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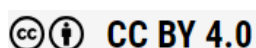
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Jihad, Reform, and Ideology: Shah Ismail's Political Thought in the Context of Sayyid Ahmad Bareilvi's Movement

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Abstract: This study explores the political thought of Shah Ismail Dehlavi (1779–1831) as a central ideological force within the reformist and militant movement led by Sayyid Ahmad Bareilvi in early 19th-century India. Situating Shah Ismail's ideas within the broader framework of Islamic revivalism and resistance against colonial and indigenous non-Islamic domination, the study examines how his theological doctrines informed a distinct vision of Islamic governance, moral reform, and collective jihad. Drawing upon key texts such as *Taqwiyat al-Iman* and *Mansab-i-Imamat*, the paper analyzes Shah Ismail's advocacy for Tawhid (monotheism), Shari'ah-centric social order, and rejection of Bidah (innovations) as foundational principles for sociopolitical renewal. It further investigates how these ideas were operationalized through the militant campaign of Sayyid Ahmad Bareilvi against Sikh rule in Punjab, portraying jihad not merely as armed struggle but as an instrument of spiritual purification and political reformation. The paper also considers the movement's attempt to establish an Islamic polity (Dar al-Islam) amidst colonial encroachment and sectarian fragmentation. By situating Shah Ismail's political ideology within the context of anti-colonial resistance and Islamic reform, this study highlights the synthesis of theology and activism that characterized one of the most significant indigenous Islamic movements of pre-modern South Asia.

Keywords: Shah Ismail Dehlavi, Sayyid Ahmad Bareilvi, Islamic reform, Jihad in South Asia, Political thought, Anti-colonial resistance, Islamic revivalism

Introduction

The initial decades of the 19th century represent a significant inflection point in the evolution of Indo-Muslim political thought. The degradation of Muslim political authority, which commenced in the early 18th century, culminated in its nadir during this epoch, coinciding with the extensive proliferation of British imperialism throughout the subcontinent. The Red Fort, which had once epitomized the grandeur of India akin to Versailles, was relegated to a deplorable state, such that according to Bishop Heber, who visited it in the early 19th century, the Shah Burj appeared filthy, desolate, and miserable, with its bath and fountain rendered dry, the inlaid pavement obscured by debris, and gardeners engaged in sweeping, while the walls were marred by the excrement of avian and chiropteran inhabitants.¹

The comprehensive political framework of northern India disintegrated during this epoch. The Mughal emperors transitioned into not merely pensioners but also captives under the authority of the East India Company, which swiftly evolved from a profit-driven entity to a sovereign power, implementing an assertive policy of territorial acquisitions. Confronted with a trading corporation metamorphosing into a dominator of Indian fates, Shah Abdul Aziz, progeny of the illustrious Muslim intellectual and theologian of Delhi, Shah Waliullah, proclaimed that India had transformed into Dar ul Harb. This declaration represented a political edict expressed through religious terminology. It subsequently emerged as the foundational element of Muslim political thought in the following decades, and indeed, Muslim participation in the political sphere was inspired by this fatwa and was centered around it. Sayyid Ahmad Shahid and Shah Ismail strived to translate the resolution of Shah Abdul Aziz into actionable terms. They traversed the expanse of northern India, from Balakot to Calcutta, amassing adherents in nearly every significant town and city they encountered. Hunter asserts that as a direct result of their advocacy, covert organizations proliferated throughout the entirety of northern India. The catastrophe at Balakot (1831) signified a crucial turning point in the historical narrative of Muslim political thought and activism. It exposed a glaring truth that the realization of objectives was entirely unattainable in the absence of a robust military framework, and that simple religious zeal would not produce significant results. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm instilled by Sayyid Ahmad Shahid and his peers among the populace persistently invigorated the religio-political dialogue of Muslims. As noted by Sir Sayyid, individuals willingly journeyed to Balakot for a minimum of two decades following the tragedy to demonstrate their profound respect for and connection to the deceased leader. Some among this group became naively persuaded that the leader had simply concealed himself to reemerge at a fortuitous time. Beyond this aspect of superstition, it is an observable fact that the movement initiated by Sayyid Ahmad Shahid did not dissipate with his passing. It continued to manifest in various forms across diverse regions. Repressed in the northwestern frontier, it resurfaced in the eastern provinces as the Faraizi movement. For an extended period, the British merchants in Bengal found themselves in a precarious situation due to the activities of the Faraizis.²

The phenomenon commonly identified as the mutiny of 1857 was, in fact, preceded by an array of initiatives directed towards dislodging the British from the firmly entrenched position they had progressively yet decisively established within the nation's economic and political infrastructure. It is essential to scrutinize the political milieu of India at the onset of the 19th century and assess the interactions and standings of the diverse powers engaged in the struggle for dominance.

The Mughal Empire and the Mughal Emperor

Upon the passing of Aurangzeb in 1707, the Mughal Empire had already initiated a significant epoch in its historical development. Prolonged periods of incessant conflict in the Deccan had utterly devastated the nation's prosperity. Agrarian distress, economic disintegration, and political turmoil plagued both the northern and southern regions. The central authority found itself impotent in curbing the rebellious factions. The Marathas, the Jats, and the Sikhs commenced their militant endeavors against the Mughal regime, engendering significant apprehension and anxiety within the civilian

population, which included both Hindu and Muslim communities. Harcharan Das elucidates the circumstances faced by the inhabitants of Delhi amid the Jat incursions in the following manner: The denizens of Delhi traversed from domicile to domicile, thoroughfare to thoroughfare, enveloped in despair and confusion, reminiscent of a battered vessel adrift upon tumultuous seas; every individual was scurrying about in a state of madness, distraught, perplexed, and incapable of attending to their own welfare.³

The endeavors of the Marathas, Sikhs, Jats, and Rohillas each of whom was eager to assert dominance within the nation while simultaneously lacking the necessary competence to administer a comprehensive all-India governance rendered the Mughal Empire to a mere semblance of its former self. The empire's esteem diminished with each assault perpetrated upon Delhi by these factions. Exploiting the weaknesses inherent within the central authority, regional governors instituted autonomous principalities in Bengal, Awadh, and the Deccan. Consequently, the territorial expanse of the Mughal Empire contracted to include only a restricted number of districts in proximity to Delhi. With the rise of British hegemony, the Mughal Empire was confined to the precincts of the Red Fort, and the Mughal Emperor was relegated to the diminished status of the Saman Burj. Indeed, the Mughal emperor transitioned from being regarded as an individual to being perceived as an institution.⁴

During the early decades of the nineteenth century, the last two emperors of the Mughal dynasty who occupied the throne of Delhi were Akbar Shah II (1806-1838 C.E.) and Bahadur Shah II (1837-1857 C.E.). Akbar Shah II exhibited considerable weakness and indecisiveness as a ruler. He relied heavily on the women of the harem even for making decisions regarding administrative and political affairs. Indeed, as Spear articulates, these women effectively assumed the role of the genuine architects of his policy.⁵

The three prominent women who exerted influence over him and directed the fates of the declining empire were Qudsia Begum, his maternal figure, Mumtaz Mahal, his preferred spouse, and Daulat-un-Nisa Begum, his aunt on his father's side. Even in matters of political discourse and diplomatic negotiations, they played a significant role. The monarch himself, as noted by Holford, engaged minimally in dialogues, yet he periodically elucidated or affirmed those of their statements that pertained to his own sentiments or desires.⁶ The financial condition of the Emperor declined to a degree whereby the silver ceiling of the Diwan-i-Khas was disassembled and later sold in the commercial market to meet the increasing monetary demands of the royal treasury. The copper ceiling of the Diwan-i-Am was repurposed for the minting of currency.⁷ The palace emanated an impression of a setting shrouded by impoverished individuals and those suffering from severe economic deprivation. Sir Sayyid narrates that during this epoch, his maternal grandfather Khwaja Farid Uddin was summoned by Akbar Shah to address the fiscal concerns of the palace; however, the entrenched interests within the royal court rendered him ineffective, leading him to conclude that there existed no plausible alternative other than to resign and withdraw from his official duties. At this juncture, the destitution of the salatin (the emperor's collateral relatives) had escalated to such a degree that they would vociferously proclaim from the rooftops of their residences, "We are famished, we are famished."⁸ There existed a significant populace of salatin residing on pensions within the confines of the palace. They were explicitly prohibited from exiting the palace premises to secure their means of

subsistence. Such an action was perceived as detrimental to the esteemed dignity of the Mughal Empire.

Emperor Akbar Shah expressed his desire to appoint Mirza Jahangir as his successor; however, Lord Minto declined to acknowledge this appointment and prohibited the Resident from participating in his formal inauguration. Lord Minto characterized his stance towards the Mughal sovereign as a respectful acknowledgment of a nominal authority. Nevertheless, he advocated for an augmentation of the royal stipend in accordance with the commitments previously established by Wellesley.

