

## Sayyid Ahmad Shahīd's Role in Islamic Revivalism: A Critique

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### Abstract

*The emergence of Sayyid Ahmad Shahīd on the political horizon of Muslim India in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century synchronized with the loss of Muslim political power. This loss led to departure of the Muslim community from Islam in its pristine purity. Sayyid Ahmad Shahīd embarked upon the gigantic task of reviving Muslim enthusiasm toward the pristine Islam. The overbearing theme of what Sayyid Ahmad Shahīd stood for amounted to the saying 'back to the Qur'an and 'back to the traditions of the Prophet (s.a.w.)'. By that time the Mughal rulers were too weak to effect any meaningful change. Muslim religious scholars like Sayyid Ahmad rose to the occasion. Sayyid Ahmad, like other scholars, devoted his energy to diagnose the malaise of the Indian Muslims, on the one hand and tried to identify solution to the problems in Islam, on the other. He came to conclusion that changes could be brought about if Muslims reformed their ways. For that matter he preferred social Jihād, which was originally intended to purify or purge Islam of accretions from*

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*without. However, very soon the social Jihād assumed a military nature, targetting first the Sikhs and later the British. The Jihād movement of Sayyid Ahmad was not a success during his life time but its theoretical and practical impact could be seen in later period.*

Sayyid Ahmad of Rā'ē Barēli, son of Sayyid Muhammad 'Irfān was born in 1786 in Rā'ē Barēli.<sup>1</sup> He was the 36<sup>th</sup> direct descendent of *Imām Hasan*, son of the 4<sup>th</sup> Caliph 'Ali Ibn Abī Tālib.<sup>2</sup> Since early he inclined to Sufi tendencies which were reinforced by his upbringing. At the age of four, he was admitted to a school where as a student he was an unpromising child. He attended the school for three years but gained nothing except the acquisition of a few chapters of the Qur'ān by heart; it is said that it took him three days to memorize the first easily graspable poetic verse of *panj kitāb* (a small book in Persian taught to children) and then he kept forgetting again.<sup>3</sup> When the father saw this helpless condition of his son, he remarked, "... leave the matter of his education to God, He will provide whatever He thinks better for him. The apparent compulsion is of no use".<sup>4</sup>

Shāh Ismā'īl and Ja'far Thanasari, disciples and biographers of Sayyid Ahmad explain the illiteracy of Sayyid Ahmad in terms of his relationship to the family of the Prophet.<sup>5</sup> According to these two scholars, Sayyid was not only a direct descendent from the family of the Prophet but in his physical features, Sayyid also resembled the Prophet Muhammad (SAW).<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that apart from the fact that Sayyid Ahmad belonged to the family of the Prophet; other credulous stories have been woven around his personality. As a case in point, it has

been said that in a dream the Prophet fed him three dates: that ʿAli gave him a bath and that Fatima clothed him a nice garment<sup>7</sup>. These stories reflect the Sufi inclinations of Sayyid Ahmad. On the other hand, the story that he resembled the Prophet in his features is perhaps based on a legend.

When Sayyid Ahmad was seventeen years old, his father died. The problem he faced at that time was to find a job to support his family. He went to the nearest city, Lucknow, accompanied by his friends. After four months being unable to find a job, he then went to Delhi to study under Shāh ʿAbdul ʿAzīz, the famed traditionalist of his time. ʿAbdul ʿAzīz welcomed Sayyid and entrusted him to the care of his younger brother Shāh ʿAbdul Qadir. ʿAbdul Qadir admitted Sayyid Ahmad to his seminary; again Sayyid showed his lack of interest in books, and the story has it that the letters on the page vanished from his sight when the book was put before him.<sup>8</sup>

It should be indicated here that although Sayyid Ahmad was not a great *ālim* (religious scholar) as far as *ʿilm-i zāhirī* (exoteric knowledge) was concerned, it seems, nonetheless, that he was an expert in *ʿilm-i bātini* (esoteric knowledge). This became clear when ʿAbdul ʿAzīz, the teacher of Sayyid Ahmad, initiated him into three renowned Sufi orders, the Qādiriyah, Chishtiya, and Naqshbandiya. When the stage of teaching him *shugl-i-barzakh* (concentration on the image of one's *Murshid*) arrived, Sayyid Ahmad protested against this practise and queried ʿAbdul ʿAzīz about the difference between idolatry and *shugl-i-barzakh*. In the former, Sayyid pointed out, the image worshiped was made of stone or paper whereas in the latter the image was imaginary; yet in each case it was an image which was being worshipped. ʿAbdul

‘Azīz could not answer that question and instead recited the following couplet from the Persian poet Hāfiz:

Colour your prayer-carpet with wine if your religious  
guide so orders  
because the salik is not unaware of the  
formalities of the path".<sup>9</sup>

