

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES OF MUSLIM INSURGENCIES IN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT: CASE STUDY OF DEOBAND MOVEMENT

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Abstract:

It is fact that the Muslims have had always responded to the foreign challenges either in shape of colonial and political domination, military intervention, missionary activities or in the sphere of Western idealism or intellectual modernism. It is said that the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were the periods of decline the Muslim world, but in that period the purificationist and revivalist movements were quite active against the colonial ascendancy. These movements whether raised in the Middle East or in India, adopted an approach of relegio-political positivism and germinated Islāmic dynamism. There is a striking parallelism between the movements launched either in India or in the Middle East. A critical anylsis is given on the association of Syed Ahmad Shahid's jihad movement with the Wahhabi movement of Arabia as well as the effects of Muslim rebel to the colonial and their allies. This paper presents a historical sketch of insurgence in subcontinent from Shah Waliullah to later established school of thoughts. This paper will help to understand the historical roots of Muslim uprising history in the region.

Keywords: Islam in India, Muslim insurgence, Shah Waliullah Movement, Syed Ahmad Shahid, Reshmi Romal Movement.

Introduction:

By some estimates, there are approximately 1.7 billion Muslims in the world, of which 60% live in Asia.¹ Only 15% of Muslims are Arab, while almost one third live in South Asia.² The four nations with the largest Muslim populations, Indonesia (194 million), India (150million), Pakistan (180million), and Bangladesh (130million), are in Asia. China also has a population of 39 million Muslims.³ Despite this, the Muslims of Asia are perceived to be on the periphery of the Islāmic core based in the Arab Middle East. Muslims are a majority in Kirgizstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan in Central Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan,

¹ "Islam", BBC World Service, 2 July, 2004 and Robert Hefner, "Islam and Asian Security," Strategic Asia, 2003, (For general information on the history of Islam, see Karen Armstrong, *Islam: A Short History*, The Modern Library New York, 2002)

² Vartan Gregorian, *Islam: A Mosaic Not a Monolith*, Brookings Institute Washington, 2003

³ "Huge Potential", Far Eastern Economic Review, August 5, 2004.

and Bangladesh in South Asia, and Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia in Southeast Asia. There are also significant minority populations in Kazakhstan, India, Thailand, and the Philippines. Sizable Muslim communities are also found in Sri Lanka, China, Burma, and Singapore.⁴

Islam has been undergoing a revival in Asia. RAND's analyst Angel Rabasa points to several factors that contribute to this Islāmic resurgence in Asia. These include both domestic and external factors. Internally, the forces of globalization and the impact of Western culture have played a role, especially the effect of rapid industrialization and resulting urbanization. The Asian financial crisis of 1997 resulted in the overthrow of the authoritarian Suharto regime and created political space for Islamists in Indonesia. Muslim separatist insurgents have continued their struggle in the Philippines and Thailand while the *Parti Islam se Malaysia* (PIM) has worked through the political system to promote an Islamist agenda while in opposition in Malaysia⁵. In Rabba's view, External factors include the current situation in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the 1979 Islāmic revolution in Iran, the export of Saudi-backed Wahhabi Islāmic fundamentalism, the conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, and the Afghan war against the Soviets.

Western policy makers believe that the Islāmic revival is changing the face of political Islam in Asia', with the fact that 'the Islāmic revival has a complex relationship to the level of extremism in Asia. While Islam in Southeast Asia has been moderate in character, it is undergoing a process of revivalist change in some segments of society'. As Bruce Vaughn, who proposed the report on Islam in Asia to the American Congress, contends that, 'the resurgence is in Asia inspired by links to the Middle East, Afghanistan, and Pakistan'.⁶

Islamic Resurgence in South Asia:

