins. With further contemplation, he feels ashamed and the intensity of his love and respect for him grows. This intense love, tempered by extreme respect overwhelms the body and heart of the *mumin*. Which is also

referred as *hubb-i-imāni*.³⁰ In this case the lover is so strong that his sole concentration is on obedience to his will³¹ and has complete trust in God (*tawakkul*). His exposition of *tawakkul* is that it does not mean giving up worldly means entirely but it signifies not placing ones trust on them.³² In conclusion, it has been emphatically, stated, that the two systems *tariq-i-nubuwwah* and *tariq-i-wilāyat* are not incompatible with one another in fact the *Hub-i-imani* is like a royal paced horse moving forward on the accepted path while the *hubb-i-ishqī* is like its various stages. In case of some persons *hubb-i-ishqī* being stronger it attracts them to the path of *wilāyat* and becomes the manifestation of their *hubb-i-imani* also, while in others the latter reappears when the excitement of the former abates. However some ignorant and idiot persons ignore the *hubb-i-imani* and laid stress on *hubb-i-ishqī* only. Thus in order to improve and set right the conditions born out of their misconceptions, it becomes inevitable to lead them towards the directives (*ahkām*) of the Qur'an and Sunnah in its letter and spirit.³³ Thereby giving preference to the *tariqah-nubuwwat* and *hubb-i-imāni* but at the same time having liberal attitude towards the *tariqah-wilāyat* or *hubb-i-ishqī* as its distinctive features. The demand of situation as perceived by Sayyid Ahmad Shaheed and his disciples to opt for resistance against external enemy side by side with internal reformation ultimately failed to succeed because of his death at Balakot in 1831. He did not get enough time to implement his projects of reform and which were only possible in an independent state. Nevertheless, his successors continued the work for some time and it cannot be denied that the movement left deep traces on the socio-cultural history of the Muslims of the subcontinent in the decades preceding the Revolution of 1857.

There were other reform movements which have been originated in different circumstances, fostered by men of very different characters and have left their mark in quite different degrees of Islamic thought in India. They were Haji Shariat-ullah (1781-1840), the founder of Faraidi movement of eastern Bengal and the Maulvi 'Karamat Ali of Janpur (d.1873). A mention of their role will illustrate the subsequent development in the field.

Haji Shariat-ullah born in the village of Bahadurpur, in the district of Faridpur, Bengal³⁴ and when eighteen years of age he went to pilgrimage to Mekha. Here

he stayed for twenty years as a disciple of Shaykh Tahir as - Sunbal al-Makki, who at that time was the head of the Shafi Sect at Mekha. On his return to Bengal, he began to preach the purity of faith and conduct and obtained a large following. He sought to rid his followers of un-Islamic practices and superstitions (*bidāt*) and concentrate on performing the *fara'id* (obligatory duties). It was for this reason that this movement came to be called Faraidis. Shariat-ullah denounced a number of Sufi practices, like the offering of *fatihah* for the souls of the dead, veneration of the Shaykh (sufi) and visits to their tombs. Like a true missionary he lived in the midst of common people like one of them. Exemplary selflessness and self effacement is evident by his discontinuing the use of term *pir* (priest) and *murid*, and substituting in their place the title *ustādh* (teacher) and *shagird* (pupil). The age long practice of *bayat* was given up and *tawbah* (repentance) was insisted upon in its place. It is for this reason of concordance of views on certain issues with those of Wahhabi ideas. He is regarded as having been imbued with the spirit of Wahabi reform during his stay at Mekha. However, it is certain that he adhered to the Hanafi school of fiqh.

Like Shah Abdul Aziz, he declared the subcontinent to be *dar al harb*, therefore, he argued, Friday congregational prayers and the celebrations of the two 'id festivals were not to be held in *dar-al harab*,³⁵ and Muslims should exert themselves to bring about normal conditions in which they could exercise their important rites of their religion. He did not, however, preached *jihad* against the British, perhaps because he considered such an undertaking outside the capabilities of his followers.

The establishment of the British influence over Bengal proved to be a signal for revolutionary changes not only in the political situation in the region, but also in the socio-economic and religious life of its people. British had a clear policy of depriving Muslim of their leading position they previously held. Many of the finer and more skilled industrial arts of India had been in the hands of Muslims, and they were ruined by the fiscal policy of the East India Company. The higher posts in pre-British India, in the army, in the administration, and in the learned professions had been in Muslim hands. Many of the higher and middle classes were reduced to beggary. The permanent settlement introduced in 1793 completely upset life in

rural areas by investing ownership of the land in the Zamindars who thus became land-lords instead of mere agents of the state as they had been under the Muslim government. Soon it became evident that the British policy in Bengal was based on the principle of placating the Hindus by enabling them to strengthen and stabilize their position particularly in the economic and administrative fields. With an improvement in their economic life Hindus who had previously been in the employment of Muslim rural gentry or had earned wealth as bankers and money-lenders had started purchasing land on a large scale. This change of hands in the possession of Zamindari lands had a far-reaching effect on the relations of the cultivators and new owners of land. Now the tenantry of eastern Bengal were almost Muslims, whom the exactions of their Hindu landlords had reduced to great poverty.