The Sufi cult of Sayyid Ahmad is evident from *Sīrāt-i-Mustaqīm*, the only book attributed to Sayyid Ahmad. Sayyid is said to have written it with the help of his two learned disciples, Shāh Ismā‘īl Shahīd and Mawlānā ‘Abdul Hayy.<sup>10</sup> The book begins with a discussion of two ways of loving God; one being *hubb-‘ishqī* (Loving Love), the other being *hubb-i imānī* (love on account of faith or reason). The former leads to *rāh-i Wilāyah* or the path of sainthood and the latter leads to *rāh-i nubuwwah* or the path Prophethood. According to Shāh Ismā‘īl, one of the two editors of the book, the love of a prophet for God is superior to a mystic's love for God, because the former is concerned with creating a good society on earth whereas the latter is concerned only with the betterment of his soul; however the two are complementary.<sup>11</sup> As the Sufi thoughts of Sayyid Ahmad could not be discerned by the common people, Shāh Ismā‘īl had to render them into simple words so as to make them intelligible to the common people. When the book got completed, it was read over to, and corrected by, Sayyid Ahmad.<sup>12</sup>

## II

Sayyid Ahmad Khan says that in order to keep his Sufi experiences secret from people so that they might not disturb him and that he could have sufficient time to complete his esoteric knowledge,

Sayyid Ahmad joined the army of Amīr Khan Pindāri of Tank.<sup>13</sup> Be that as it may, Sayyid was again facing an economic problem, and as he was not eligible for any other job such as that of *qādi* or a clerk because of the fact that he was not a highly educated person, he had no choice but to work in the army. He was first recruited as a trooper,<sup>14</sup> then he was assigned the duty of leading people in prayer.<sup>15</sup> Mawlana °Ubaidullāh Sindhi claims that Sayyid Ahmad had joined the army of Amir Khan according to a programme which his mentor Shāh °Abdul °Azīz had in mind, i.e. it was the desire of Shāh °Abdul °Azīz that Sayyid should get military training in the army of the Amīr prior to launching the *Jihād*.<sup>16</sup> Sayyid Ahmad remained in the army of the Amīr for seven years. The army of the Amīr is said to have been influenced morally by the presence of Sayyid.<sup>17</sup> The piety and high moral character of Sayyid led to his promotion to the rank of advisor and special bodyguard of the Amīr who consulted him on every matter.<sup>18</sup> During this period, Sayyid developed his spiritual potential to such a degree that the desire to preach in public and initiate people into his Sufi order became very strong. He could no longer stay in the army of Amīr and thought it appropriate to withdraw from the Amīr's service in order to initiate a general calling (*da'wah*). Incidentally, the time of his departure from the Amīr's army coincided with the signing of a treaty between the British and the Amīr and, as a result, some biographies of Sayyid have suggested that he deserted the army as a signal of protest against the decision of the Amīr.<sup>19</sup>

It was in 1817 that Sayyid left the army and returned to Delhi. By this time his former teacher Shāh °Abdul Qādir had died, and his seat of *iftā'* any interest in *°ilm-i bā°ini*, having been more interested in *°ilm -i zāhiri*.<sup>21</sup> Among the early converts of the new reformer were Shāh

Ismā'īl, Shāh Muhammad Ishaq, the grandson and successor of Shāh 'Abdul 'Azīz and Mawlana 'Abdul Hayy, the scions of the family of Shāh Waliullāh, as 'Azīz Ahmad calls them.<sup>22</sup> Shāh Ismā'īl was eight years older<sup>23</sup> and more knowledgeable than Sayyid, and the same was true of 'Abdul Hayy; yet Sayyid Ahmad seems to have held these '*ulamā*' and a host of others in such a spellbound condition that they rendered menial services to him and ran, with their shoes off, by the side of his palanquin, wherever Sayyid would go.<sup>24</sup>

After having made a considerable number of proselytes, Sayyid, then aged 38, intended in 1820 to go on pilgrimage to Mecca. It is said that it was Shāh 'Abdul 'Azīz, the mentor of Sayyid Ahmad, who had advised him to go to Mecca for *Hajj*,<sup>25</sup> in any case, Sayyid, accompanied by one thousand followers,<sup>26</sup> set out for the Hijaz. The party first went to Calcutta where they boarded a ship for Mecca. During his brief stay at Calcutta, he continued his preaching, initiating people into his own Sufi order called the *ʿariqah Muhammadiyah*, telling people to cling to the Sunnah of the Prophet and shun all types of innovations (*Bid'at*). It is said that at Calcutta the number of his converts became so huge that it was impossible for him to take individual *bai'ah* from the people. Consequently, at times like these he would spread his turban and tell the people that any one who would touch any part of the turban would automatically become his disciple. He continued this practice throughout his journey to Mecca. After performing *Hajj*, Sayyid Ahmad stayed in Arabia and then returned to India in 1824. William Hunter, however, gives the date of Sayyid's return as October 1822.<sup>27</sup> Garcin de Tasse, a French historian, also mentions the story of Sayyid's going to Constantinople, increasing the number of his disciplines and getting a

present, the value of which was 9 lakhs in rupees.<sup>28</sup> This story, however, cannot be confirmed by other sources.