Relationship between the ancient Indo-Pak Subcontinent and the Arab maritime traders across the Arabian Sea existed since the dawn of history. The military code words used during the Mahabharata wars (12 C.B.C.), were in the Arabic language' and the secret news dealing with the destruction of the *Pandavas* by the *Kurus* were also revealed in Arabic⁷. The *Jats* of Sind were serving in the army of the mighty Iranians who held sway over the provinces of Sind and Baluchistan even before the advent of Islam. It is reported in *Tirmazī*, the collection of ahādith (*Abwāb al-Amthāl*), that 'Abd-Allah ibn-e-Masud saw people in the company of the Holy Prophet who had striking facial similarities with the *Jats* of Sind⁸. The *Jats* joined the military service of the Islāmic Caliphate after the surrender of the Iranian forces to the Caliphate. The *Jats* were employed in the administration of the Caliphate. They were appointed as custodians of the treasury by Hazrat 'Ali during the war of Jamal⁹ and were rehabilitated by Caliph Mu'awiyah on the coastal towns of Syria in order to fight with the Romans. The colonies of the *Jats* were established by Caliph 'Abd-al-Malik in Antakya¹⁰. The Arab traders settled along the Indian coast right from the seventh century. They intermarried indigenous women and

⁴ Bruce Vaughn, *Islam in South and Southeast Asia*, CRS (Congressional Research Service) report for Congress, Feb. 2005, p. 2

⁵ Angel Rabasa, *Political Islam in Southeast Asia: Moderates, Radicals and Terrorists*, Adelphi Paper358, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2003, p.10-12.

⁶ Bruce Vaughn, *Islam in South and Southeast Asia*, p. 4

⁷ Syed Sulaiman Nadvi, *Arab-o-Hind ke Ta'alluqāt*, Azamgarh ed. 1979, pp.10 – 11

⁸ Ibid., p. 11, See also *A History of Hind –Pakistan*, Part II, pp. 27-35 which deals with the Aryans, Rig Vedic Age and Mahabharata and the Ramayana. For further information on Aryans the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* can be consulted.

⁹ Percy Skyes, *A History of Persia*, London 1969, 3rd ed., Vol. 2, p. 95

¹⁰ Syed Habib ul Haq Nadvi, *Islamic Resurgent Movements in the Indo-Pak Subcontinent*, Durban 1986, p. 17

joined the administrative services of Hindu Rajas.

Islamic Revival in South Asia

It is fact that the Muslims have had always responded to the foreign challenges either in shape of colonial and political domination, military intervention, missionary activities or in the sphere of Western idealism or intellectual modernism. It is said that the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were the periods of decline the Muslim world, but in that period the purificationist and revivalist movements were quite active against the colonial ascendancy.

One can see movements of moral and political positivism in operation both in Asia and in Africa. The 'Ulama' and the religious leaders wanted a positive participation in Islāmic affairs and to achieve means to change the state of affairs. They, therefore, called the Muslims to four point agenda¹¹:

1. Return to pristine Islam and to do away with moral and social abuses;
2. Reform Sufism so that it could follow the path laid down by the Prophet, conform to the strict Sunnah and get rid of shrine-based theology, nihilistic, pantheistic, Shar'ia-free Sufism and deification of saints;
3. Revive the right of Ijtihād;
4. Revive the spirit of Jihād (or political activism) in order to effect religious, social and political reforms and above all to expel the European Colonialists from the boundaries of the Muslim lands.¹²

These movements whether raised in the Middle East or in India, adopted an approach of religio-political positivism and germinated Islāmic dynamism. There is a striking parallelism between the movements launched either in India or in the Middle East.

The Rashdiya movement in Algeria, the Amirghania and Sanusiya movements in Sudan and in Nubia, the Wahhabi movement in Arabia, the Fuldniana the Mahdi Jihād movements in Nigeria in the first half of the nineteenth century and in Sudan in the last decades of the nineteenth century, as well as the Jihād movements of Syed Ahmad Shahid of Rae Baraili and Syed Isma'il Shahid of Delhi in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, laid the foundations of Fundamental purificationist reforms which ultimately accentuated emphasis on Islāmic activism or Jihād.

The sense had been developing in that time of subcontinent that since the 'Ulama' symbolized the aspirations of the nation; they could alone renew the faith of the followers of Islam and revive the spirit and moral discipline of Muslims with dedication to Islam. Being political positivists and activists, they invited people to practical effort and military action against the English, if necessary. The Jihād movement, launched in Northern India in the 1820s and 1830s against the English and other anti-Islāmic forces which had made inroads into the socio-economic and political life of the Muslims, was the result of the same spirit.