Bahadur Shah II, who ascended to the imperial throne subsequent to Akbar Shah in the year 1837, faced an even more untenable predicament. Lord Ellenborough abrogated the tradition of nazar, as he deemed this act of subordinate feudal submission to be incongruous with the relative stature of the Sovereign of Delhi. Bahadur Shah articulated his dissent; nevertheless, his nazrs were not reinstated. The incident pertaining to the nazrs, as observed by Spear, serves as a salient exemplar of the altered perceptions regarding the Mughal dynasty. The rescindment of the agents' nazar encompassed not only an acknowledgment of the King's assertions regarding his sovereignty over India but also a reinforcement of his identity as a monarch.⁹

Bahadur Shah, a prince distinguished by his literary inclinations, had cultivated an entourage comprising poets, scholars, and theologians; however, he faced considerable challenges in exerting influence over the political dynamics and inclinations of his era. The court was rife with corruption and conspiracies. Numerous idle salatin wandered aimlessly, causing disturbances. Sir Sayyid Ahmad presents a rather absurd portrayal of Bahadur Shah in the subsequent passage.

The former monarch harbored a peculiar notion that he could metamorphose into a fly or gnat, believing that in such a form, he could traverse to other nations and ascertain the happenings therein. He genuinely and resolutely maintained that he possessed the ability to undergo transformation.¹⁰

This assessment may represent a rather stringent appraisal of the character of Bahadur Shah; nevertheless, it is irrefutable that the atmosphere within his court was marked by apathy, inertia, moral decay, scheming, treachery, and disloyalty. However, one dimension is exceptionally challenging to dispute. While the Mughal emperor embodied little more than a mere shadow of former grandeur, within the shared political psyche of the citizenry, he emerged as a symbol of India's political cohesion. The fact that, during the Indian uprising against British rule in 1857 C.E., all groups, including the Marathas, Jats, and various others, who had historically resisted Mughal supremacy for centuries, united under Bahadur Shah, highlights the perception of the Mughal emperor as an emblem of India's political uniqueness.

The Sikh Power in the Punjab

The political instability and chaos that emerged in northern India, subsequent to the invasions led by Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali, created a conducive environment for the elevation of Sikh authority in the Punjab region. Throughout the 19th century, the Sikh populace in the Punjab exerted a considerable influence on the political ideologies and actions of the Muslim community.

Ranjit Singh, distinguished by his steadfast determination and a disposition characterized by self-serving interests, duplicity, resourcefulness, perseverance, bravery, and greed, embarked on his professional trajectory as a soldier but swiftly rose to the esteemed position of ruler of the Punjab, designating Lahore as his capital in the year 1799 C.E. Simultaneously, the British demonstrated a pronounced interest in establishing a strategic alliance with the Maharaja, driven by concerns regarding a prospective French incursion through Persia, Afghanistan, and the Punjab. Charles Metcalfe was dispatched to Ranjit Singh's court to negotiate a treaty designed to mitigate tensions in the cis-Sutlej states while ensuring that the British secured the allegiance of Ranjit Singh. The British envoy engaged with him at Qasur; however, the negotiations culminated in failure. In reaction, David Ochterlony advanced with a substantial British force to the Sutlej and consolidated his position at Ludhiana. Ranjit Singh maintained his demand for the withdrawal of British troops to Karnal. The British position altered upon receipt of intelligence indicating that Napoleon had relinquished his ambitions to invade India. On February 9th, Ochterlony issued a proclamation declaring that the cis-Sutlej States were now under British protection, and any acts of aggression from Ranjit Singh would elicit a vigorous response. This proclamation achieved its intended effect, prompting Ranjit Singh to accede to the Treaty of Amritsar on April 25, 1809. The British authorities granted Ranjit Singh the right to govern the territory north of the Sutlej while securing a commitment that he would not deploy military forces south of the river beyond what was necessary for routine administrative operations and that he would abstain from infringing upon the territories of other cis-Sutlej states.

The Maharaja augmented his supremacy in territories where his jurisdiction was endorsed by the British Empire. In light of the volatile circumstances prevailing in Afghanistan during that period, Ranjit Singh deliberated upon the prospect of territorial expansion towards the western frontiers. Following the expulsion of Shah Shuja from Afghanistan, who subsequently sought asylum in India, Ranjit Singh commenced diplomatic negotiations with him, proffering assistance in the reclamation of Multan and Kashmir. Under considerable pressure, Ranjit Singh acquired the Koh-i-Nur diamond from Shah Shuja, failing to fulfill the obligations he had pledged.

In the year 1819, Ranjit Singh fortified his control over Kashmir and attained dominion over Dera Ghazi Khan and Dera Ismail Khan, located along the banks of the Indus River. By 1822, he demanded tribute from the governor of Peshawar, who complied by presenting a contingent of horses as a token of subservience. In the subsequent year, 1823, Ranjit Singh secured a momentous military triumph against the Afghan forces at Nawshera. The annexation of the frontier region was met with fierce opposition from the Muslim populace; nonetheless, Ranjit Singh adeptly consolidated his power and emerged as the sovereign ruler of a vast territory extending from the Khyber Pass to the Sutlej River and from Kashmir to Multan. This geopolitical configuration provoked a counter-response, epitomized by the resistance movement led by Sayyid Ahmad Shahid.

The principal political ambition of Ranjit Singh was to establish a cohesive Sikh state encompassing the entire territory extending to the estuary of the Indus River, which necessitated the subjugation of several Muslim states. This endeavor inevitably brought him into confrontation with British interests; nevertheless, both parties exercised prudence in their interactions to avert open conflict.

In the initial months of the year 1831, a delegation representing Lahore sought a formal audience with Lord William Bentinck in Simla. Bentinck assigned Captain Wade, the Political Agent positioned in Ludhiana, the duty of orchestrating a meeting between himself and Maharaja Ranjit Singh. This meeting occurred in Ropar, situated along the banks of the Sutlej River, and spanned a week, during which the relationship between Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the British notably intensified. Ranjit Singh advocated for a fair partition of Sind; however, Bentinck did not affirm this proposal. In the year 1843, Charles Napier performed what he deemed a remarkably advantageous, beneficial, and humane act of deception through the annexation of the entirety of Sind.

Nevertheless, within a relatively short period, Sikh governance emerged as a formidable authority within the region. The Muslim populace faced significant challenges in openly contesting its dominion, as any opposition required a resilient, organized, and meticulously coordinated effort. The conditions experienced by Muslims under Sikh rule were profoundly dire, as they suffered not only a life characterized by humiliation but were also subjected to various forms of severe mistreatment and torturous circumstances.

The following proclamation issued in the context of jihad against the Sikhs elucidates the dire circumstances faced by the Muslims of Punjab.

The Sikh nation has long exerted control over Lahore and other locales. Their oppressive actions have surpassed all conceivable limits. Countless Muslims have been unjustly slain by them, and many have been subjected to public shame. The practice of calling to prayer from the Mosques has been entirely suppressed, and the slaughter of cows has been thoroughly prohibited. Ultimately, when their intolerable tyranny became insupportable, Hazrat Sayyid Ahmad (may his fortune and blessings be perpetually bestowed) took it upon himself, motivated solely by the desire to safeguard the Faith, to gather a small group of Muslims and journey towards Kabul and Peshawar, successfully awakening the Muslim community from their state of apathy and galvanizing their resolve for action. Praise be to God, thousands of faithful individuals responded to his call to embark on the path of divine service, and on December 21, 1826, the jihad against the infidel Sikhs commenced.¹¹

This declaration, which encapsulates the prevailing conditions and the gravity of the situation, was propagated throughout northern India. As the Muslim campaign against the Sikhs was initiated under the leadership of Sayyid Ahmad Shahid, the British authorities chose to adopt a stance of passivity and maintain a policy of clear neutrality. Sir Sayyid elucidates that numerous Muhammadans, armed with weapons and a significant stockpile of military resources, were gathered for jihad against the Sikhs. The Commissioner and the Magistrate, who were informed of this development, duly notified the government; however, the government explicitly mandated that they abstain from any form of intervention.¹² Indeed, it was posited that regardless of which faction emerged as the vanquished, the ultimate triumph would be attributed to the British.