The journey to Mecca intensified the religious feelings of Sayyid, and now he began to compare the religious condition of India with that of Arabia and other Muslim countries he had visited. Thus far he had been a reformer of abuses, but now he took it upon himself to undertake an active *Jihād* against non Muslims. About this change in the outlook of Sayyid, Sir Sayyid maintains that Sayyid Ahmad had had a vision that he would die as martyr along with a group of Muslims, and his eagerness in a *Jihād* was a fulfilment of that vision.<sup>29</sup> When Sayyid Ahmad, as a Sufi and reformer, appeared on the scene, it was the time when the Sikh rule was predominant in the Punjab. The Sikh rule was notorious for its oppression of Muslims,<sup>30</sup> and the tyranny of the Sikhs was put forward as a reason for the waging of *Jihād* against them. The exact date of *Jihād* can be known from the following extract from *Targhīb al-Jihād* (Incitement to religious war), a treatise written by a certain *mawlawi* from Qanuj. According to this Mawlavi,

The tribes of Sikhs have long held sway in Lahore and other places. Their operations have exceeded all limits. Thousands of Mohammedans [sic] they unjustly killed, and on thousands have they heaped disgrace. The Azan or the summons to prayer, and the killing of cows, they have entirely prohibited. when at length their insulting tyranny could no longer be born, Hazrat Sayyid Ahmad (may his fortunes be permanent) having for his single object the protection of the faith, took with him a few true Musalmans, and going in the direction of Kabul and Peshawar, succeeded

in rousing the Mohammedans [sic] of those countries from their slumber of indifference and nerving their courage for action ---- Praise be to God---- some thousands of believers became ready at his call to tread the path of God's Service; and on the 20th Jumadi-ul-ula', 1242 Hijri (or the 21st December, 1826) the *Jihād* against the kāfir Sikhs began.<sup>31</sup>

Sayyid Ahmad, followed by his band, reached the frontier through a detour passing through Gwalior, Tank, Ajmer, Sind, Hyderabad, Baluchistan, Qandahar, Ghazni, Kabul and Peshawar. Ultimately he chose Nowshera as his headquarter.<sup>32</sup> According to the story, Sayyid Ahmad sent an ultimatum to Ranjit Singh, the Sikh ruler of the Punjab, informing him of his intentions.<sup>33</sup> Ranjit Singh ignored the ultimatum as a result of which Sayyid Ahmad 'girded his lions' to initiate a series of skirmishes against the Sikh army. When *mujāhidin*, the followers of Sayyid Ahmad, left Ra'e Bareli, they were five or six hundred in number; in Qandahar the number reached one thousand. When various bands arrived from India, the total number swelled to 2500.<sup>34</sup> The Sikhs were so much intimidated by the *mujāhidin* that they were willing to relinquish the upper part of the Indus to Sayyid Ahmad, but the latter refused to accept the offer because, as he stated, his intention was only to "carry out the order of God".<sup>35</sup> The lack of discipline which was surfacing in Sayyid's band was more than compensated for by the zeal and enthusiasm with which they fought. Initially Sayyid Ahmad's followers were victorious, despite the huge number and more sophisticated weaponry of the Sikh army. However, it was not long before problems both internal as well as external arose for the *mujāhidīn*. Internally, a small group of *mujāhidīn* headed by a certain

Mahbūb ‘Ali challenged the authority of Sayyid Ahmad as a leader and deserted eventually.<sup>36</sup> Externally, the local tribal chiefs who had enthusiastically welcomed the new reformer and had allied themselves with him started intrigues against him. They came to look upon the success of Sayyid Ahmad as a threat to their position and, as ‘Ubayd Allāh Sindhi put it, they came to regard the leadership of Sayyid as a death-news '*piyām-i marg*' for their chieftainship.<sup>37</sup> Thus they started conspiring against him: in the middle of a war against the Sikhs, Yar Muhammad khan, one of the three Barakzai brothers who were the chiefs of Peshawar at that time, deserted from the army of Sayyid and sided with the Sikhs. Apparently Yar Muhammad khan went so far as to administer poison to Sayyid Ahmad in an attempt to get rid of him.<sup>38</sup> It may be pointed out that Rangit Singh knew fully well that he could not defeat the *Mujāhidīn* in the battlefield keeping in view the initial victories that were accrued to Sayyid. Therefore, he launched a diplomatic offensive by visiting Peshawar and bribing the chiefs of Peshawar and thereby weaning them from Sayyid. These events naturally occupied Sayyid Ahmad and his military advisor Shāh Ismā‘īl in putting down this local rebellion engineered by local chiefs.

Sayyid Ahmad was successful in crushing this rebellion and now he marched towards Peshawar in 1830. The ruler of Peshawar Sultan Muhammad khan, brother to Yar Muhammad Khan must have been shocked by the sudden appearance of the *mujāhidin*. He decided to give in: after a brief negotiation which took place in Hazarkhani, a town in the suburbs of Peshawar, the Sultan swore allegiance to Sayyid Ahmad and thus Peshawar capitulated. Sayyid then decided, against the wishes of his disciplines, to hand Peshawar to its previous chief, Sultan Muhammad

khan; the latter was aided by a *Qāzi* and a few other persons who would promulgate the *shari'ah* law in the city. Thus after laying the foundations of a *hukumat-i muwaqqatah* or provisional government as 'Ubayd Allāh Sindhi likes to call it,<sup>39</sup> Sayyid left the administration in the hands of Sultan Muhammad Khan, and shifted his headquarter to Panchtar in Buner.