Haji Shariat-ullah took up cudgels on behalf of poor people against the landlords and told his followers to stop paying undue ceases and taxes. It gave this purely religious movement an agrarian touch. However the movement was further developed by his son and successors Mushin al-Din, popularly known as Dudu Main, (1819-62), who after 1838 led the movement started by his father, he had a genius for organisation and making his headquarters at Bahadurpur, and divided eastern Bengal into circles (*halqah*) appointing a *khalifa* (deputy) to each. He took a determined stand against the levying of illegal cases by landlord and indigo planters. The cultivators and village artisans responded enthusiastically to his preaching. He was too realistic like his father to advocate an armed struggle and tried to avoid a head-long clash with landlords.³⁶ But they implicated him in a number of criminal suits; he served several terms of imprisonment and died on 24 September 1862. The sect continued for some time to exist and stuck to its beliefs.

The movement led by Maulivi Karamat 'Ali had a wholly peaceful and religious aim. Through his works and preaching he made attempts to prevent reformist tendencies from becoming extremist and insisted upon to abandon the extremist doctrines by which they were being led into dangerous path of the political irredentism³⁷ he taught that on account of the prevalence of complete religious liberty India was not a *dar al harb*, and the celebration of the Friday congregational prayer and of the two 'Id festivals were not only lawful but obligatory. Thus he

was antithesis of Shah Abdul Aziz's and Haji Shariat ullah's thought and movement. However Karamat 'Ali insisted upon the reformation of Muslim society by purging the Hindu customs and superstitions that had been adopted by the Muslims of Eastern Bengal.

1857 earmarked the end of the Mughal rule in the sub-continent and the beginning of a new historical phase. However, for more than a hundred years, after the death of Aurangzib in 1707, the last of the powerful Mughals, disintegration had been going on not only in Muslim political power but in Muslim life and culture as well owing to the lack of a strong central government and leadership. The Muslim, though in a minority, had been the rulers of the land, and it is not surprising that their reaction to the British policies was sharper and more determined than that of the Hindus. "In that part of British India where Muslims were influential and also where their religion and culture had become strong rooted . . . the mutiny took on the definite character of Jihad".³⁹ 'Ulama' not only supported it but actually fought in it. Indeed they were the main organizers of the Revolution of 1857. After the collapse of the movement, therefore, they had to pay a heavy price and the post - 1857 policy of the British government was decidedly anti-Muslim. The tragedy of the great revolt marks the death of old order, and brought political, economic, and cultural disaster to the Muslims of the sub-continent. For many years afterwards the Muslims steadily lost ground in education, in the public services, and in general leadership in India. The Muslim community stood defeated, powerless, and demoralized. As the resilient and protracted resistance failed to resuscitate the Muslims in sub continent and the enormous lose of worthy energy in their attempts, enervated Muslims and instilled in them the idea prescribed by some that the prosecution of *Jihad* was as an impracticable and counted productive part of the revivalist programme. On the other side, the influence of western civilization which was already, slowly but surely creeping closer and closer to Muslim mind in India and else where and had been the dominant factor in molding only the higher life of Muslims in the sub-continent. After 1857, with the removal of the last vestige of Mughal imperial authority and dejected Muslim morale, we find scarily any department of life, which has not been affected by the Western influences.

At this juncture of Muslim history in the sub-continent, mainly two types of responses were offered, one by the orthodox '*ulama*' and another by the Muslim modernists. Majority among the former advocated a policy of cultural isolation and non-cooperation. They equated any form of political accommodation of the western culture with betrayal and surrender. They determined to boycott the western institutions which were rapidly taking root and flourishing everywhere. This prohibition had a particular reference to the western education, which included the teaching of English and modern science in the Government and missionary schools. With vehement language they inveighed against the institutions of foreigners, western (Christian) ideas and values were as dangerous as their governments and armies, therefore withdrawal, non-cooperation, or rejection of the west is indispensable in order to preserve the Islamic culture and heritage under non-Muslim rule. It was decided to establish a *madrasah* on the lines of Madrasah-I-Raimiyah.⁴⁰ Mawlana Muhammad Qasim Nanawtawi⁴¹ with other *ulama* drew up the scheme and established famous *Dar al-'ulm*, a seminary of traditional Islamic learning, at Deoband. It became the main center of orthodox Muslim thought in sub-continent. In its own field, the *madrasah* has established a high reputation in the Muslim world.