The British Power

It would be inappropriate to delineate the sequential phases of development that culminated in the consolidation of British authority in India. The East India Company commenced its existence as a commercial enterprise and rapidly evolved into a

governing entity. Edmund Burke astutely observed that the East India Company appeared to function not merely as an organization established for the promotion of British commerce, but, in essence, as a delegation embodying the entirety of the power and sovereignty of this realm dispatched to the eastern territories.¹³

Although the assignment of responsibility for the inception of British dominance is frequently attributed to the Marquess of Wellesley, the theoretical framework regarding the development of a territorial empire within the Indian subcontinent is ascribed to Dupleix.¹⁴ It is a prevalent practice among the English populace in this nation to engage in actions with utmost deliberation. They operate with a vision that encompasses both foresight and prudence. They consistently remain vigilant to ensure that any misstep does not disrupt their administrative duties and consequently precipitate disorder within the nation. Therefore, whenever they detect any potential threat in the northern region, they mobilize their military forces toward that area and establish garrisons to ensure that any adversary that emerges may be swiftly subdued. In instances where they identify any vulnerabilities, they promptly address them. This exemplifies the commendable attribute of the English that they execute their responsibilities at the most opportune moment.¹⁵

Within a century subsequent to the engagement at Plassey (June 27, 1757), India found itself necessitated to concede to the dominion of the British Empire. The British initiated a transformative trend characterized by iconoclasm and socio-economic upheaval within the country, dismantled pre-existing institutions, and engendered a novel social, political, and economic paradigm; in essence, the East India Company facilitated the preliminary phase of capitalism in India.

The emergence of British authority in India precipitated a profound transformation in the political, social, and economic circumstances of the Muslim community. W.W. Hunter, in his scholarly work, acknowledges the numerous atrocities inflicted upon Muslims by British authorities. He articulates, "There is no utility in disregarding the reality that Indian Muhammadans have levelled a series of grave accusations against us, as severe as any ever directed towards a governing body." They contend that we have effectively barred practitioners of their faith from every respectable avenue of occupation. They assert that we have instituted an educational framework that has relegated them to a state of derision and destitution. They claim that we have inflicted suffering upon countless families through the dissolution of their legal representatives. Most importantly, they accuse us of intentional malfeasance regarding their religious foundations and the large-scale misappropriation of their educational resources. A multitude of employment opportunities have been rendered inaccessible to Muslims, while the British authorities commenced the systematic patronage and assistance of Hindus. Hunter observes, "All categories of employment, irrespective of their scale, are increasingly being appropriated from the Muslim community and redistributed to individuals of different ethnic backgrounds, predominantly Hindus." The Government is ostensibly compelled to treat all segments of its citizenry with impartiality; nonetheless, a point has been reached where it explicitly delineates Muslims in its Gazettes for the purpose of exclusion from public sector appointments. Recently, when several vacancies emerged within the office of the Sunderbans Commissioner, that official, in his proclamation within the Government Gazette, stipulated that the positions would be exclusively conferred upon Hindus. In summary, the Muhammadans have descended to such a lowly status that even when suitably qualified

for governmental positions, they are systematically excluded through official governmental notifications. Their dire circumstances receive scant attention, and higher authorities do not deign to acknowledge their plight.¹⁶

The English populace perceived Muslims as adversaries of Christianity and the State.¹⁷ Macaulay once articulated that Clive held a pronounced opposition towards Muslims and exhibited an unwillingness to confer upon them any positions of authority.¹⁸ The underlying reasoning, as interpreted by an Englishman, is that, owing to a myriad of factors, Muslims exhibit a distinct separation from our societal constructs, whereas the modifications to which the more versatile Hindus have acquiesced are regarded by the former as significant personal injustices.¹⁹

A formal petition, submitted by the Muslim community, was conveyed to the Commissioner of Orissa, detailing the precarious circumstances confronted by Muslims during that historical juncture. The document articulates, as loyal subjects of Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen, we assert, with unwavering conviction, our rightful claim to equitable access to all positions within the nation's administrative echelons. In reality, the Orissa Muhammadans have experienced systematic marginalization, with no avenues for revitalization. Emerging from a lineage of distinction, economically disadvantaged by their vocations, and devoid of benefactors, we find ourselves in a predicament akin to that of a fish removed from its natural environment. Such is the regrettable state of the Muhammadans, which we submit for your esteemed consideration, placing our trust in your Honor's capacity as the sole representative of Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen for the Orissa division, and aspiring for just and equitable treatment to be extended to all segments of society, regardless of their race or creed. The condition of destitution and austerity to which we have been relegated, as a consequence of the unfulfilled anticipations stemming from our prior governmental positions, has thrust us into an incessant state of reliance, prompting us to articulate from the profound depths of our souls that we would embark upon journeys to the most isolated regions of the earth, scale the frigid peaks of the Himalayas, and traverse the barren territories of Siberia, provided we could be convinced that such undertakings would result in a governmental appointment that affords a remuneration of ten shillings weekly.²⁰

In addition to its socio-political ramifications, the ascendance of British dominance in India engendered significant economic repercussions. Historically, Indian commodities were exported through the Portuguese, Dutch, and Arab traders; however, these exports subsequently vanished entirely, relegating India to a mere supplier of raw materials, which consequently diminished the national income.

The deterioration of the landed aristocracy imposed significant detriment upon Indian craftsmen. The emergence of the power loom eradicated the vestiges of conventional industries. The British methodically dismantled the industrial centers situated in Surat, Dacca, Murshidabad, and numerous other locales. The age-old crafts of spinning and weaving, which had provided livelihoods for countless individuals, were deliberately eradicated to favor the interests of British manufacturing centers in Manchester and London.

Within the context of the nominal Mughal authority in Delhi, the rigorous administration implemented by the Sikhs in Punjab, and the rising tide of British

Imperialism across northern India, the political philosophies and viewpoints of the contemporary Muslim populace have been scrupulously examined in the subsequent sections.

Shah Abdul Aziz and His Political Ideas

The most pivotal figure in the annals of Indian Islam during the 18th century was Shah Waliullah of Delhi (1703-1762). He was not solely a highly esteemed religious instructor but also a perspicacious political theorist. The disintegration of the Mughal Empire unfolded before his observation, while the nation succumbed to an increasingly profound economic crisis throughout his lifetime. Born into an epoch characterized by political and economic fragmentation, he devoted his intellectual efforts to a thorough examination of the underlying causes of political deterioration and economic turmoil. As articulated by Dr. Tara Chand, he encountered some of the most complex quandaries associated with Society and State, alongside religion, ethics, and politics; within the field of political discourse, he can be considered the preeminent Muslim intellectual with a clear comprehension of the intricate connections between ethics, politics, and economics. His conceptualization of justice warrants a comparative analysis with that of Plato, due to its broad scope and depth. However, the cognitive frameworks through which they developed their respective concepts were significantly divergent. Waliullah's philosophical framework encompassed significant elements of thought that, if adequately cultivated, could have contributed to resolving the complex issues of Indian life; regrettably, the conditions of the era were unfavorable, and the philosopher's resources were insufficient.²¹

In his seminal treatise *Hujjat-ullah-il-Balighah*, the author delineates several factors contributing to the political and economic malaise of his era.

The contemporary disintegration of the State can be attributed to two primary factors. Firstly, the strain on the public treasury arises from the populace's propensity to extract funds from the exchequer without fulfilling a concomitant obligation. Individuals often reference their roles as military personnel or religious academics, thus claiming a right to access state treasury resources, or they assert affiliation with distinguished groups, such as devout Sufis or renowned poets, who receive financial allowances without providing any services to the government. This occurrence detrimentally affects the economic stability of other members of society and places an excessive strain on the economy. The second element contributing to this widespread degradation is the exorbitant taxation levied upon agrarians, tradespeople, and laborers, in conjunction with the unjust treatment of these groups. Consequently, those individuals who remain loyal to the State and adhere to its directives are gradually being impoverished. Conversely, those who are insubordinate and evade taxation are becoming increasingly defiant and neglectful of their fiscal responsibilities. The economic well-being of a nation is fundamentally reliant on moderate taxation and judiciously necessary appointments within the military and other governmental sectors. It is imperative that the populace comprehends this critical insight.²²

A gentleman possessing an exceptionally sensitive disposition and an astute observational acumen, Shah Waliullah traversed an era characterized by chaos and conflict within the nation, bearing witness to the inability of the Mughal Empire to subdue the rebellious factions. He completely disavowed his conviction in the Mughal

Empire, as well as in the framework of hereditary monarchy, which obliterated any vestige of democratic principles, engendered a narrow-minded perspective among the ruling class, catalyzed the economic exploitation of the populace, imposed unjust fiscal obligations on the citizenry, and intensified the suffering and subjugation of both agricultural laborers and craftsmen. He boldly criticized the ruling class for its methodical exploitation of the general populace, widespread corruption, and omnipresent complacency. He addressed the attitudes of the nobility with the following remarks.²³

Oh Amirs, do you not harbor a reverence for the Divine? (What accounts for) your complete immersion in the pursuit of ephemeral indulgences, whilst disregarding those individuals entrusted to your guardianship? The consequence of this negligence is that the powerful are preying upon the vulnerable... Your cognitive faculties are wholly concentrated on procuring lavish sustenance and enchanting, aesthetically pleasing companions for personal gratification. Your focus is exclusively directed towards opulent garments and grandiose abodes.²⁴

He expressed significant criticism regarding the disposition of the soldiers, urging them to internalize the authentic essence of jihad and uphold discipline. Through his literary contributions, one can discern the faint reverberations of a democratic ethos that scrutinized the prevailing political and social frameworks from the perspective of the common populace, a notion that was remarkably distinctive during that historical period. His exhortations to the citizenry to engage in their rightful participation within the political sphere imbue his overall methodology with a notable democratic essence. He emphasized the imperative of equity and justice in individual existence, alongside the necessity for equilibrium (*tawazun*) in economic relations, as these factors are fundamental in establishing a robust and appropriate political framework. He found common ground with Plato and Aristotle in advocating for the enhancement of virtue and intellect among the populace.