The handing over of Peshawar to Sultan Muhammad Khan proved disastrous for Sayyid Ahmad and the *mujāhidin*. His victory over the local chiefs had only increased their jealousy and resentment, and they now were waiting for an opportune time to break into rebellion. They had never accepted his leadership wholeheartedly, nor were they happy with the abrupt social reforms he introduced.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, in one of the wars Yar Muhammad Khan, the Sultan's brother, had been killed by Sayyid's army. The Sultan had never forgiven Sayyid for the death, and it appears that the opportunity of revenge, a prominent feature in the Pathan tribal code, was being awaited. The above factors all contributed to a general conspiracy against Sayyid Ahmad and his deputies. A nefarious plan was hatched by the Sultan and the rest of the chiefs to put to death all the deputies of Sayyid who were assigned various duties such as collecting tithes from people, working as moral-sensors and so on. It was, in fact, implemented in a most grim fashion. The tragic news of the death of his associates shocked Sayyid very deeply. Disillusioned and disappointed with the local populace, he now decided to leave the area and migrate to Kashmir with his followers and establish his base there. In Balakot, on his way to Kashmir he was surprised by a huge Sikh army of 20000 under the command of Sher Singh who had come there to collect his annual (*qalang*) tax from the people of that area.<sup>41</sup> Someone,

purportedly a local Gujar, made espionage on the *Mujāhidīn*, and showed the secret entry point to Balakot to the Sikhs. Consequently, the Sikh army surrounded Balakot from all sides. A clash resulted: the night before the actual fighting began, Sayyid Ahmad dreamt that the colour of the legs of his *charpa'i* (bed) which had been specifically brought for him from heaven was red;<sup>42</sup> the interpretation of the dream was clear: the end of the reformer had arrived. The *mujāhidīn* fought desperately but in the face of a huge and well equipped Sikh army, they were defeated. Sayyid Ahmad received a bullet in the thigh that proved fatal while his military commander, Shāh Ismā'īl, was shot in the forehead.<sup>43</sup> This unfortunate incident happened on 6 May, 1831.<sup>44</sup>

### III

It will not be without interest to mention the controversy over the "disappearance" of Sayyid. A substantial number of the disciples of Sayyid could not believe their master had really died; they asserted that he had not died: they thought, rather, that he was hiding and would reappear in the future to defend the Muslim faith. This occultation myth was strengthened by some statements attributed to Sayyid Ahmad himself. For example, before leaving his home for *Jihād*, Sayyid had addressed his sister thus:

People will say that Sayyid Ahmad has died but until and unless the infidelity of India, the schism of Iran and the hypocrisy of Afghanistan are gone, my mission will not come to an end.<sup>45</sup>

There were stories that after his death Sayyid was actually seen and recognized by people at different places.<sup>46</sup> It is surprising that learned people such as Yahyā 'Alī of Patna, one of the eleven people who were awarded the death sentence in the 1864 trials,<sup>47</sup> supported the

myth of occultation.<sup>48</sup> Similarly the Urdu poet Mu'min believed in the myth of disappearance.<sup>49</sup> In the beginning, Ja'far Thanasari was as sure of the returning of Sayyid as he was sure of his own death; however, he changed his mind afterwards and accepted the notion of martyrdom.<sup>50</sup>

The chief exponent of the theory of occultation was Wilayat 'Alī, one of the four caliphs of Sayyid, who was not present at the disaster of Balakot.<sup>51</sup> Wilayat 'Alī believed that Sayyid Ahmad had disappeared temporarily; in his absence the preparation of *Jihād* should be carried on; he would certainly return and the Muslims would find salvation in his leadership. After stating the above position of Wilayat 'Alī, Sindhi makes the following remark: Obviously this idea seems very irrational; but since the names of great '*Ulamā*' and Sufi's are mentioned in connection with the movement, therefore the only way that it can be interpreted is that it was a political tactic (*chāl*) whose intention was to keep laymen in touch with the movement.<sup>52</sup>

There was also a controversy as to where Sayyid was buried. Nawāb Wazir-ud-Dawlah, a disciple and biographer of Sayyid relates the following anecdote about the tomb of Sayyid Ahmad. Someone said to Sayyid Ahmad, "You criticize tomb-worship. After your death, your followers will worship your tomb". Sayyid replied, "I will pray to God to make my tomb disappear". The Nawab remarked, "lo and behold, the prayer of Sayyid Ahmad was answered, and up to this day nobody knows the exact place where Sayyid is buried".<sup>53</sup> According to one story, the head was buried at one place and the body at another.<sup>54</sup> Another story has it that the head and the body were floating in a stream, then somebody recognized them and buried them together.<sup>55</sup> There is also a story that Sher Singh engaged a boy to identify the dead body of Sayyid

A+mad and then buried it with respect following the Muslim ritual.<sup>56</sup> All these stories sound baseless and preposterous. The anecdote told by the Nawab was closer to the truth. The truth of the matter is that "Sayyid's body was identified and burnt by the Sikhs."<sup>57</sup> This being the case, the tomb attributed to Sayyid A+mad at Balakot is not real. The story that Sher Singh had the body of Sayyid buried with respect sounds unfounded, for, and that the *khalisa darbar* at Lahore celebrated the occasion with much jubilation.<sup>58</sup>

#### IV

In this section we will address the question as to whether the *Jihād* movement was against the Sikhs only or whether it included the British also. 'Ubayd Allāh Sindhi (1872-1944) claims that the movement was sponsored by Shāh 'Abdul 'Azīz who had declared India to be *dār-ul-harb* (the country of war), and was now looking for a young and energetic man to spearhead the movement. Such a person he found in Sayyid A+mad.<sup>59</sup> Sindhi also mentions that 'Abdul 'Azīz has setup two committees which would operate under his own supervision; one was administrative in nature and was comprised of Shāh Muhammad Ishāq and Shāh Muhammad Y'aqūb whose function was to collect funds at Delhi and then send them to the frontier; the other was a military committee consisting of Shāh Ismā'il and Mawlānā 'Abdul Hayy, the son-in-law of Shāh 'Abdul 'Azīz whose duty was to make preparation of military endeavours.<sup>60</sup>