The 'Ulama' and Sufis of the Delhi school followed the Naqshbandiyya order which was introduced to India by Khawaja Baqi Billah (1563 -1603) who left his ineffaceable impact on both Shaikh Ahmad Sirhind¹ and Shah 'Abd-al-Haq Muhaddis Dehlawi, Mirza Mazhar Jan-e-Janan (1700 -1780), Mir Dard (1721 - 1715) and above all Shah Waliullah (1703 -1762), owed their allegiance to the same order.¹³

¹¹ Syed Habib ul Haq Nadvi, *Islamic Resurgent Movements in the Indo-Pak Subcontinent*, p. 37

¹² Ibid., p.38

¹³ Ibid., p.39

The first wave of Radical Change

Historically, It is indubitable fact that Shah Waliullah of Delhi was destined to preside over the future of Islāmic reformist and resurgent movements both in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. He became a guide for all reformists, resurgent and revivalist 'Ulama', as well as for purificationist Sufis who played major roles during the two centuries. The 'Ulama' of Farangi Mahal joined hands with their counterparts in Delhi in order to preserve Islāmic traditions in a period of political instability. They, due to their academic achievements¹⁴, enhanced the position of 'Ulama' in the post-Mughal period. But all the efforts in various versions were the result of the movement which was established by Shah Waliullah. John L. Esposito expressed his views by saying:

In India the decline of Mughal power had spurred a number of revivalist movements. Among the most influential were that of Shah Wal^l Allah of Delhi (1702-62) and his disciples. Wal^l Allah rejected the moral corruption of Indian society, indicted popular Sufiism's indiscriminate syncretism, and called for a purification of Islam. Yet, unlike Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Wal^l Allah's surgery was less radical. Rather than reject the present to restore the past, he sought to modify present Muslim belief and practice in light of early Islāmic practice.¹⁵

Shah Waliullah made it clear that the revival of Islam was not possible without the revival of spirit of Jihād. Moreover, Jihād had to be directed first against the puppet Muslim rulers who were themselves the greatest obstacles in the way of restoring Islāmic order. His powerful Jihād appeal, made in '*Tafhimat*', and addressed to the Kings, the governors and Muslim scholars is self-explanatory. He believed that Jihād had to continue until the political authority of Islam was restored, Shar'iyah law enforced and justice administered. The revolutionary teachings of Shah Waliullah and his counsels¹⁶ on statecraft accorded to the rulers, in fact, determined the future course of resurgent movement in the nineteenth century.

After the passing away of Shah Waliullah¹⁷ the Delhi school of "Ulama" was led by his three sons who perpetuated the reformist teachings of their father. Shah 'Abd-al-'Aziz (d. June 5, 1824), the eldest son of Shah Waliullah, wrote the famous Fatawa, known as "*Fatawa-e-'Aziziyya*". Shah

¹⁴ For example, Mull^l Qutb ad-D^l n (b. 1691/2) was a member of the committee instituted by Emperor Awrangzeb for the collection of Fat^l w^l (religious edicts), better known as Fat^l wa-e-'Alamg^l r^l. He established the famous Madrasa at Farangi Mahal (a French mansion given to him by the Mughal rulers), which produced luminaries of intellect, such as Moul^l n^l 'Abd-al-'Ali, known as Bahr-al-'Ul^l m (the ocean of knowledge) and Malik al-'Ulama' (the chief of 'Ulama'). Famous commentaries of Fus^l s of Ibn-'Arab^l (1165 - 1240) and of Masnaw^l of Jal^l l al-D^l n R^l m^l (d. 1273) were written by him. He was committed to the metaphysical doctrine of Wahdat al-Wuj^l d. He excelled in jurisprudence, theology and philosophy. His son Mulla Niz^l m ad-Din (d. 1748) is better known for his famous curricula which he formulated for the Islamic Mad^l ris in India. The systematization of syllabus was the major contribution of Farangi Mahal. But unfortunately the curricula laid more stress on Ma'qul^l t or rational studies such as logic and philosophy with less stress on the study of the Qur'an and the Sunna. The syllabus, better known as the Dars-e-Niz^l mi system, has dominated the scene of Islamic Mad^l ris until today. Even Madrasa 'L^l iyya, founded by the English at Calcutta in 1780, adopted the same curricula. Ibid, pp. 39 - 40