His political philosophy was fundamentally oriented around the escalating demands of laborers, artisans, and agrarians, asserting that the implementation of these principles was feasible solely within a context of peace, thereby channeling his efforts towards the restoration of harmony and stability within the nation.

In the realm of religion, he dismantled the exclusivity of the religious elites by translating the Quran into Persian, thereby rendering its message accessible to a broader audience. Consequently, Shah Waliullah emerged as a pivotal figure in the political and religious spheres affecting the lives of the populace.

His intellectual contributions significantly shaped the trajectory and orientation of subsequent generations' Muslim political and religious discourse. The most conspicuous demonstration of his impact can be discerned in the pursuits and initiatives of his descendant, Shah Abdul Aziz, who, upon assuming his role at the Madrasa-i-Rahmiya at the age of 18, continued to sustain his legacy within both the political and scholarly spheres.

Life of Shah Abdul Aziz

Shah Abdul Aziz, the primogenitor of Shah Waliullah, was born in the year 1159 A.H./1746 C.E. Ghulam Halim functions as his chronogrammatic appellation, denoting

the annum of his birth.²⁵ He initiated his preliminary education under the guidance of two esteemed disciples of his ancestor, Khwaja Muhammad Amin and Shaikh Muhammad Ashiq of Phulat. Thereafter, he matriculated at the seminary, Madrasa-i-Rahimiya, founded by his father, where he undertook an extensive examination of the Masabih, the Musawwah fi Sharh Muwatta, and the Sihah Sitta. He demonstrated an extraordinary aptitude for memorization. He assimilated the canonical collections of Ahadith, the Sihah Sitta, nearly verbatim. Thus, he consummated his education under the guidance of his father Shah Waliullah in the year 1174/1760 while still in his adolescent years. In 1763, he ascended to the position previously held by his father at the Madrasa-i-Rahimiya and commenced imparting knowledge to students in religious disciplines, particularly focusing on the Quran and the Hadith. Scholars from various regions traveled considerable distances to seek enlightenment at his feet. He disseminated the intellectual legacy of his father to a broader audience than had previously been achieved. Among his pupils are notable figures such as Shah Abdul Qadir Dihlawi, Shah Rafi Uddin Dihlawi, Shah Muhammad Yaqub, Shah Muhammad Ishaq, Shah Muhammad Ismail, Shah Abdul Hai, and Sayyid Ahmad Shahid, all of whom are recognized luminaries in the domain of Islamic religious scholarship.²⁶

Political Thought of Shah Abdul Aziz

Shah Abdul Aziz dwelled in Delhi for a span of nearly seventy-eight years. During this period, Delhi experienced one of the most consequential phases in its historical development. From the third battle of Panipat (1761) to the incursion of Lord Lake's forces into Delhi (1803), he observed Delhi navigating a myriad of political disturbances. This swift succession of political changes significantly shaped his political philosophy. Notably, while he criticized the depredations perpetrated by the Sikhs, Jats, and Marathas, he refrained from categorizing the territories under their dominion as Dar-ul-Harb; conversely, upon the establishment of British authority in northern India albeit it ameliorated the previously prevailing instabilities he promulgated a fatwa designating all land under British occupation as Dar-ul-Harb.

The fatwa is articulated as follows:²⁷

In the urban center of Delhi, the Imam ul-Muslimin is devoid of any formal jurisdiction. The genuine authority is concentrated in the hands of Christian officials. There exists an absence of accountability regarding their conduct, and the promulgation of Kufr edicts indicates that in the domains of governance and jurisprudence, as well as in the arenas of law enforcement, commercial activities, financial transactions, and tax administration, the Kuffar (infidels) exert control. Indeed, there are specific Islamic practices, such as the observance of Friday prayers, Eid prayers, the azan, and the ritual slaughtering of cattle, which they tolerate without interference; however, the fundamental essence of these rituals holds no intrinsic value for them. They systematically dismantle mosques with complete impunity, and no Muslim or any Zimmi is permitted to access the city or its surrounding areas without their explicit authorization. It aligns with their interests to refrain from obstructing the ingress of travelers and merchants into the city. In contrast, prominent figures such as Shuja-ul-Mulk and Wilayati Begum are unable to conduct a visit to the city without securing their permission. From this point (Delhi) to Calcutta, Christians exercise comprehensive control. Undoubtedly, in regions such as Hyderabad, Rampur,

and Lucknow, they have delegated administrative responsibilities to local authorities, yet this occurs because these authorities have acknowledged their subjugation and have acquiesced to their dominance.

To thoroughly grasp the ramifications of this fatwa, it is essential to clarify the differentiation between Dar-ul-Islam and Dar-ul-Harb. Within the framework of Islamic constitutional jurisprudence, the international terrain is delineated into Dar-ul-Harb and Dar-ul-Islam. Dar-ul-Islam, denoted as the abode of Islam, signifies a region where the principles of Islam are enacted under the authority of a Muslim ruler. Its inhabitants include both Muslims and non-Muslims who have consented to Muslim governance and who, within designated parameters, are guaranteed their lives and properties by the Muslim State, although without the prospect of complete citizenship. Conversely, the Dar-ul-Harb, or the Abode of War, encompasses territories that are not under Islamic governance, yet which, either in reality or in potential, represent a theater of conflict for Muslims until such time as they are subdued and transformed into an Abode of Islam through conquest. Thus, the transformation of Dar-ul-Harb into Dar-ul-Islam represents the fundamental aim of jihad, and in theoretical discourse, the Islamic State exists in a continuous state of conflict with the non-Islamic world.

The Abode of Islam does not transition into the Abode of War except under the following stipulations.

- i. that the judicial determinations of non-believers are acknowledged while those of Islam are disregarded.
- ii. that the territory in question is in immediate proximity to an abode of war, with no Muslim territory interposed.
- iii. that there is an absence of protection for Muslims and their non-Muslim dhimmis.

Among these factors, the most critical holds significant weight, and certain scholars have argued that as long as a singular legal ruling (hukum) of Islam is observed and maintained, a nation cannot be designated as a dar-ul-harb. In situations where a Muslim nation does indeed evolve into a dar-ul-harb, it becomes the obligatory responsibility of all Muslims to distance themselves from that environment; moreover, a wife who chooses not to accompany her husband in this pursuit is, in effect, considered to be divorced.²⁸

This fatwa possesses a distinct significance within the context of 19th-century Muslim political thought. It represented the inaugural and unequivocal articulation of the Muslim perspective regarding the establishment of British colonial governance in India. The frequency with which this fatwa was referenced in 1857 underscores its profound impact on the prevailing Muslim intellectual discourse of the time. The subsequent facets of this fatwa warrant particular attention.²⁹

1. Shah Abdul Aziz had presided over the academic landscape in Delhi since the year 1763, following the demise of his father. Throughout the interval from 1763 to 1803, he witnessed Delhi enduring recurrent devastation and looting perpetrated by the Jats, the Sikhs, and the Marathas. In his Arabic poetry³⁰, he has alluded to the egregious acts perpetrated by them. In the year 1771, he witnessed the Marathas seize control of the city of Delhi, with Visaji being designated as the collector of the fiscal revenues of Delhi and the surrounding districts of the capital.³¹ In the year 1784,

Mahadji Sindhia held the position of regent in the administrative center of Delhi.³² However, Shah Abdul Aziz did not designate India as Dar-ul-Harb based on this rationale.

2. His opposition to the enforcement of British dominion in India was not driven by any theological concerns (he concedes that the British do not obstruct the practice of Islamic rituals); rather, it originated from the recognition that, in the domains of governance and jurisprudence, in matters related to law enforcement and societal order, as well as within the fields of trade, finance, and tax administration, the British had established a status of unparalleled supremacy.

Shah Abdul Aziz was not satisfied with the mere promulgation of the fatwa. He undertook further measures by leading the formation of the resistance movement. In light of his advanced age, which hindered his capacity for active involvement, he entrusted the responsibility to Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi, directing him to align with Amir Ali Khan's camp in Rajputana, who was engaged in hostilities against the British in conjunction with Jaswant Rao Holkar.