The most outstanding biographer of Sayyid who wrote on the latter in post-1947 era is Ghulām Rasūl Mihr whose voluminous biography of Sayyid fills close to two thousand pages. The recurrent theme of Mihr's book is that Sayyid was principally against non-Muslim

ruler in India, be it that of the British or the Sikhs or the Jats. Mihr faults the earlier biographers for concentrating on two objectives of Sayyid only, that is, *i'lā Kalima Rabb al-<sup>c</sup>Alamin* (the Elevation of the word of God) and *Ihyā-i sunnat-i Sayyid al-Mursalin* (the revivification of the Prophetic *sunnah*); while losing sight of a third objective, namely, *Istikhlas bilād al-muslimīn az dast-i kafara mutamarridīn* (deliverance of the Islamic lands from the hands of rebellious infidels).<sup>61</sup>

According to Mihr, when Sayyid Ahmad was busy on *Jihād*, an Englishman by the name Mason was touring the country and described the following as the goal of Sayyid Ahmad: the elimination of the Sikh rule and the seizure of the Punjab, and then the conquest of India and China.<sup>62</sup> Among the non-Muslim writers on the *Jihād* Movement, the person who wrote extensively on Sayyid is W.W. Hunter who holds that the 'Apostle' was hostile to the British. R.C. Majumdar in his *History of the Freedom Movement* maintains that Sayyid Ahmad "deliberately conceived the project of reviving Muslim rule in India by fighting infidel rulers, particularly the Sikhs and the British."<sup>63</sup> Freeland Abbot opines that Sayyid Ahmad believed that the condition of Muslims could be improved by force.<sup>64</sup> On the question of why Sayyid chose the Sikhs as his first target, Abbot expresses the following opinion: "Sayyid Ahmad Shahīd, of course, raised his *Jihād* against the Sikhs rather than against the British, but he looked upon the matter only as one of putting first things first, and first he thought he could defeat the Sikhs".<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, it may be pointed out that when Sayyid appeared on the scene it was a time that the British had not fully established themselves in India, rather their power was growing; therefore, at this early stage the British must naturally have welcomed the trouble between Sayyid and

the Sikhs despite the fact that the Sikhs were the allies of the British.

Sayyid Ahmad has been described as an 'adventurer',<sup>66</sup> a 'visionary'<sup>67</sup> and a 'dreamer of dreams'.<sup>68</sup> He had actually envisioned the supremacy of Islam and Muslims in India, but as Mihr has rightly pointed out, Sayyid's purpose was not to prop up the decadent and corrupt Mughal Empire. His goal was rather to strike a new moral order for Muslims which would eventually lead, as he put it, to *khilāfah 'alā' minhāj al Nubuwwah* (caliphate on the pattern of Prophethood).

Sayyid Ahmad was a Sufi, but his *Ta'awwuf* was not characterized by an escape from the world as is generally believed about the Sufis. On the contrary, he was a pragmatic person and consequently very much alive to the needs of his community. Like common Sufis on his day, he would teach *tawajjuh* (concentration) which has been likened by some to the bellows of a blacksmith.<sup>69</sup> However, unlike them, he would get his arms and shoulders massaged, practice push ups, and devote some time to archery.<sup>70</sup> This was indeed a preparation of some kind for his militant intentions. He wanted to be strong in both body and spirit.

## V

A few words are in order on the question of 'Wahhabism' in India, which has been associated with the name of Sayyid Ahmad.

Many western scholars are of the view that during his religious journey to Mecca Sayyid Ahmad came into contact with Wahhabi professors, imbibed their views, and on his return to India brought their doctrines with him.<sup>71</sup> There is also a story that Sayyid Ahmad was expelled from Mecca because of the similarities of his doctrines to those of the Wahhabis,<sup>72</sup> and that he returned to India as a fanatical disciple of

Abdul Wahāb. According to Freeland Abbot, the 'path of Muhammad', the Sufi order initiated by Sayyid Ahmad was identified by some Muslims as an Indian version of the puritanical Wahhabi movement.<sup>73</sup> J.R.C. expresses the same opinion that Sayyid's movement maybe regarded as an imitation of the 'Arabian Wahhabi movement'.<sup>74</sup> It has also been asserted that the literature produced by Shāh Ismā'īl breathes the spirit of Wahhabi ideology.<sup>75</sup>

It may be pointed out also that the reform movement of Sayyid Ahmad has been described as "Wahhabi" in the British Indian government documents.<sup>76</sup> However, certain facts run counter to such claims. During the period when Sayyid Ahmad travelled to Mecca, the Wahhabi movement had been suppressed in the Hijaz by Ottomans.<sup>77</sup> The mere fact that Sayyid Ahmad was interrogated and expelled reveals that Wahhabi influence must have died out politically as well as historically.<sup>78</sup> As for the question of similarity between the two movements, Mas'ūd Nadwi holds that it was because of their common origins, namely the Qur'ān and the Hadith. Both movements emphasized the unity of God and condemned all types of associationism (shirk) and innovations.<sup>79</sup> The same author holds that Sayyid's movement was dubbed as Wahhabi because of a certain British propaganda;<sup>80</sup> that is, the British were responsible for the name, and giving it such a name was a way of fighting the "Wahhabis".