¹⁵ John L Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, Syracuse University Press, (New York 1984), p. 36

¹⁶ G. N. Jalbani, *Teachings of Shah Wali-Allah of Delhi*, Ashraf Publicaitons, Lahore 1973, p. 143. Please see chapter VII on political thoughts of Shah Wali-Allah (pp. 142 - 162)

¹⁷For details on influence of Shah Waliullah's philosophy and thoughts in the region, please see: Ahmad Dallah, *The Origins and Objectives of Islamic Revivalist Thought 1750-1850*, in Journal of the American Oriental Society, Vol. 113, No. 3, July-Sep. 1993, pp. 341 - 359

Rafi' ad-Din (1749 -1817) and Shah 'Abd-al-Qadir (1753 -1827), the second and third sons, translated the Holy Qur'an in Urdu language.

Jihād School: The First Phase of the Delhi Jihād Movement

The Delhi school of reformist and resurgent "Ulama" was divided into two groups, the academic reformist and the positivist and the second was revolutionist Jihād-group. Syed Ahmad of Baraili¹⁸ (1786 - 1831), a student of Shah 'Abd-al-' Aziz, belonged to the second school of thought.

His religio-political leadership, inviting for Jihād against the enemies of Islam, attracted both the laity and the educated elite. The "Ulama" were the first to join his Jihād movement. Syed Muhammad Isma'il (1781 -1831), the paternal grandson of Shah Waliullah and Moulana 'Abd-al-Haq (d. 1828), the son-in-law of Shah 'Abd-al-'Aziz, took Bai'a (oath of allegiance) to Syed Ahmad. Now the initial basis for social and political reforms was formed. The writings of Syed Ahmad, such as "*Sirat al-Mustaqim*" (The Right Path), and of Syed Isma'il, such as "*Taqwiyyat al-Iman*" (strengthening of faith), were designed to exercise a great influence on the resurgent movement.

The Jihād Movement of Syed Ahmad has been regarded by some scholars as the first Islāmic resurgent and reformist movement in the Subcontinent which was led by a disciple of the Shah Waliullah school of thought. Practically, the reformative-cum-revolutionary ideas of Syed Ahmad were promoted throughout his Hajj trip in 1821, when he reached Bengal via Bihar. The three provinces, U.P., Bihar and Bengal, responded to him positively.¹⁹ In Calcutta people flocked around him and while he was in Mecca he administered an oath of Jihād with his followers at *Hudaibiyya*, where the companions of the Holy Prophet had vowed to fight against the infidels. After his return from Hajj in 1823 he stayed at Calcutta for about three months disseminating the reform movement and motivating people for -Jihād.²⁰

On January 17, 1826, when Syed Ahmad, along with the Mujahidin, left his dear and near ones in order to attain religious freedom and liberate Muslim provinces which were annexed by Sikhs and where Sikh-tyrants had made life miserable for Afghan tribes. The Afghan chiefs had already complained to Syed Ahmad about the abduction of their women by Sikhs and annexation of their properties by them. The decision for Jihād was taken to deliver the Afghan tribes from the unceasing tortures of Sikhs.²¹ The Mujahidin reached the North West Frontier Provinces under the leadership of Syed Ahmad in 1826 and defeated the Sikhs at Akaura in Naushera. Afghan "Ulama" and tribal chiefs were obligated to the Mujahidin and accepted Syed Ahmad as their leader (*Amir al-Mo'minin*), and made *Bai'a* on his hands.²²

¹⁸ For details, see: John L. Esposito, *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, Oxford University Press, (Karachi 2006), p.37