While Shah Abdul Aziz was mobilizing his adherents to oppose the imposition of British hegemony in India, he demonstrated sagacity by acknowledging the substantial benefits presented by Western science and education. He encouraged his students to pursue proficiency in the English language and commended the technical expertise demonstrated by the English.³³ This stance was profoundly pragmatic and intellectually stimulating. Nonetheless, this perspective was not sustained by subsequent generations. Individuals who engaged in the study of the English language and the sciences readily acquiesced to British governance, whereas those who outright rejected British dominion completely declined to pursue the English language and its associated literature. As anticipated, two fundamentally divergent tendencies manifested within the religious and social frameworks of Islam; one was exemplified by the Aligarh movement, which was directed by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, while the other was embodied by the Deobandi school of thought, which was led by Mawlana Muhammad Qasim.³⁴

Political Approach of Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi

In the realm of 19th-century Muslim religio-political discourse, Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi occupies a distinctive and pivotal position. He surpassed the confines of a conventional political theorist, simultaneously serving as an impassioned political activist and organizer. He invigorated the previously dormant and placid state of Muslim political life to its very essence; although he ultimately fell short of realizing his ambitions, he left an indelible mark on the political framework of his era, with the effects of his movement discernible throughout various territories of the nation and manifested in a plethora of social and political engagements.

Following the proclamation of India as Dar-ul-Harb, denoting the territory of the adversary, by Shah Abdul Aziz, Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi initiated his campaign for jihad amongst the general populace. As a result, each person who came into contact with him made a commitment to offer their life in alignment with his exhortation. In the year 1821, he undertook a pilgrimage to Mecca for Haj. It was during this expedition to Arabia that he became significantly influenced by the Wahhabi ideological framework and recognized its profound effect on the extensive populace. He returned with this ideological construct, employing it as a political tool aimed at reinstating Muslim

dominance. Immediately following his return from Mecca, he set in motion the conclusive development of his reformist initiative, which tragically reached its zenith on Friday, May 6, 1831, when he was assassinated at Balakot, accompanied by a significant number of his followers, including Shah Ismail, whose contributions were fundamental to the core principles of his movement. Upon the announcement of his demise, celebrations erupted within the court of Ranjit Singh, who commanded a Royal salute to be discharged and instructed the illumination of the city of Amritsar in honor of the event.³⁵

Sayyid Ahmad engaged in the revitalization of Islam within the spheres of both religious and political dimensions. He embraced a theological viewpoint concerning the nature of existence and governance. His profound belief in the unity of God and the supremacy of the Quran as the definitive guide for humanity is evident in his written communications and political pronouncements. His philosophical perspective and approach towards existence and governance reaffirm that the essence of Tawhid, as a tangible concept, encompasses themes of equality, solidarity, and freedom. The State, viewed through an Islamic lens, symbolizes an endeavor to realize these principles as dynamic forces within the continuum of space-time, reflecting a desire to manifest them within a designated human organization.³⁶ The intellectual development of his ideology was profoundly influenced by the doctrines espoused by Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi and, more explicitly, by Shah Waliullah. Furthermore, he harbored an intense affection for India and held a sincere conviction regarding the nation's quest for autonomy. It was in the aftermath of the calamity of 1857 that his movement acquired a markedly distinct character.³⁷

Sayyid Ahmad cannot be distinctly categorized as either a philosopher or a politician due to his absence of extensive discursive engagement; nonetheless, he exhibited a coherent perspective accompanied by pragmatic considerations in both his intellectual and practical endeavors. Despite refraining from the formulation of any systematic political theory or doctrine, he is still acknowledged as one of the eminent political figures of the nineteenth century. His vigorous and bold participation in the jihad movement infused a political dimension into his identity. He committed a considerable portion of his life to active service. Regardless of political differences and biases, he extended assistance to all individuals acquainted with diverse challenges and circumstances, particularly to those whom he perceived could provide even the slightest support in his quest to reform and realign Muslim society.

His aspirations did not encompass the restoration of the Mughal Empire, nor did he seek to establish another state under his dominion. Instead, his objective was to ensure the establishment of an Islamic Kingdom and to rectify the injustices inflicted upon Muslims by both the Sikhs and the British. The contemplation of a political system that closely mirrored the Khilafat-i-Rashida, in both essence and specifics, illustrates the unrealistic and contextually misplaced nature of his movement and methodology.

To grasp the authentic significance and relevance of his mission, for which he ultimately sacrificed his life on the battlefield of Balakot, it is imperative to consider all preceding Muslim political upheavals as well as the challenging circumstances prevailing in the country at that time. The disintegration of the religious and political authority of Muslims underscored his mission and infused it with even greater fervor. Muslims were profoundly unsettled, and a myriad of societal ills had infiltrated their

community, leaving them in a state of uncertainty regarding the trajectory of Muslim society.

The principal hallmark of Sayyid Ahmad's movement was his emphasis on the practical endeavor of jihad. He employed the entirety of his intellectual capabilities and spiritual qualities to convince the populace of the essential necessity of engaging in conflict for the creation of an Islamic State. In a letter directed to Nawab Sulaiman Jah, he expressed, "In recent years, fortune has been remarkably favorable to the condemned Christians and the bothersome polytheists, leading to their escalating oppression of the populace. Atheistic and polytheistic practices are being overtly displayed, whereas Islamic observances have faded into obscurity. This distressing situation evokes significant sorrow within my heart, inciting a yearning to embark on hijrat. My heart is burdened with humiliation at this religious decline, and my thoughts are exclusively occupied with a singular concern: how to mobilize for jihad."³⁸

Given that India had been classified as a region of hostility, it became essential to either initiate a jihad or to execute a permanent relocation from that territory. He did not endorse the prospect of irrevocable withdrawal; rather, he advocated for jihad while systematically dismantling all arguments that sought to dissuade him from this course of action. He never contemplated the shedding of Muslim blood to reestablish the dominion of corrupt Muslim rulers; instead, he envisioned an Islamic State as an aspirational ideal to pursue. He was not in favor of monarchy, as its historical trajectory had thoroughly convinced him of its unworthiness.

In the realm of historical analysis, it is evident that the early reformers and statesmen, who aspired to maintain Islamic traditions, primarily directed their appeals towards intellectual elites and sought the cooperation of rulers and influential political figures, while largely disregarding the wider community. Conversely, in the movement orchestrated by Sayyid Ahmad, reminiscent of J.S. Mill, considerable emphasis was placed on both the collective masses and individual citizens, underscoring the critical importance of popular endorsement for the successful establishment of an Islamic State that appropriately recognizes the sentiments and aspirations of the general populace. In this context, he bears comparison to Rousseau, who expounded his theory of the General Will as a cornerstone principle. He posited that, akin to the perspectives of Rousseau and Bentham, a government lacking the support of the majority is devoid of legitimacy and should promptly be discarded by the citizenry. It was this profound affinity for the common populace that rendered him the first popular political leader within the nation.

The turmoil among the Mujahidins at Akora and Hazro culminated in a gathering on the 11th of January, 1827, which consisted of chiefs, scholars, and notable Mujahidins, who collectively resolved to appoint Sayyid Ahmad as their Imam and implored him to assume the necessary authority to ensure the success of their endeavor. Subsequently, he became known as Sayyid Badshah, while the Sikhs referred to him as Khalifa. His imamate did not infringe upon the jurisdiction of local chiefs and principalities; rather, it established a supreme authority to enable the effective execution of jihad. In constitutional terms, this arrangement can be characterized as a loose confederation. His name was thereafter integrated into the Khutbah of Friday prayers. Certain scholars contend that even currency was minted bearing his name³⁹; nevertheless, there exists a lack of credible historical documentation to verify this assertion.

The institution of the imamat significantly augmented the momentum of the jihad movement, culminating in the assembly of 80,000 individuals within a mere two-month period for the purpose of engaging in the jihad struggle. Among the foremost figures in this initiative were Yar Muhammad Khan and the Sadars of Peshawar. They were instrumental in mobilizing a lashkar comprising 20,000 valiant men equipped with light artillery.

The successful capture of Peshawar, following considerable conflict and hardship, facilitated the consolidation of the remarkable political stature of Sayyid Ahmad, thus rendering him the preeminent figure in the region, widely recognized for his exceptional political acumen and operational capability. His adherents traversed the entirety of the nation, actively recruiting individuals for the cause. The work of Hunter provides a comprehensive account of the actual state of his organization. In his observations, it is noted that throughout northern India, from the most distant reaches of East Bengal to the northernmost elevations of the Frontier, nearly every municipality harbored a clandestine organization centered around the local mosque and overseen by a cadre of virtuous individuals. The recruits undertook extensive journeys exceeding a thousand miles, acquiring essential resources and guidance along their route. From the central headquarters situated in Patna, emissaries disseminated the message of reform and jihad across India. They maintained high standards of conduct and demonstrated excellence in their interactions. The individuals who constituted the backbone of the jihad movement were predominantly scholars and intellectuals with clearly defined political objectives.