At the same time there were differences between the two movements. The Arabian Wahhabis show their affiliation with the school of Ahmad Bin Hanbal whereas Indian Wahhabis describe themselves as *ghayr muqallids* or 'non-conformists', meaning that they do not follow any one of the four medieval canonical schools. The Indian *Wahhabis*

sometimes call themselves Muhammadis,<sup>81</sup> that is, 'the followers of Muhammad (PBUH).' Another point of difference between the two is that the Arabian Wahhabis were entirely inimical to Sufism where as Sayyid Ahmad and his disciples maintained their Sufi practices. As a matter of fact, Sayyid's movement was started through the use of the Sufi practice of *bay'ah* or showing allegiance to ones *Ptr*. In the initial stage Sayyid's disciples used to go into the jungles for long meditations.<sup>82</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

In this article, an attempt has been made to highlight various dimensions of the life and career of Sayyid Ahmad Shahīd. The *Jihād* movement initiated by the latter constitutes an important phase of the politico-religious history of Muslim India. The *Jihād* movement has been dubbed as the precursor of the Pakistan Movement and Sayyid Ahmad Shahīd has been portrayed as the first founder of Pakistan. It is true that the *Jihad* movement did not realize the stated objectives of the movement in the lifetime of its founder, however, the fact remains that it accentuated the political consciousness of the Indian Muslims. After the massacre of Bala kot in May 1831, the *Mujāhidīn* Movement died out temporarily. However, very soon the successors of Sayyid Ahmad Shahīd rearranged themselves and kept the spirit of the *Jihād* alive. First they established themselves at Sethana and when that centre was destroyed by the British, the *Mujāhidīn* shifted to Malka situated at Chamla valley in Buner. Latter, they shifted their headquarters to Smast also situated at Buner. Finally, the *Mujāhidīn* shifted their centre to Chamarqand, situated at the confluence of the Mohmand and Bajaur political agencies. The choice of Chamarqand was due to the fact that the *Mujāhidīn* wanted to stay closer

to the border of Afghanistan so that they could solicit help from that country in their struggle against the British. The struggle of the Mujāhidīn against the British virtually continued till 1947 when partition took place and an armed resistance against the British became redundant.

### **Notes and References:**

1. (Mihir, 1954) p.56; (Nadwi, 1948) p. 69; Mirza; (Dihlaw, 1993) p. 285. This book is mainly a biography of Shāh Ismā'īl, although at the end of the book a short biography of Sayyid Ahmad is also given; (Thanesari 1968) p.50. This book was originally published in 1891 with the title *Tawārīkh-i 'Ajibah mawsūm bih Sawānih A+madi* and divided into five parts. The Karachi edition has dropped the fifth part which contains the letters of Sayyid Ahmad; (Azad 1968) p.460; (Manglori 1945), p. 105; (Sindhi 1952) p.91; (Hunter 1871) p. 3.
2. (Thanesari 1968) p. 51; (*Encyclopaedia of Islam*), p. 282.
3. Mirza Hayrat, p. 287. However, Sindhi mentions that Sayyid Ahmad had learnt the basic Arabic and Persian books from Shāh Muhammad Ishāq and Shāh Ismā'īl (Sindhi 1952) p. 91. Sir Sayyid also mentions that Sayyid Ahmad learnt *sarf* and *nahw*, i.e., Arabic grammar and syntax. ,part 4, (Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan 1947) p. 26. Mihir casts doubt on the complete illiteracy of Sayyid Ahmad. According to Mihir, Sayyid was not a *'ālim* in the sense that Shāh 'Abdul 'Azīz and Shāh Ismā'īl were, but he knew the do's and don'ts of *shari'ah*, and also he understood Arabic and Persian (Mihir, 1954) p. 58.
4. (Mihir, 1954) p.57; (Thanesari 1968), p. 53; (Nadwi, 1948), vol. 1, p. 70.
5. (Ismā'īl 1916) p. 16; (Thanesari 1968) p. 53.
6. Ibid.
7. (Ismā'īl 1916) p. 369; (Nadwi, 1948), vol. 1, p. 58; (Thanesari 1968), p. 54; (Rizvi 1968) p. 94.
8. (Mihir, 1954) p. 58; Nadwi, *Sirat*, vol. 1, p. 82.
9. (Thanesari 1968), p. 61; (Nadwi, 1948), vol. 1, p. 79; (Mihir, 1954), p. 76.
10. (Ikram 1966) p. 441. The book is divided into four chapters, with a *muqaddimah* (introduction) and a *khatimah* (conclusion). The first and last chapters were written by Shāh Ismā'īl while the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> were written by 'Abdul Hayy, who translated

the whole book into Arabic when Sayyid journeyed to Mecca; (Ismā'īl 1916) p.16; (Siddiqi 1945) p. 131; (Ikram 1966) p. 12. According to S.M. Ikram, the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of *Sirat-i Mustaqīm* is the soul of the book from the point of view of reform. *Mawj-i Kausar*, p. 13.