Another Muslim school of modernist thought sought to delineate an alternative to western, secular adaptation. It sought to respond to, rather than react against, the challenge of Western imperialism. They stressed upon the dynamism, flexibility and adaptability that had characterized the early development of Islam, notable for its achievements in law, education and the sciences. They pursued for internal reform through a process of reinterpretation *ijtihād* and selective adaptation of the western philosophy and technology. Islamic modernism, what it is called, is a process of internal self-criticism, a struggle to redefine Islam to demonstrate its relevance to the new situations that Muslims found themselves in as their societies modernized.

In the aftermath of 1857 in the sub-continent, Muslim sullenness, their aloofness and suppressed hatred for the new order became more marked than ever. As a result of this policy of isolation and self-sufficiency, for many decades Muslims in sub continent lost ground in education, in the public service, and in general leadership

in India. On the other side, they fell farther and farther behind their Hindu compatriots in the field of education; for the latter were not at all slow to avail themselves of the new educational facilities, and to adapt themselves to the changing circumstances and the requirements of the new government.⁴² Many Muslim leaders realized the gravity of the situation. For them, the remedy to the whole problem was to attempt adaptation to the new environment, use of the new forces that had come into play, acceptance of new instrument of progress that had been created through English education.⁴³ Sporadic efforts were made in this direction in many places, but the concentrated efforts that won the field culminated in the personality of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) the leading Muslim modernist of sub continent. He was convinced that the survival of the Muslim community necessitated a bold reinterpretation of Islam and the acceptance, of the best in western thought.

In the sub-continent, Islam from its inception has seen many vicissitudes and has always provided an abundant incentive for reformation. Thus there has been a protracted endeavour by '*Ulama*' and *mashāik* to preserve Islam in its pristine purity and to protect it assiduously from any encroachment of alien customs and beliefs. In fact, whatever the burdens of Muslim history or of Western domination, the true Islamic ideals have always remained alive. Whatever the counter-currents in Muslim society and thought, the direction given by '*Seerah*' could never be lost. The impulse has always kept beating inside, sometimes feebly, sometimes strongly. It has continually generated movement for change, for the fulfilment of Islamic ideals, from earliest times. Many a times the ideals were actualised or approximated and some '*Ulamā*' even if they accepted the status quo as defacto, never accepted it as de jure, as the true fulfilment of Islam. But, most remarkably, even a number of sufis, generated such powerful socio-political movements and made tremendous impact on societies that they had no parallel in human history. Whichever way the Muslim society deviated, its real genius kept throbbing and correcting the march.

References and Notes

1. In Shah Waliullah's times Persian was widely understood and that was the reason for his translating the Qur'an into this language and also used it for some of his other works. A generation later, Urdu seems to have become more popular; Shah Rafi al-Din and Shah 'Abd al-Qadir, both preferred to render it into Urdu. Shah Rafi al-Din's translation is literal while that of Shah 'Abd al-Qadir is in idiomatic Urdu and is accompanied by a short commentary in the form of marginal glosses, called *Mudih al-Qur'an*. The latter is still considered to be one of the best and most authentic translations in Urdu. Shah Abdul Aziz's son-in-law produced a handy dictionary of the vocabulary of the Qur'an, which helped the beginners to understand the Book more easily.
2. Marsh John Clark, *Abridgement of the History of India*. (Serampore, 1873) PP 267-268.
3. *Ibid.* P. 268.
4. Shah 'Abdul Aziz, *Fatāwa-I-Azizi*, Majtaba-e-Mujlabai, Delhi. 1311 A.H. Vol. 1. P. 16-17.
5. *Idem.*
6. *Ibid.* P. 186.
7. *Ibid.* P.17.
8. Mohiuddin Ahmad, *Sayyid Ahmad Shahid: His Life and Mission*. (Academy of Islamic Research and publication Lucknow, 1975), P.36.
9. Sayyid Abul Husan Ali Nadvi, *Seerat Sayyid Ahmad Shahid* (Urdu) (Majalis Tahqiqat wa Nashriyat Islam, Lucknow 1986) P.128.
10. I.H.Qureshi, '*Ulama' in Politics*, Pakistan, P.143.
11. M.Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims*, Manohar Publications, Delhi, P.395.
12. Gulam Rasul Mhir, *Sayyid Ahmad Shahid*, Kitab Manzil, Lahore, 1952, Vol.I. P.109 also quoted by I.H.Qureshi, *op. cit.*, P.142.
13. Mohiuddin Ahmad, *Sayyid Ahmad Shahid: His Life and Mission*, Academy of Islamic Research and Publication Lucknow, 1975, P.59.
14. I.H.Qureshi, *op.cit.* PP.143-144.
15. Mohiuddin Ahmad, *op. cit.* P.62.
16. I.H.Qureshi, *op.cit.* P.145; also see Mhir, *op. cit.*, P.123.
17. Sayyid Ahmad Hassan Ali Nadvi, *op. cit.* P. 160 and Mohiuddin Ahmad (English) *op.cit.* P.63.
18. For details see Sayyid Abdul Hassan Ali Nadvi, *op.cit.*, P.160.
19. M. Mujeeb, *op.cit.* P 397 also see Sayyid Abdul Hussain Ali Nadvi, *op.cit.* Vol. I and also see Mohiuddin Ahmad, *op.cit.* PP.64-77 P-239.
20. S.A.H.A.Nadwi, *op.cit.* PP-261-62.