The movement initiated by Sayyid Ahmad, while fundamentally religious in character, was in alignment with the prevailing circumstances within the nation. For approximately five decades, the vigor of the populace in Northern India was harnessed under his leadership to reclaim lost authority. It remains irrefutable that his presence catalyzed the emergence of individuals endowed with exceptional political insight and mature political sagacity.

The establishment of a specialized code for the effective management of diplomatic affairs is a contemporary development. However, upon examining the practices of Sayyid Ahmad, one is astounded to discover that he had already formulated a code for the proficient administration of his political dealings. The contents of these correspondences could only be deciphered by a select group of individuals.

He exhibited exceptional discernment in the selection of his companions, all of whom possessed formidable character traits. Ghulam Rasul Mehr recounts that during their sojourn, Mullah Kalim became aware of comments made by certain female members of the village, indicating that the associates of Sayyid Ahmad were either individuals of saintly disposition or had been stripped of their sexual inclinations. They refrained from casting glances at women, a testament to the rigorous training imparted by Sayyid Ahmad.

Sayyid Ahmad achieved notable milestones within the framework of his movement. He engaged in direct opposition against the British authorities, who had devised a situation that has been delineated in a Persian publication from Calcutta (Durbin July, 1869) in the following manner: Various employment opportunities, both minor and major, are systematically being seized from the Muslim demographic and redistributed to

individuals of diverse ethnic backgrounds, particularly those identified as Hindus. The Government is mandated to treat all categories of its subjects with equitable regard; nevertheless, the prevailing conditions have compelled it to explicitly designate Muslims in its Gazettes for the purpose of their exclusion from governmental roles. Recently, when a number of vacancies arose within the Sundar bans Commission, that official, in announcing these positions in the Government Gazette, explicitly indicated that the appointments would be exclusively offered to Hindus.⁴⁰

Sayyid Ahmad demonstrated an exceptional ability to influence his audience through his compelling rhetoric. These discourses were diligently compiled by Shah Ismail and Abdul Hai, under the designation *Sirat-i-Mustaqim*. In light of the fact that Sayyid Ahmad had undertaken a comprehensive analysis of the Indian political milieu from multiple vantage points, particularly with respect to the challenges faced by the Muslim demographic in India during the early decades of the 19th century, he was not only capable of discerning the fundamental issues but also of articulating pragmatic solutions.

The Aims and Objectives of Jihad

In his epistolary exchanges with various leaders, he unequivocally articulated his positions regarding jihad and delineated several motivations that compelled him to proclaim jihad. In a correspondence addressed to Raja Hindu Rao, the then Wazir of Gwalior, he articulated the following.

It is evident that individuals who were once mere merchants have now ascended to the status of sovereign rulers within the nation. The dignity and esteem of numerous esteemed individuals have been utterly diminished by their actions. Those who once wielded authority in governance and political affairs are now rendered inert. Consequently, a select group of pious individuals has taken a stand for a cause, forsaking their familial ties and domestic lives solely for the sake of divine will. These individuals represent the devoted servants of God. Their aspirations do not include worldly recognition or honor. Our singular intention is to serve God, as material wealth and possessions have lost their significance for us.⁴¹

This indicates that he was indeed the inaugural combatant for Indian sovereignty and, through the expulsion of the British from the nation, aspired to institute a pristine national administration wherein no discord would arise with the governing authorities' religious beliefs and ideological perspectives.

In one of his correspondences addressed to Raja Hindu Rao, he articulates.

Upon the liberation of the nation from British control, our aspirations will be realized. The positions within the government will be conferred upon individuals who are both willing and deserving. We merely implore the populace of the State to dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to the service of Islam and to persist in fulfilling their roles within their respective regions.⁴²

It signifies that Sayyid Ahmad recognized the peril posed to the nation by the swiftly ascending influence of the East India Company; consequently, he consistently sought the collaboration and assistance of both Muslim and non-Muslim leaders to confront the shared adversary. His pronounced anti-British stance compelled him to depart from

the camp of Amir Khan immediately upon the latter's decision to engage in a treaty with the British authorities.

Choice of Strategic Frontier

The driving force behind his political development and practical expertise dictated that this initiative ought to originate from the northern frontier, where the powerful Afghan tribes could support such a movement and where an unbroken line of Muslim sovereigns reached into Turkistan. It was owing to his astute political acumen that he refrained from establishing India as the focal point of his political engagements. In this context, he would have been compelled to confront adversarial forces from all directions, making it exceedingly challenging to contend with the Sikhs. In designating the frontier as the nucleus of his operations, he must have also taken into account the martial disposition and valor of the Afghan people. Even within his native town of Rai Bareli, there existed a locality populated by Pathans, and he had already garnered experience regarding their valor and intrepidity. A significant number of them were personally acquainted with Sayyid Ahmad and pledged their support for his undertaking. During a speech at Panjtar, he articulated his rationale for selecting the frontier with the following assertion: "In India, I could not identify an appropriate location to initiate my jihad movement, although many individuals assured their assistance in various capacities."⁴³

Actual Struggle

Hunter asserts that the founding of the Rebel encampment along the Punjab Frontier can be ascribed to Sayyid Ahmad, a figure representative of the intrepid individuals that our methodical dismantling of the Pindari Power disseminated across India nearly half a century prior.⁴⁴

Having devoted a period of two years to domestic life, Sayyid Ahmad subsequently journeyed to Malva, where he became an observer of the operational endeavors undertaken by Amir Khan Pindaris. He enlisted in the cavalry as a sawar within his military forces and resided in that region for a duration of seven years. During this time, he exhibited notable instances of valor in various military engagements, which led to his expedited elevation to the esteemed position of Amir Khan's personal bodyguard. Recognizing his consistent role as a source of motivation, Amir Khan appointed him as his principal advisor concerning all significant political and military affairs. W.W. Hunter, influenced by his own biases, characterizes him as "a horse soldier in the service of a celebrated free-booter" (Amir Khan), asserting that for an extended period, he imposed considerable distress upon the affluent opium-producing districts of Malva.⁴⁵

In the year 1817, upon becoming cognizant of Amir Khan's intention to engage in a treaty with the British authorities, Sayyid Ahmad vacated his encampment and proceeded to Delhi. He postulated that the aspirations of jihad could only be realized through widespread societal support and comprehension. Subsequently, he embarked on an extensive tour across the nation, and within a remarkably brief timeframe, transformed the territory extending from Delhi to Calcutta into a bastion of rebellion.

During one of his visits to Rampur, he was apprised of the deplorable plight of the Muslim populace in the Punjab region. It was at that location that he formulated a strategy⁴⁶ aimed at safeguarding the Muslim populace in the Punjab, subsequently

intending to eradicate British colonial presence from the Indian subcontinent. With the prompt assistance of his two competent lieutenants, Shah Ismail and Maulvi Abdul Hai, he orchestrated a remarkably impactful reform initiative that rapidly evolved into a nationwide mass mobilization. Numerous individuals engaged in bait and affiliated themselves with his movement.

While engaging in conflict with Ranjit Singh in the Punjab region, he concurrently benefited from the implicit assistance and endorsement of the British, who were keen on the dissolution of Ranjit Singh's dominion. The British authorities exhibited no opposition to the solicitation of financial resources and the enlistment for jihad. Notably, the edict issued against a merchant accused of misappropriating funds serves as ample evidence of such a disposition.⁴⁷ This disposition persisted exclusively while the Mujahidin engaged in hostilities against the Sikhs; however, upon their initiation of anti-British propaganda, they simultaneously became the focal point of British opposition and critique.

Within a span of two years post his return from Mecca, he meticulously finalized all requisite arrangements for jihad. On the 16th of January, 1826, he bid farewell to his domicile permanently. At this juncture, he was an individual of exceptional fortitude and political acumen. Initially, the number of his companions was confined to approximately five or six hundred individuals. They progressed toward the northwestern region, traversing thousands of miles.

Initially, the individuals traversed the territory of Gwailor, where notably, Hindu Rao, the brother-in-law of the Maharaja, received them with remarkable hospitality. Subsequent to their time in Gwailor, they reached Tonk, where he was already acquainted with the founder of Tonk, Amir Khan. Amir Khan not only extended financial support but also equipped him with necessary apparatus. Thereafter, he proceeded towards Ajmer. At this juncture, Maulvi Hai was specifically commissioned to journey to Delhi for the purpose of securing financial resources, and subsequently, he reemerged at the epicenter of the jihad through Panipat, Karnal, Thanesar, Nandot, Bahwalpur, Marwar, Sind, Baluchistan, and Afghanistan.

Up to this moment, Sindh had not come under British dominion, and its ruling authorities were the Mirs, who were embroiled in conflicts with Jodhpur and held reservations regarding British ambitions. As a result, the expedition led by Sayyid Ahmad was regarded with skepticism by the officials of Amar Kot and Mirpur, who conjectured it to be either an endeavor emanating from Jodhpur or a stratagem orchestrated by the British.