11. (Ismā'īl 1916) p. 58-60, 67-8 as quoted in (Hardy 1972) p. 53.
12. (Ismā'īl 1916) p. 17; J.R.C., "Notice of the peculiar Tenets held by the followers of Syed A+mad, taken chiefly from the '*Sirat-i Mustaqīm*' (Ismail 1832), p. 498.
13. (Sir Sayyid A+mad Khan 1947) part 4, p. 26.
14. (Qureshi 1962), p. 196. About the early life of Sayyid A+mad, Hunter writes, "He began life as a horse soldier in the service of a celebrated freebooter, and for many a year harried the rich opium-growing villages of Malwa,"; (Hunter 1871), p. 4. Obviously, this is a very prejudiced and tendentious view. It is true that war-fare and military aggrandisement was the fashion of the day but there is no evidence that Sayyid A+mad Shahīd, a mystic of myriad attainments, participated in the unlawful activities of the Amīr, as Hunter would make us believe.
15. (Qureshi 1962) p. 196; (Alī 1971), p. 60.
16. (Mihir, 1954), p. 91.
17. (Nadwi, 1948), vol. 1, p. 86 (Dihlaw 1993) p. 301; (Thanesari 1968) p. 72.
18. (Dihlaw 1993) p. 301.
19. (Mihir, 1954), p. 109; (Sindhi 1952), p. 93; (Nadwi, 1948), vol. 1, p. 88; (Malik 1963) p. 161; (Qureshi 1962) p. 197.
20. (Sir Sayyid A+mad Khan 1947) part 4, p. 27; (Alawi 1951) p. 4.
21. Ibid.
22. (A. A+mad 1969) p. 20.
23. (Manglori 1945), p. 106.
24. (Hunter 1871) p. 4; (Titus 1959) p. 189; (Rehatsek 1878-1880) p. 352; (Nadwi, 1948), vol. 1, p. 113.
25. (Tassy 1839) p. 32; (Alawi 1951) p. 4.
26. (Sir Sayyid A+mad Khan 1947) part 4, p. 27.
27. (Hunter 1871) p. 5.
28. (Tassy 1839) p. 32. The story of Sayyid's visit to Constantinople is mentioned also by (Latif 1891) p. 437. However, according to Mahmud Husayn, the story lacks

evidence and therefore seems to be unfounded. (M. Husayn 1955) p. 563.

29. (Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan 1947), Part 4, p. 27. It may be pointed out that Sir Sayyid had confused the vision with the one which Sayyid experienced one night before the battle of Balakot. However, Sir Sayyid had dropped part four of his *Āthār-us-Sanādīd*, which contains the stories of Shāh ‘Abdul ‘Azīz and his disciples, from the second edition. The explanation for this, according to Hafeez Malik and Morris Dembo, in their translation of Sir Sayyid’s *History of the Bijnore Rebellion* (Michigan: Asian Studies Centre, Michigan University, n.d.), p. VI, appears to be Sir Sayyid’s “impolitic eulogy” of Sayyid Ahmad in which the latter has been depicted as a man of superhuman qualities in bravery, in popular appeal, and in “command of spiritual power.”
30. The details of Sikh oppressions of Muslims can be seen in (Dihlaw 1993), (Thanesari 1968), and S.M. Ikram’s *Mawj-i Kawsar*. Jafar Thanessary relates the story that when Sayyid was on a visit to Rampur, some Pathans came to him and related to him the following tragic story. “While passing through a certain village in the Punjab, we went to a well to drink water. There we saw certain Sikh women filling their utensils with water. Since we did not know the local language, therefore, we told those women with a language of gesture to give us some water. The women looked around and then started speaking in Pashto. They told us “they were basically Pathans belonging to such and such areas. The Sikhs brought us here forcibly, converted us into Sikhism and made us their wives.” We were shocked to hear that Muslim women were converted in such a way. O Sayyid, you are a saintly person, think about a scheme that these women are liberated from infidelity”. Sayyid replied that very soon he was going to launch Jihad against the Sikhs. S.M. Ikram, *Mawj-i Kausar*, p.21.
31. (Hunter 1871) p. 6-7; (Rizvi 1968), p. 99.
32. (Sindhi 1952) p. 99; (Siddiqi 1945) p. 138; (M. Husayn 1957), p. 584.
33. (M. Husayn 1957) p. 585; (Siddiqi 1945) p. 132.
34. (Mihir, 1954), p 76.
35. (Nadwi, 1948), Nadwi says Ranjit Singh offered 9 lakhs rupees to Sayyid Ahmad for the area on the right bank of the river Indus if he would give up the idea of warfare with Ranjit Singh, but Sayyid refused. (Nadwi, 1948), p. 219.