¹⁹ Qeyamuddin Ahmad, in his doctoral thesis (Patna University 1961), entitled '*The Wahabi Movement in India*' (National Book Foundation, Islamabad 1972), pp. 1 -24, (Originally published in Calcutta in 1966), deals with the background of the Jihad movement. The re formative endeavors of the Syed which was in fact a follow up of the reforms which were carried on before him by Mujaddid-alf-e-Thani and Shah Waliullah. The Syed followed the path of the Prophet (*Tariqa-e-Muhammad*¹), He examines the salient features of the reforms and compares the Indian and the Najdi Wahhabism (p. 53). The rise and fall of Muhammad ibn-'Abd al-Wahhḡ b have also been analyzed (p. 55). Indian Wahhabism had been compared with Arab Wahhabism (p. 56), and points of similarities and differences have been highlighted (p. 57).

²⁰ Ibid, pp. 25 - 62

²¹ It is also the fact of the History that the Afghans betrayed the Mujahidin with their conspiracies with the English. For further detail see Syed Habib ul Haq's *Islamic Resurgent Movements in Indo-Pak*, pp. 46 - 48

²² Ibid, pp. 43 - 57

Due to the Afghan leaders' conspiracy against Mujahidin and the Fatwa of infidelity by Afghan 'Ulama' causing desertion of some people, Syed Ahmad and his companions, while on their way to migration, were trapped by the huge army of Sher Singh at Ba'lakot. The Mujahidin were defeated and uprooted and Syed Ismail and Moulana Khair ad-Din were martyred along with other companions. Syed Ahmad was martyred on 24 Zil Qa'da, 1246 (1831)²³. Many of his followers still believe that Syed Ahmad, being a *Mahdi*, had disappeared and would reappear soon as the promised Messiah.²⁴

Jihād School: The second Phase, (Sadiq-pur Jihād Movement)

The first phase of the Jihād school came to an end with the tragedy of Balakot in 1831. But the second phase started soon. The centre of Jihād was now shifted from Delhi to Patna in East India, and the Jihād leadership was transferred from the family of Shah Waliullah to the family of 'Ulama' of Mirza in Patna.²² Moulana Wilayat 'Ali (b. 1790-9/d. 1852) and Moulana 'Inayat 'Ali Ghazi (d. 1858), the two brothers and faithful disciples of Syed Ahmad Shahid took charge of the Jihād movement. Moulana 'Abd-Allah, the son of Moulana Wilayat 'Ali fought as the leader of Jihād (Amir al-Jihād) until his death in 1902. The two brothers were appointed by Syed Ahmad Shahid as his Khalifa in Hyderabad and Bengal respectively, in order to carry on his reformative mission.²⁵

On the other hand, the English had been in search of people who could create and provoke incurable schisms in the religion and issue the Fatwa abolishing Jihād - a movement which was going on in Muslim countries against the colonial powers, particularly the English. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Punjab (1839 -1908) rendered his services to the English and announced the abrogation of Jihād. He evolved a loyalty cult and regarded obedience to the English as a religious duty. The 'Ulama' challenged Mirza Ghulam Ahmad and his creed - the *Mirzalogy*.²⁶ Despite the service of Mirza for the English as well as the destruction of Sadiqpur's 'Ulama', Jihād movement remained furnished in many parts of India. No challenge of any magnitude, posed to Islam, has ever escaped a response of similar dimension in the history during the fourteen centuries. The English had virtually captured Delhi in 1803 and ruled the country in the name of the puppet pension-holders, Mughal rulers, who were already on the defensive. The English had launched a massive genocidal program against the Muslims in the Subcontinent with destruction of Islāmic Educational and traditional heritage. Foundation of Deoband (1867)²⁷ and Nadwa (1893) was the effort by

²³ Syed Abul Hasan 'Ali Nadvi, *Sirat-e-Syed Ahmad Shahid*, Vol. 2, (Lucknow 1977), The author deals with the events from the war of Shaidu to the tragedy of Balakot in 1831, when the Syed was martyred. The volume details all the wars that took place as well as the tour of the Syed of the various areas. The last part of the book (pp. 465 - 558) deals with the natural disposition, virtues, character, religiosity and spiritualism of the Syed. See also Mas'ud 'Alam Nadvi's *Hindustan Ki Pahli Islami Tahrik*, (Hyderabad 1946). The third chapter (pp. 29 - 47) deals with the Syed, his mission and Jihad movement, aiming at establishing divine kingdom on earth.

