

How the reform movements of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi influenced the history of Muslim India.

## 1- Introduction:

Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1624) is also known as Mujjadid alif Sani, that means "Reviver of Islam during the second Millennium". Shaikh was "the most forceful and original thinker of India, before Shah Waliullah and Iqbal" - SM Ikram. Shaikh was responsible for the reassertion and revival in India of Islam as a reaction against the syncretistic religious tendencies prevalent during the reign of the Mughal emperor Akbar. Shaikh was the most prominent disciple of Khawaja Baqi Billah - who started Naashbandia order in India. Hazrat Khawaja Baqi Billah predicted:

"Shaikh Ahmad is such a light which will illuminate the whole world."

## 2- Need for the reform movements

### 2.1- Religious A- Degeneration of muslim society

During Akbar's reign a lot of initiatives were taken for the unity of Muslims and non-Muslims which led to the degeneration of muslim society. Non-muslims' religion started flourishing in subcontinent. Islam was losing importance in the region and muslims were not allowed to practice their religion openly. The dice playing and gambling was allowed, Veneration (great respect) of sun and fire started, cow slaughter was banned, aram was prohibited, mosques were being converted to temples, jizya was exempted along with pilgrimage tax.

All in all, muslims were humiliated and powerless. Sirhindi labeled this age as "the age of the Islamic Poverty"



According to SM El-Ghannay Muslim civilization in India.

Non-Muslims carried out aggressively the ordinances of their own religion in a Muslim state and the Muslims were powerless to carry out the ordinances of Islam; if they carried them out they were executed."

## b- Wahadat-ul-Wajood

Claim of Wahadat-ul-Wajood was initiated by Sheikh Ibn-e-Arbi's book "Fatohat-e-Makia" which meant "the Oneness or unity of existence". It claimed that every thing in the existence is one or from one nature including the Creator and His creation. Due to this concept the policies of state changed and there was no more a religious difference; ultimately Muslim identity was threatened. Supremacy of Islam and Muslim identity was being compromised due to Wahadat-ul-Wajood. Also it led to Pantheism, which is against the tenets of Islam.

## c- Withdrawal of patronage of Islam:

The main channel of mischief were the "Ulama-i-Su" (worldly minded Ulama, who has taken Fiqh as the whole of religious teachings, it was held that "every slackness and irregularity that has taken place in the matter of Shari'ah in this age, and every obstruction which has hindered the growth and expansion of Islam, is due to the wickedness of the Ulama-i-Su and the result of their incompetence". Also Bid'at was very common which was the main cause of changed Islamic values.

## 2.2- Political

### a- Zil-e-Elahi

Zil-e-Elahi translates to the "shadow of God" it was a title bestowed upon Emperor Akbar himself, it aimed to highlight Akbar's moral leadership and authority, reinforcing his divine attribute. Under the same concept, prostration before King was made mandatory.

to they (the disciples of Akbar) took upon a prostration before His Majesty as a prostration performed before God"



## b- Hindus increase in political positions

Akbar appointed various Rajputs and Hindus to significant administrative and political positions. This act strengthened the non-muslims, and thus was predicted a reason for muslims downfall in future. Empowering Hindus would weaken Muslim rule and end it eventually.

## 2.3- Social

### a- Integration of Muslims and non-Muslims

Due to two initiatives of "Din-e-Elahi" and "Bhakti Movement", muslims and non-muslims were integrating and were influencing each other. For example, the muslims adopted marriage and death practices and started believing in superstitions.

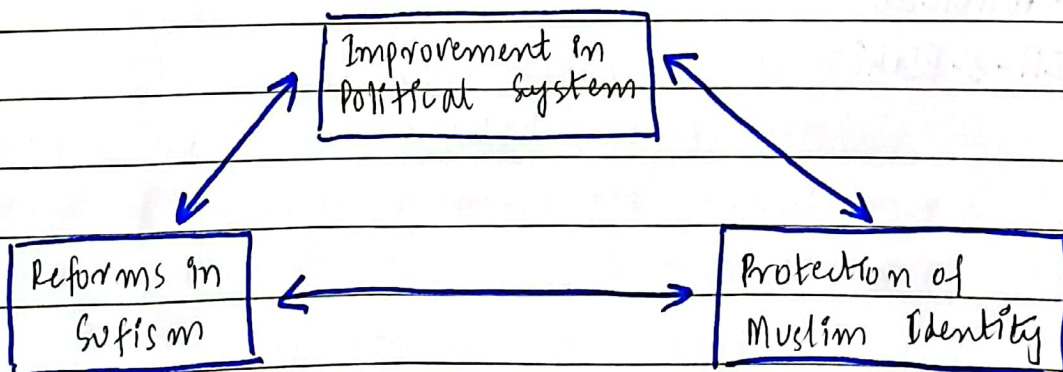
"Allah shall raise for this Ummah at the head of every century a man who shall renew for its religion" (Sunan Abu Dawud)

### b- Inter-marriages

A trend of inter-marriages was set by Akbar, as he married many Rajputs. Also marrying of close relatives was negated, as per Hindu practices.

## 3- Objectives for reforms:

On the basis of current situation at that time following were the objectives for the reform movements:



## 4- Reformative Efforts:

### a- Through disciples

Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi prepared a number of his disciples and sent them to different cities and countries to preach the true Islam, to emphasize the ittibai Sunna and to bring the people back to the fold of the Sharia.

### b- Through Maktubs

Mujadid wrote many letters to the nobles. These letters replete with the message of truth and reality. Through these letters, the attention of the nobles was invited to the troublesome situation in Islam and the Muslims were plunged.