Political Ideas of Shah Ismail

Shah Ismail⁴⁸ constituted a pivotal figure among the principal lieutenants of Sayyid Ahmad. His birth occurred on the 29th of April in the year 1779 C.E. in Phulat, situated within the District of Muzaffarnagar.⁴⁹ He acquired his foundational education from his progenitor, Abdul Ghani. The demise of his father occurred on the 12th of April, 1789 C.E., at which juncture Shah Ismail was merely ten years of age. Subsequently, his welfare was entrusted to his uncle Shah Abdul Qadir. He adeptly completed his examination of external sciences by the age of sixteen. This occurred during the governance of Akbar Shah II, who, in effect, existed as a pensioner and a de facto prisoner under British rule. A pervasive climate of pessimism and stagnation was

manifest throughout society, and the deterioration of Muslim political ideology was regarded as an undeniable truth that necessitated neither inquiry nor regret from any individual.

Emerging from one of the most esteemed families in India, Shah Ismail was born into an era characterized by the fragmentation of Muslim authority. The prevailing circumstances necessitated an innovative role and visionary leadership from the Muslim community. Shah Ismail adeptly addressed the pressing demands of the era and committed himself to the restoration of Muslim political autonomy in the Indian subcontinent.

Shah Ismail demonstrated a profound interest in the study of history. In addition, he pursued the field of geography. Both domains significantly facilitated the structuring of his initiatives. As a scholar, he focused his intellectual endeavors on the cartography of India, particularly the Punjab region, which was destined to become the focal point of his future engagements.

From his formative years, Shah Ismail maintained close associations with the underprivileged segments of society. He became a confidant and ally of marginalized individuals. Upon entering the public sphere, his foremost realization was the imperative to cultivate military valor and fortitude, for the prevailing circumstances indicated that armed resistance was the sole viable means to safeguard Muslim society. Despite originating from a conservative lineage, he cultivated a broad and progressive perspective. He mastered the art of horseback riding under the tutelage of an adept instructor, Rahim Bakhsh, who claimed that no pupil under his guidance had acquired the complete skills of equestrianism to the same extent as Shah Ismail. Following this, he engaged in boxing training with Mirza Rahmat, who had served as the coach for nearly all the princes in this discipline and was unrivaled in his expertise. Shah Ismail also excelled in swimming, demonstrating the ability to remain submerged for three consecutive days. Typically, he would traverse the Jamuna River to Agra from Delhi and return.⁵⁰ He was also an accomplished marksman, possessing the ability to effortlessly eliminate even the smallest avian creature perched upon a densely foliated tree. All of these endeavors were being observed by his uncle, Shah Abdul Aziz, whose pedagogical principles and ideologies were exerting a profound influence on the entirety of the Muslim intellectual community in India during this period. By the age of twenty-one, he had evolved into a fully-fledged soldier who had endured the myriad adversities of existence.

His Visit to the Punjab

It was an exceedingly lamentable era for the Muslim populace of Punjab, who were enduring a precarious existence under the dominion of Ranjit Singh. The principles and edicts of Islam were egregiously transgressed, with mosques being razed and Muslims being coercively dissuaded from performing their prayers. During the holy month of Ramzan, Muslims were forcibly compelled to consume food by members of the Sikh community. Shah Ismail found it intolerable to witness such injustices. As an individual of ordinary status, he navigated various locales and engaged with the populace throughout Punjab. Sikh children, upon encountering a Muslim, would derogatorily refer to them as Swar-da-Baccha or 'young one of bore.' Shah Ismail clandestinely frequented inns where he observed the plight of individuals who had been bereaved of

their spouses, offspring, and possessions. These excursions significantly contributed to his formulation of a coherent political strategy for the Muslims, which may be aptly characterized as his political expedition. He amassed all available data pertinent to his political evaluation of the prevailing circumstances. Although he did not receive assistance from the Punjabis, he harbored hopes for support from the Afghan community and resolutely resolved to exact retribution from the Sikhs for the injustices inflicted upon his Muslim brethren. Throughout his two-year sojourn in Punjab, he meticulously prepared plans and sketches pertaining to several critical forts.

Shah Ismail subsequently contemplated conferring with Sayyid Ahmad, who had by that time departed from the camp of Amir Khan and arrived in Delhi. He discerned in him an individual of extraordinary valor and unwavering sincerity of intent, leading him to decide to initiate a movement under his stewardship. The Sayyid, in turn, recognized in Shah Ismail a loyal and devoted subordinate, prepared to sacrifice his life at his command. The responsibility of managing all challenging political matters was predominantly shouldered by him. He executed his responsibilities with remarkable courage, tact, and competence. Indeed, Sayyid Ahmad owed a considerable debt to the organizational prowess and devoted spirit of Shah Ismail. Shah Ismail was endowed with exceptional oratory skills. In the domain of profound and unequivocal reasoning, the lucidity of expression, and the esteemed nature of linguistic communication, his speeches were notably difficult to surpass. Sayyid Ahmad explicitly delegated to Shah Ismail, in the company of Abdul Hai, the responsibility of conducting a comprehensive nationwide expedition to establish the foundational elements of his movement. The significant influence of his rhetorical prowess is substantiated by numerous insights articulated by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan in his scholarly work, *Asar-us-Sanadid*.

Shah Ismail represented the esteemed lineage of Shah Waliullah and Shah Abdul Aziz, ardently aspiring to instigate a religious revival and achieve political prominence. The subsequent remarks by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad regarding Shah Ismail merit quotation, as they encapsulate the essence of the reformer's greatness.

The fundamental tenets of communal reform and rejuvenation that Shah Waliullah found himself unable to express openly due to the dominant impatient and authoritarian sociopolitical environment, which remained shrouded within the vestiges of historical Delhi and the philanthropic institutions and educational seminaries located in Kotla, were later articulated with significant enthusiasm by the distinguished reformer of that epoch, Shah Ismail, during his public orations conducted on the steps of the Jamia Masjid, thereby sparking a revolutionary zeal among the citizenry. The ramifications of his movement transcended the geographical boundaries of India. Matters that individual previously approached with trepidation, even in private discourse, began to be deliberated openly in public forums and on the streets.⁵¹

His Political Writings

In addition to his theological treatises, there is a clearly delineated body of his political literature. However, his political ideologies are dispersed throughout the discourses he presented intermittently, the correspondences he penned to sovereigns and scholars, as well as in his treatise entitled *Mansab-i-Imamat*. As noted by Hunter, this particular work was composed to rationalize the *Imamat* of Sayyid Ahmad. It is regarded as one of his exemplary writings and comprises 114 pages. The significance and value of this

manuscript reside in the fact that within this discourse, he provides a profound analysis of the concept of political leadership within the Islamic framework. He categorically repudiates kingship, deeming it an un-Islamic construct. In this unequivocal repudiation of monarchical governance, he stands unrivaled in the chronicles of Islamic history; since the advent of monarchy within the Islamic context, there has been an incessant effort to depict monarchy as a sanctioned institution necessitated by historical contingencies. Shah Ismail undertook a critical examination of the historical development of Islam, free from biases and characterized by a clear and infallible perspective, ultimately arriving at the conclusion that the entire construct of kingship fundamentally undermines the authentic essence of Islam. He reassigns sovereignty to the Muslim populace, thereby infusing a progressive dimension into Islamic political thought. He articulates.

The political structure of Islam and that of monarchs are as fundamentally distinct as sweet and saline waters; should the two be fused, it is evident that the sweet water would forfeit its intrinsic flavor. All significant correspondences composed by Sayyid Ahmad to various Sardars, rulers, and scholars were meticulously crafted by Shah Ismail. In terms of the potency and vigor of his mission, the inspirational quality of his teachings, and the subsequent impact on future generations and developments, Shah Ismail distinctly emerges as a prominent thinker in political theory. He elucidated crucial realities and anticipated significant evolutions that remained obscured from the perception of his contemporaries.

Actual Struggle

For an extended duration, Shah Ismail collaborated closely with Sayyid Ahmad. Indeed, he served as the intellectual architect of the movement. In every engagement that transpired at the frontier, he assumed a pivotal role. Numerous confrontations conducted under his leadership yielded successful outcomes. Following meticulous preparations, upon his counsel, Sayyid Ahmad undertook a clandestine expedition to Thanesar to apprise others of his mission and subsequently traversed Malir Kotla, Bahawalpur, Mamdoot, Hyderabad, Sind, Shikarpur, Khan Garh, Jagain, Dara Bolan, Qandahar, and Kabul, with all the intelligence provided by Shah Ismail proving to be accurate over time.