²⁴ Abul Hassan Nadvi, *Sirat-e-Syed Ahmad Shahid*, pp. 135 - 149, The author analyses the causes of the reaction of the 'Ulama' of Sarhad against the Syed as well as the causes of the assassination of the officers of the Shar'iyah government and the Mujahidin have been described.

²⁵ Qeyamuddin Ahmad, *The Wahhabi Movement in India*, please see chapter 6, pp. 177 - 214.

The author deals with the Frontier Campaigns from 1852-63. The advance made by the English have been explained in detail. The encounter of 'Inayat 'Ali with the English, his defeat and other engagements have also been explained.

²⁶ The Mirza and his followers were ultimately declared as non-Muslims by the Constitution of Pakistan on 7th September 1974.

²⁷ J.L. Esposito introduces Deobandies in positive phrase, he wrote: "Deobandis: Ind-o-Pakistani reformist 'ulama' movement centered in the Dar al-Ulum of Deoband. The school was founded (1867) by scholars associated with the thought of Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi to preserve the teachings of the faith during non-

the Muslims to abolish that English program to preserve the generations from the fully secular education basis which had not any religious values.

Wahhabism and the Syed Ahmad's Movement: The Basic Misconception

It should be clear that the Wahhabi movement was pioneered in the Subcontinent by Moulana Nazir Husain of Sadiqpur, Patna, and Nawab Siddiq Hasan Khan of Bhopal. The movement committed itself merely to Hadith and rejected the four schools of Fiqh, that is the Hanafi, the Shafai, the Hanbali and the Maaliki. It stressed that the Holy Qur'an and the Hadith of the Prophet, as the primary sources of religion, were enough for the guidance of the Muslims and there was no need for any school of Fiqh. The school also demanded liberal studies of the Scripture and pleaded that every Muslim had a right to interpret and understand Islamic law and the Shar'iyah. Un-Islamic innovations (Bid'a), superstitious beliefs, social and moral abuses, Sufi meditations and shrine-worship were condemned by the school. The followers of the movement became known as 'non-followers' (*Ghair-Muqallid*) and were differentiated from those who followed the Fiqh Schools known as 'followers' (*Muqallid*). The Ahl-al-Hadith²⁸ group was soon branded as Wahhabis. It was absolutely false to call them Wahhabis, because the latter followed the Fiqh school of Imam Ahmad ibn-Hanbal, while the former rejected any kind of following. M. Abdul Barq, an Indian historian, argues convincingly that

...the name "Indian Wahhabis" given to the nineteenth-century militant reform movement led by Sayyid Ahmad Bareilvi (d. 1831) was an afterthought, "perhaps given by co-religionist opponents to discredit them". He also argues that the name was adopted by British administrators for the same purposes.²⁹

It is unfortunate that the Orientalists and their Eastern companions, either in Asia or in the Arab World, have often branded the movement of Syed Ahmad Shahid as a Wahhabi adventure. As Bruce Vaughn believes:³⁰

Since the term 'Wahhabism' was extremely abhorring and frightening for any Muslim and since it meant to them, in religious sense, a sacrilegious movement, desecrating holy places, dismantling the tombs of the saints, disrespecting the Prophet and his companions and since its major tool was Jihād which was employed in order to enforce the reforms, the English imported this term to Muslim-India and exploited it to fulfill their own interest, so that Muslims dissociate themselves from the movement.