- <sup>36.</sup> (Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan 1947) Review, p. 15.
- <sup>37.</sup> (Sindhi 1952)p. 110.
- <sup>38.</sup> (Ikram 1966) p. 436; (Thanesari 1968) p. 227; (Mihir, 1954) p. 396; (Sindhi 1952)p. 110; (Shāhjahānpūrī 1971) p. 89; (Tassy 1839) p. 34; (Qureshi 1962) p. 201.
- <sup>39.</sup> (Sindhi 1952) p. 122.
- <sup>40.</sup> For example, there was the custom still practised in certain parts of Afghanistan and the Frontier province of melmastia, or hospitality which includes, among other things, giving shelter to criminals. This custom was also practised by the pagan Arabs of the time of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) (Nadwi, 1948), vol. 2, p. 87. According to Nadwi, parallel to Islamic shari'ah another "divine law" was being practised for centuries in Afghanistan and the Frontier province, and the tribesmen were not willing to give up that "divine law" (Nadwi, 1948), vol. 2, p. 319. Secondly, the tribesmen married off their daughters to the highest bidders (Ibid.). Sayyid Ahmad explained this evil custom, and his agents are reported to have taken strong measures to eradicate it. Qāzī Mazhar 'Alī, the promulgator of shari'ah law in Peshawar issued a strict order that all the widows and those engaged women whose prospective husbands were present should be married within three days (Ibid, p. 322; (Dihlaw 1993), p. 211. Some Pathan women were married off by force (Nadwi, 1948), vol. 2, p. 307. For example, Sindhi relates the story that the daughter of the Khan of Khwashgi was married forcibly to an Indian (Sindhi 1952)p. 115. Third, the imposition of taxes upon the tribesmen was another source of trouble. Prior to the appearance of Sayyid in the area, the chiefs were the recipients of half of the income from the crops. The introduction of 'ushr by Sayyid put an end to the existing system. These causes led to the consternation of the chiefs.
- <sup>41.</sup> (Sindhi 1952) p. 118; (Thanesari 1968) p. 284.
- <sup>42.</sup> (Shāhjahānpūrī 1971), p. 243.
- <sup>43.</sup> (Nadwi, 1948), vol. 2, p. 439.
- <sup>44.</sup> (Mihir, 1954)vol. 2, p. 414; (Dihlaw 1993), p. 314; (Sindhi 1952) p. 118; (Manglori 1945) p. 116; (Nusharawi 1938) Vol.1, p. 92; (Mawdudi 1960) p. 114; (Latif 1891), p. 443; (Ikram 1966) p. 442; (Rizvi 1968), p. 103; (Qureshi 1962) p. 201; (M. Husayn 1955) p. 597; (Caroe 1960) p. 305; (Malik 1963) p. 183; (Cunningham 1966) p. 172. At the time of death Sayyid Ahmad was forty six and Shāh Ismā'īl

fifty three (Sindhi 1952) p. 118.

- <sup>45.</sup> (Nadwi, 1948), vol. 2, p. 444; (M. Husayn 1957), p. 167; (Mihr, 1954) vol. 2, p. 445. Another version of the story goes like this: I am going for Jihād. I will have to fight many wars with the hypocrites and infidels. God has promised me that he will not kill me until the schism of Iran, the hypocrisy of Afghanistan, and the infidelity of India is eliminated through my hands. If somebody, while putting the Qur'an on his head, comes and says to you, "I have buried your brother, never believe him." (Ms. From the library of the Amīr of Tonk.)
- <sup>46.</sup> (Nadwi, 1948), vol. 2, p. 444.
- <sup>47.</sup> (Rehatsek 1878-1880) p. 370.
- <sup>48.</sup> Yahyā Alī used to recite the following *rubā'ī* from Dard: Give this much message from Dard
- When the morning breeze passes through the streets of the beloved  
Which night will you come?  
Many days have we spent in your waiting?
- (Nadwi, 1948), vol. 2, p. 445.
- <sup>49.</sup> (Mihr, 1954) p. 103.
- <sup>50.</sup> (Nadwi, 1948), vol. 2, p. 446.
- <sup>51.</sup> (Sindhi 1952) p. 130.
- <sup>52.</sup> Ibid, p. 132.
- <sup>53.</sup> (Nadwi, 1948) vol. 2, p. 516.
- <sup>54.</sup> (Mihr, 1954) vol. 2, p. 439. According to Sindhi, Sayyid was beheaded and the head was taken to Lahore so that Ranjit Singh could see it (Sindhi, p. 117).
- <sup>55.</sup> (Mihr, 1954) vol. 2, p. 438.
- <sup>56.</sup> Ibid, p. 437.
- <sup>57.</sup> (M. Husayn 1957), p. 132; Ishtiaq Husayn Qureshi, p. 207.
- <sup>58.</sup> (Qureshi 1962) p. 208.
- <sup>59.</sup> (Sindhi 1952) p. 91.
- <sup>60.</sup> Ibid, p. 95.
- <sup>61.</sup> (Mihr, 1954) p. 254.
- <sup>62.</sup> Ibid, p. 258.
- <sup>63.</sup> (Majumdar 1962) p. 276.

64. (Abbot 1960) p. 100.
65. Ibid, p. 106.
66. (Titus 1959), p. 188.
67. (Ram Gopal 1960) p. 22.
68. (J. Ahmad 1971) p. 442.
69. (Mihr, 1954) p.18.
70. Ibid, pp. 18-19.
71. See for example, (Titus 1959) p. 189; (Wilson 1916) p. 56; (M.S. Zaharaddin 1979) p. 148; (Rehatsek 1878-1880), p. 353.
72. (Manglori 1945) p. 250.
73. (Abbot 1960), p.89.
74. J.R.C., p. 481.
75. (*Encyclopedia of Islam*), p. 431.
76. (A. Ahmad 1969) p. 9.
77. (Rahman 1968) p. 250.
78. Ibid.
79. (Nadwi, 1948).
80. (Salafi 1969) p. 244.
81. (Mihr, 1954) p. 20.

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