- The anarchy and pillage which marked the sea voyage in those days Gradually reduced the number of pilgrims going for *haji*, and to ease their conscience came forward the self seeking ecclesiastics with their juristic opinions allowing the *haji* to be deferred in case of danger to life and property. One such juristic opinion or *fatwa* was referred to Mawlana Abdul Hai and Shah Ismail, both of whom denounced the ruling as erroneous. Shah Abdul Aziz to whom both the sets of rulings were sent for review, agreed with Mawlana Abdul Hai and Shah Ismail and severely criticized those who sought to create a dangerous precedent by relinquishing the obligatory religious duties on different pretexts. Mohiuddin Ahmad *op.cit.* PP.80-81.
21. Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi, *A Short History of the Revivalist Movement in Islam*, Markazi Maktaba Islami, Delhi -6, P.89.
 22. *Ibid.*, P.90.
 23. I.H.Qureshi, *op.cit.* P-171. For detailed discussion on the topic see Mohiuddin Ahmad, *op.cit.* P-98 FF and also Mas'ood Alam Nadwi - *Hindustan Ke Pehli Islami Tahrik*, (Urdu), Markazi Maktabat Islami-Delhi 1977.
 24. W.W.Hunter, *The India Musalmans*, London, 1876. PP.60-61.
 25. Masood Alam Nadwi, *op.cit.* P.17.
 26. Sayed Ahmad Khan, *Athar al-Sanadid*, ed.s Moinul Haq, Karachi, 1966].
 27. Sayyid Ahmad Shahid, *Sirat -al - Mustaqim*, Delhi, n.d. P.46. f.
 28. *Ibid.* P.46.
 29. *Ibid.* PP-8-13.
 30. *Ibid.* P.18-20.
 31. *Ibid.* P.24.
 32. *Ibid.* P.24.
 33. *Ibid.* PP.29-40.
 34. For details see Muinuddin Ahmad Khan, *History of the Faraidi Movement*, Karachi, 1965, and also for the account of his life and work, as given by M. Hidayat Husain the encyclopaedia II, 57 FF.
 35. S. Moinul Haq, *op.cit.* PP 450-51.
 36. I.H.Qureshi, *op.cit.* P.180.
 37. M. Mujeeb, *op.cit.*, PP 446-7.
 38. For detailed discussion on the subject see Syed Moinul Haq, *The Great Revolution of 1857* (Karachi 1968). PP-551 FF and Kayes and Malleson. *History of Indian Mutiny* (London, 1898) vol V.P.339.
 39. Fazlur Rahman *Islam* 2nd edn (Chicago and London, 1979) P.204.
 40. Madrasah-i-Rahimiyah had been developed under the guidance of Shah Waliullah and Shah Abdul Aziz. It had held the torch of piety and spiritual fervour aloft in a society that had succumbed to the enervating influences of

idle pleasure and moral decay and had inspired a burning for recapturing the former glory of Islam. It had ceased to exist after the destruction of its buildings by the British when they re-occupied Delhi in 1858. It was situated where Edward Park is located now. I.H. Qureshi 'Ulama' p. 221.

41. For a short biography see Muhammad Yaqub Nanawati Sawanih 'Umri (Deoband n.d.)
42. Titus, *op. cit*, p. 193.
43. S.A.A. Rizvi, 'The Breakdown of Traditional Society in the Cambridge History of Islam, Vol.2, *op.cit*. PP. 81-82.

In fact a beginning towards reform had already been made by the Muslims of Bengal under the leadership of Nawab 'Abd al Latif Khan, who had found the 'Muhammadan Literary Association in 1863, and his effort he was later joined by Maulana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri. (d. 1873), to the name few.