Syed Abul Hasan 'Ali Nadvi says in categorical terms that there was no Wahhabi Impact on

Muslim rule. Deobandis educated Muslims in "correct practice" and emphasized individual responsibility for correct belief. The school emphasized hadith and the Hanafi legal tradition, and encouraged spiritual transformation through "sober" Sufism. Providing an alternative to an intercessory religion focused on shrines and elaborates customary celebrations, Dar al-Ulum educated imams, preachers, writers, and publishers of religious works....Since the 1920s the Deobandi apolitical stance has taken shape in the transnational movement Tablighi Jama'at, but Islamist trends such as those of Pakistan's Jami'at-ul 'Ulama-i- Islam and Afghanistan's Taliban have also emerged from the ranks of the Deobandis." *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, p.66

For more details regarding Deoband School and Nadwa see Syed Habib ul Haq Nadvi, *Islamic Resurgent Movements in the Indo-Pak Subcontinent*, pp. 55 – 76

²⁸for detailed note on Ahl-e-Hadith sect, see: Syed Habib ul Haq Nadvi, *Islamic Resurgent Movements in the Indo-Pak Subcontinent*, pp. 99 – 109

²⁹M. A. Bari, *A Nineteenth-Century Muslim Reform Movement in India*, in Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of Hamilton A. R. Gibb, ed. George Makdisi, Harvard University Press, 1965, p. 84

³⁰ Bruce Vaughn, *Islam in South and Southeast Asia*, CRS (Congressional Research Service) report for Congress, Feb. 2005, p. 2

Syed Ahmad Shahid:

No documentary evidence or authoritative proof exists of the Syed's coming into contact with any Wahhabi preacher. Far from being treated as a heretic (as W.W. Hunter and others claim), the collection of his discourses 'Sirat-al-Mustaqim', was rendered into Arabic on the request of the religious scholars of Mecca. The Syed had, in fact, already finalized the blueprints of his socio-religious reforms before undertaking the journey for Hajj and unfolded its practical details based on his own understanding of the Qur'an and the Sunna during his reformatory tours in India. On his return from Hajj, the Syed gave practical shape to his concept of Khilafat which could unite the whole of the Muslim World from India to Central Asia and Turkey for the service of Islam. Nothing that the Syed did was not premeditated.³¹

There are certain misconceptions about the genesis and growth of the Wahhabi movement as well as about its impact on the resurgent movement in the Subcontinent. It is generally believed that 'Abd-al-Wahhab was the founder of the movement. But this is not true. The movement was initiated by his son Muhammad ibn 'Abd-al-Wahhab (1703 - 1792). The father, being a man of quiet temperament, is said to have left 'Uyaina, his home town in Najd and had settled in a neighboring town in order to avoid the ever rising agitations caused by the movement of his son Muhammad. Sometimes it is identified with the 'Ahl-al-Hadith' movement of the Subcontinent which is also not true.

Tehrik-e-Reshmi Romal (The Silk Movement)

Tehrik Reshmi Romal is considered an evolutionary movement in the subcontinent against British colonialism. This movement is basically entrenched result of the war that had been fought Frontier against British and which was started by Sayed Ahmad Shahid about hundred years ago. In fact, this movement was a staple of the movement of 'Ulama'-e-Sadiqpur. After the fall of Muslim Empire in India, the Muslim community was suppressed and they have lost the sense that how can they regain their lost dignity? Only the way was to defeat colonialists and to liberate the India from those traders who had dominated not only the economy but they had been ruling on the region. In that situation, some prominent ideologues planed to active the movement of Sayed Ahmad Shahid which was demolished after the freedom war of 1857. In 1914, Maulana Mahmud ul Hasan conceived a movement for the liberation of India by which armed units would be deputed to organize the Pakhtuns of the Tribal Areas, and rally support in Afghanistan in order to destabilize the British Indian government and provide a convenient point for the Turkish army to open a new front against British. The movement was rooted in the new and exciting politics of anti-colonialism and pan-Islamism galvanized by the start of the World War I, but the founders of the movement highlighted the difference in their militaristic outlook and the politics of non-violent non-cooperation which dominated the nationalist Indian arena at that time.³²

As it is evident by its name, the correspondence was exchanged among the activists of the movement the messages were written on the silk handkerchiefs. Thus, the Muslim of sub-continent particularly religious Muslim scholars took a great part and sacrificed for the salvation of the people of sub-continent.