He occupied the distinguished role of commander-in-chief of the Mujahidin forces. Through the route of Durrai Khaiber, he progressed to Peshawar and subsequently, by way of Yusufzai, arrived at Khuwaishgi, from which vantage point he was able to thoroughly evaluate the military strength of the Sikhs. He instituted a comprehensive network of informants to procure intelligence regarding the military capabilities possessed by the Sikhs. At this critical juncture, he received considerable support from the cartographic depictions he had meticulously prepared during his private explorations in Punjab. Sardar Muhammad Khan, the junior sibling of Amir Muhammad Khan, approached Khuwaishgi in person and offered his assistance to him.

During the inaugural battle of Akora (December 1826), Shah Ismail orchestrated the coordination of all forces, ultimately leading to victory as a result of his strategic acumen. Shah Ismail opposed the initiative to assault Hazro, which ultimately culminated in a futile endeavor. Following this episode of insubordination, Shah Ismail

resolved to lay the groundwork for the Imamate of Sayyid Ahmad.⁵² Not solely the Punjabi Maulvis, but also the Indian ulama articulated their perspectives regarding the appointment of Sayyid Ahmad as the Imam.

The correspondence that Shah Ismail directed towards Budh Singh exemplifies his political acumen and expertise in the most exemplary manner. It is articulated as follows.

From:

The Commander of the Faithful, Sayyid Ahmad, in response to the missive from Sardar Budh Singh, the Chief Commander of Maharaja Singh's forces.

In the name of the Almighty, the Most Merciful and the Most Compassionate. It ought not to remain concealed from the soul, which is enriched by the magnificence of the Commander of the Forces and Armies, the custodian of wealth and positions, the designer of sovereignty and political affairs, the one who comprehends splendor and governance, and is proficient in military strategies, upholding a standard of significance, Sardar Budh Singh, may the Divine guide him towards the virtuous path and bestow upon him the blessings of Divine enlightenment, that their articulate correspondence, which encapsulates a demonstration of resilience and creativity, has arrived at our location. The assertions contained within it have become manifest. It appears that there exists a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding our intentions behind these endeavors and struggles, which is the reason they have composed the aforementioned letter.

Now they ought to heed it carefully and grasp its underlying purpose with utmost attentiveness, recognizing that the discord with the government and the state arises from various causes. Some individuals aspire to amass wealth and power through these circumstances, others seek to demonstrate their valor, while some merely desire to attain the status of martyrdom; however, our aspirations differ fundamentally, as we seek solely to fulfill the commands of my Lord, the true Sovereign and the most deserving King, as it pertains to the support of the religion of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W).

Indeed, the Divine, the Sublime and the Supreme, stands as a testament to the veracity that no hidden intent, beyond the previously articulated goal, resides within our consciousness throughout these martial pursuits. No alternative ambition escapes our utterances or arises within our emotions. In the defense of the religious tenets espoused by the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W), I endeavor to engage in every action that contributes positively to this cause; should it be the will of the Most Exalted God, I shall persist in this endeavor until the conclusion of my mortal existence, dedicating my entire life to this pursuit. As long as I draw breath, I will adhere to this principled path and strive towards the attainment of my aspired objective. As long as I possess the faculties of movement, there remains a path to traverse and an ambition to fulfill. Whether I find myself in a state of insolvency or affluence, subjected to accusations of cowardice or lauded for my ingenuity, whether I achieve a distinguished rank or the esteemed status of martyrdom, I am resolute in my belief that the approval of my Lord is contingent upon my willingness to enter the arena independently,

risking my life; thus, I shall undoubtedly proceed and stand wholeheartedly in the foremost ranks, unwavering in my commitment. I shall confidently join the ranks of armed congregations, unencumbered by doubt or fear.

In articulating these sentiments, it is not my intention to showcase my fortitude or to amass material wealth; the veracity of this assertion is evidenced by my willingness to commend any prominent leader or esteemed chief who embraces the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W). I shall wholeheartedly celebrate his courage and harbor genuine aspirations for his authority and dominion. Furthermore, I will exert considerable effort towards the swift advancement and prosperity of his realm. Any deviation from this stance would render me culpable.

If they engage in a realistic assessment of this matter, they will discern that I bear no responsibility for censure, for when a distinguished leader (Budh Singh) finds himself incapable of providing an excuse or apology for adhering to the mandates of his rulers despite the ruler being one of their own, indeed one of their kin how then can one expect to furnish an excuse for obeying the commands of the Supreme Being, who is not only the creator of all humankind but also the architect of the entire cosmos?

*May peace be on those who are on the right path.*⁵³

Budh Singh, nonetheless, refrained from responding to his correspondence and instead initiated preparations for military engagement. At this pivotal moment, Ismail cautioned Sayyid Ahmad against seeking assistance from the indigenous population, who had previously demonstrated their character through various incidents. In this engagement, he exhibited such valor that the Sikhs abandoned even their artillery on the battlefield.

The confrontation overseen by General Ventura, who commanded the Sikh forces, holds significant historical importance. Ventura had assured Ranjit Singh of his intention to capture Sayyid Ahmad and Shah Ismail alive for presentation at the court. However, to his astonishment, Shah Ismail emerged victorious, thereby diminishing Ventura's standing to mere insignificance.

Shah Ismail, as a sagacious military leader, remained vigilant even in times of complete tranquility and security, adhering to the principle of never being unarmed during rest. He established Amb and Kashmir as his operational headquarters, optimizing the utilization of his resources. It was this combination of prudence and courage that ultimately preserved Sayyid Ahmad's life at Shaidu. During the battle of Shinkiari, he sustained multiple bullet wounds yet remained steadfast on the battlefield until the conclusion favored his forces. In the encounter at Zaida, with a mere seven hundred troops, he inflicted a devastating defeat on an opposing force approximating 10,000 Durrani. The engagements at Amb and Ashra exemplify his exceptional military acumen and organizational skills.

The Conquest of Peshawar

The relentless success of the Mujahidin profoundly impacted the Sardars of Peshawar. All deliberations concerning prospective compromises were orchestrated by him. With

the endorsement of Shah Ismail, Sayyid Ahmad progressed towards Peshawar. The sovereign himself surrendered and transferred authority of Peshawar to him. In Peshawar, edicts were issued to prohibit the consumption of alcoholic beverages and opiates, and the institution of prostitution was abolished. Nevertheless, shortly thereafter, due to the insincerity demonstrated by the Sardars, Peshawar was ultimately forfeited. This defeat represented a significant impediment to the pursuits of Sayyid Ahmad and Shah Ismail.

While Sayyid Ahmad and Shah Ismail were situated at Balakot, Ranjit Singh dispatched Sher Singh with a formidable force of 20,000 Sikhs with the objective to obliterate them. The aggregate combat capacity of the Mujahidin was a mere 900. Shah Ismail astutely recognized that this would constitute the ultimate confrontation and engaged in battle with the fervor emblematic of a martyr. Both Sayyid Ahmad and Shah Ismail met their demise in combat at Balakot in May 1831 C.E. Those who successfully evaded death retreated to Sittana and subsequently persisted in their resistance against the British for an extended period. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, who authored his *Asar-us-Sanadid* in 1847 approximately 14 years subsequent to the tragedy at Balakot notes that up until that time, factions of volunteers regularly visited Balakot, thereby preserving the legacy of Sayyid Ahmad and Shah Ismail in perpetuity.

Conclusion

From the above discussion it can be concluded that the political thought of Shah Ismail Dehlavi occupies a pivotal place in the ideological framework of Sayyid Ahmad Bareilvi's reformist and militant movement. Rooted in a puritanical interpretation of Islam, Shah Ismail's emphasis on Tawhid, the eradication of bid'ah, and the establishment of Shari'ah-based governance shaped the theological and political direction of one of the most ambitious Islamic revivalist endeavors in 19th-century South Asia. His vision extended beyond mere spiritual reform to encompass a holistic reconstruction of Muslim society—one that resisted foreign domination, reasserted Islamic identity, and sought to establish an ideal polity modeled on the Prophetic tradition.

By fusing doctrinal clarity with political urgency, Shah Ismail provided the intellectual scaffolding for a jihad that was both moral and military, defensive and reformative. His role in the movement demonstrates how Islamic ideology could be harnessed not only to resist external powers such as the Sikh Empire and British colonialism but also to address internal decay and theological laxity among Muslims themselves. The failure of the movement in achieving its political objectives does not diminish its historical significance; rather, it underscores the complex interplay between religious ideals and political realities in colonial-era India.

Notes and References:

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- ⁹ *Twilight of the Mughuls*, pp. 57-58.
- ¹⁰ *Asbab-i-Baghawat-i-Hind*, p. 32.
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- ¹³ Edmund Burke, Speeches in the trial of Warren Hastings, as quoted in Cambridge History of India, Vol. V, P. 182.
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- ¹⁵ Khwaja Hasan Nizami, *Delhi Ka Akhri Sans*, p. 106.
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