These letters are compiled in "Maktub-e-Rabbani". He also opposed biddat in dlm in his letters

"A nation which invents innovation religion is deprived on the analogy of Summah."

### c- During Imprisonment:

Mujadid was accused of publishing un-Islamic ideas in his letters, but he met the accusations squarely. On the demand of prostration, Mujadid refused saying:

"I will not prostrate before anyone except Allah, because sajdah is exclusively due to Allah and to no one else."

On which he was imprisoned in Gwalior fort, at that time there were several non-Muslim convicts. Shaikh preached the message of faith to the fellow convicts, who then embraced Islam. He also wrote maktubs during imprisonment which served as link between him and outside disciples.



Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics mentions the achievements of Shaikh Ahmed in these words: "In India, in the 17th century, a theologian named Shaikh Ahmad Mujaddid, who had been unjustly imprisoned, is said to have converted <sup>Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat Sun</sup> ~~hundreds~~ <sup>Date: - - - - -</sup> whom he found in the prison."

#### d- Conditions before Jahangir:

After the release, Shaikh was invited for an interview by Jahangir. Where following conditions were placed by Mujaddid, which were readily accepted.

- 1- To abolish Sijdah-i-Tarkmi
- 2- To rebuild all the erased mosques
- 3- To cancel the orders prohibiting cow slaughter.
- 4- To appoint Qadis and muftis in order to enforce Islamic code
- 5- To reintroduce Jizya
- 6- To enforce Shariah law and to stop all innovations
- 7- To release all the prisoners imprisoned in contravention of the above.

#### e- Stay at Royal Camp:

Under heading (d) point (1-):

Iqbal, paid tribute to Shaikh Ahmed in following words

گردن نہ جھکی جس کی جہانگیر کے لئے  
جس کے نفس گرم سے ہے گرمی احرار

Translation:

The one who did not bow his head to Jahangir  
whose warm breath lends heat to the freemen

Iqbal (Punjab Key Peerzaadon Kay Naam).

During three and half years sojourn of the Shaikh at Royal Courts including royal camp, he devoted himself in three-fold activities:

- 1- To change the heart of the king and mould him toward Islam.

Shaikh Ahmed rightly said:

"The position of a king is the same as that of the heart in the body; If the heart is pure the body will be pure and if the heart is not pure how the body can be pure."



- To change the attitude of the people around the king, making them unentire to Islam.

5- To impart lessons of true Islam to the people in army infusing in them the real spirit of Islam and thus, turning them to be the vanguards for the cause of Islam.

### f- Wahadat-vs-Shuhud:

The great Mujadid presented alternative theory to counter wahadat-ul-wajood which was giving danger of a complete disintegration of the muslim society. Wahadat-vs-Shuhud that means "Unity of Manifestation" or "All is for Him" launched a vigorous attack to biddat (Innovation in religion). This philosophy that means "Oneness of witness and creation is different from creator" was a very powerful philosophy put forth to counter negative impacts of misunderstanding of previous one.

"To consider Ram and Rehman as one is stupidity because creator cannot be one with its creation"

(Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi)

### g- Opposed United Nationhood

Mujadid was the first one to oppose United Nationhood, he said hindu and Muslims are different people. Being different they should not intermingle. Hindus should be removed from important state positions and court.

"If muslims want to live as a nation than they have to quit the talk of shirk and biddat and stay away from Hindus. If the awareness of separate <sup>national</sup> identity is not awakened in Muslims then it is feared that they would be swept away with the flood of combined nationhood, Islam would be destroyed like Buddhism and Hinduism." (Shaikh Sirhindi)

## 5- Impact / Influences:

"Major Indian religious scholar and mystical author from Punjab, fir of the Naqshbandiya under the Mughal dynasty. As a sufi leader he was politically active, offering advice to rulers concerning needed religious reforms. And, as his hundreds of letters in Persian suggest, he sustained personal relationships with a large number of individuals"

(John Renard, Historian Dictionary of Sufism)

### a- Foundation of Islamic revival:

Mujadid saved the Indian muslims from the danger of a comprehensive religious, intellectual and cultural apostasy <sup>which</sup> had <sup>been</sup> made unavoidable by Akbar's initiatives. After him, his successors took upon themselves the task of bringing about a religious awakening and spiritual regeneration of the Indian Muslims.

### b- Tariqa is sub-Servient to Sharia:

He advocated the supremacy of sharia (the law) over Tariqa (the mystic path) in a very forceful, confident and authoritative manner. He made it clear that Tariqa was meant to sub-serve sharia and this checked the tendency to overlook or reject sharia

### c- Trust in Nabuwat Muhammadi (PBUH):

Greatest achievement, which is the nucleus of his multi-dimensional reformative movement was his success in creating a trust in prophethood of Muhammad (PBUH). Along with this Akbar's Din-e-Elahi, Wahadat-ul-Wujud and other initiatives came to end.



## 6- Conclusion:

Mujadid was the most powerful religious personality in the history of India. He was a widely read scholar and a magnetic orator. He is considered as the pioneer of Muslim self-assertion by denouncing un-Islamic practices. He was not only a religious scholar and mystic but also a reformist leader and his teachings were purely based on Sunnah. His school of thought is as important today as it was in the 17th century.

وہ دنیا میں سرکارِ ملت کا نایاب  
اللہ نے بروقت کیا جس کو مہر دار

Translation:

"He the guardian of the estate of millah in India  
Whom Allah awakened at the right time"  
(Tarbal, Punjab kay Peerzadon kay Naam).