³¹ Syed Abul Hasan 'Ali Nadvi, *A Misunderstood Reformer*, Tr. By M. Ahmad, Academy of Islamic Research and Publication, Lucknow 1979, pp. 37 – 38

³² Sana Haroon, *Frontier of Faith: Islam in the Indo-Afghan Borderland*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2007, p. 93

The movement had faced the hardships in pursuing its goals that are the bitter but factual realities which is never connived. For being anti-British, it was declared as ‘*Silk letter conspiracy*’. According to the CID reports, these letters were written on the silk pieces³³ by Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi; hence, he was declared the founder of the movement³⁴. However, the fact is that in 1915, Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi planned a journey to the Kabul following the order of Maulana Mehmud ul Hassan Deobandi. So Maulana Mehmud ul Hassan was the master mind of the movement, on this reason he should be called as founder. Furthermore, Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi had admitted himself that he had worked on the lines given by Shaikh-ul-Hind.³⁵

Though it was understood that it was not possible to defeat the colonial power, hence, it was thought that arrangements for equipment which was necessary to encounter that time super power should be conducted in the area of the free tribes, as Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madni mentioned.³⁶ Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi (1872-1944), a sikh convert to Islam and an scholar of the Dar-ul-Ulum Deoband who had studied and worked under Maulana Mahmud-ul-Hassan, was one of the primary articulators of the political ideology of the movement based in the North-West Frontier. Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madni, a senior scholar at the Dar-ul-Ulum who described the frontier-based Jihād in great detail in his autobiographical works³⁷, was another. His instructions and commentary was an appraisal of the need for the movement intellectually. While Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi’s writings described his firmed beliefs that led the foundations of the movement on Shah Waliullah’s ideals and provided a central base for organization and mobilization from which a political and religious agenda could be promoted.³⁸

Only two years later, after a substantial but failed effort due to the mutiny of Sharif Hussain of Macca, Maulana Mehmud ul Hassan along with his companions were poisoned at Malta on 16th February 1917 and that movement reached to its end.³⁹

Although, it has been observed that the verdict (*fatwa*) announced by Shaikh ul Hind was based on his approach of non-violence in the society, yet it is clear that this was actually the founding stone in making a great wave of hate towards the British rule and their cruel and unjustified obsession on the subcontinent. So it can be said with certain assertion that this movement was considered an obscure radical and vibrant approach capable to establish a great change at that time and for the future.

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³³ Those three on silk had the importance for their comprehensiveness and the objectivity. First letter was written on 8” x 10” silk piece on 9th July 1916 by Mehmud ul Hasan. Second was sent to Sheikh ‘Abd ur Rahim Sindhi which was written on 5” x 6” silk handkerchief just a day later of 1st letter on 10th of July 1916. Third letter of 15” X 10” was issued from Maulana Mehmud ul Hasan. (Zahir-ud-Din Butt, *Shah Waliullah ka qafila*, Idara Adb-e-Atfal, Lahore, 2006, p. 110)

³⁴ Zahir-ud-Din Butt, *Shah Waliullah ka qafila*, Idara Adb-e-Atfal, Lahore, 2006, p. 110

³⁵ ‘Ubaidullah Sindhi’, *Kabul mein saat saal*, Saga, Academy Lahore, pp. 104 -105 ; also see: Ved Parkash, *Terrorism in Northern India*, Kalpaz Publicaitons Delhi, 2008, Vol. 1, p. 70

³⁶ Hussain Ahmad Madni, *Naqsh-e-Hayat*, Karachi, 1953, chapter 6, p. 160

³⁷ In 1942, Maulana Madni wrote his famous book named *Naqsh-e-Hayat* in prison. He mentioned the events that he witnessed and the historical issues which often misrepresented.

³⁸ ‘Ubaidullah Sindhi’, *Shah Waliullah aor un ki Tehrik* (Shah Waliullah and his Movement), Lahore, 1978, p. ii.

³⁹ For detailed account of *Tehrik Reshmi Romal*, see: Farhat Tabassum, *Deoband Ulema’s movement for the freedom of India*, Manak Publications, 2006

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