

Shaikh Ahmed Sarhindi (1564-1624)

Early Life: Shaikh Ahmed Sarhindi popularly known as Mujaddid Alif Sani (the reformer of the second millennium), was born on June 26, 1564 in Sirhind, a city of East Punjab. This great reformer used all his energies to purge Islam. Shaikh received his early education at home. He learnt the Holy Quran by heart at an early age. Then, he studied Hadith, Tafsir or exegesis and ma'qal or philosophy and went to renowned scholars at various places. His father made him proficient in material or spiritual studies or training.

Religious Conditions during Mujaddid's time

When the great Mujaddid came to his task of reform, he found that Tasawwuf had taken complete possession of the Muslim soul.

Excessive belief in Karamat or miracles of saints was common. Many un-Islamic means of the development of occult powers had been introduced into Tasawwuf itself.

The mystics had gone to the extent of denying the commandments of Shariah or the law of Islam as universally binding and to regard Shariah itself as something external and superficial, indulgence in sama or music hearing had become the order of the day.

Influence of Hindus

Emperor Akbar quelled the revolt of some of the Muslim rulers of principalities situated away from the capital with the help of the Hindu Rajas. These Rajas started asserting themselves, even in the affairs of the country.

AKBAR'S Deen-i-Elahi

AKBAR planned to establish a new religion headed by him so that harmony may be restored among the subjects and the Mughal Empire may be guarded. At the cost of Islam, he thought of pleasing his Hindu cronies. He encouraged and employed the worldly-wise ulema and intellectuals who repudiated revelation and denied the validity of Shariah, holding it to be irrational belief and practice of the ignorant. AKBAR blatantly negated Islam on these premises. Some so-called Muslims went to the extent to malign and abuse the Holy Prophet (S.A.W). In the forewords of their books, they sufficed to mention only the unity and passed onto the titles of the emperor. No religious leader dared mention the Holy Prophet (S.A.W) in sermons. The high and low declared spiritual reality to the emperor who rejected the Holy Quran and refused to accept of life after death; in the Kalima in the place of the words: 'Muhammad (S.A.W) the prophet of Allah', the words 'AKBAR is the Khalifa of Allah' were openly substituted.

During his region, Islam was passing through a crucial period. It was under the siege of blasphemy, atheism and irreligiousness. At this juncture, Islam needed a fearless believer to defend it against the onslaught.

Challenges

Thus, the time cried for the appearance of a great reformer. Shaikh Ahmad was a spiritual man and at the age of forty such as in the year 1011 AH, he felt the call. He had the inspiration that he was the reviver of the second millennium of the Islamic era.

He had to contend against the ulema of all shades and opinions. He had to challenge the mighty emperor who had set up a new religion with inexhaustible material, intellectual, demographical and other resources totally inimical to Islam. He had to re-establish the authority of the Holy Quran and sunnah and reduce fiqh or jurisprudence to his proper place. He had to contend against the mystic pantheistic theory of Wahdatul Wujud of Ibnul 'Arabi — that was incontestably established throughout the Islamic world and holding complete sway over the mystics in India. He had, in the process, to bring out the basic difference between a prophet (nabi) and a saint (wali).

He had to work on various fronts for the fulfillment of the mission entrusted to him.

Steps taken for the Resurgence

At the time of laying claim in Mujaddidhood, he had established solid reputation for erudition and full command over Quranic and canonical knowledge. He had reached the highest step of the most respected disciplines of the Sufi orders — which was a rare distinction. Predictive writing and visions of some earlier religious personalities also supported him. Thus, as far as the genuine mystic orders and religious savants were concerned, they accepted him as their spiritual head. Mujaddid adopted the following measures to fight against the heresy:

1) Preparation of Disciples

Firstly, he prepared a number of disciples for the work and sent in all directions in India as well as the contiguous Muslim countries to preach the true Islam.

2) Correspondence

Secondly, he started a vast correspondence with men of eminence in various parts of these countries. These epistles were widely circulated. They expounded religious truths

and laid the greatest emphasis on Itiba-e-Sunnat.

3) Enlistment of Great Nobles

Thirdly, he enlisted the greatest nobles of the Imperial court as his disciples and used them to bring about a change in the lives of those circles, and to influence the emperor towards a change of heart.

4) Campaign After Akbar

Fourthly, when Akbar died and Jahangir succeeded, he started a campaign. People had to take a vow that they will not obey any orders contradictory to Islam.

Asif Jah's Caveat to Jahangir

Asif Jah, the grand vizier of Jahangir, cautioned him against the rising influence of the Shaikh not only in the empire but also in the adjoining territories. He counselled the emperor to restrain soldiers from visiting the Shaikh's disciples. Under a well-orchestrated plan, the nobles who were lenient toward Shaikh were sent to far-flung areas. Then, the Shaikh was called to the court to face the charge of propagating anti-Islamic theories.

The shaiikh refused to prostrate as it was due only to Allah. For this refusal, capital punishment was first awarded but was later converted into imprisonment for two years in the Cevalior Fort.

Continuation of Reformatory Work

He continued his reformatory work within the fort. As a result, many flagitious criminals as well as the Hindus there converted to Islam. The dispersed governors revolted and offered their thrones to the shaiikh ~~for~~ who wrote back by telling

them three things:

- That his mission was entirely different
- That their action was an obstacle in its way
- That they should submit to the Emperor.

Release from Jail

When his order of release from prison was put ^{before} ~~her~~ Mujaddid Alif sani, he however, laid down the following conditions for acceptance:

- The compulsory reverential prostration before the emperor would be abolished.
- demolished mosques should be rebuilt
- Cow slaughter would be allowed.
- Posts of qazis, muftis and muhtasibs would be revived, incumbents re-appointed.

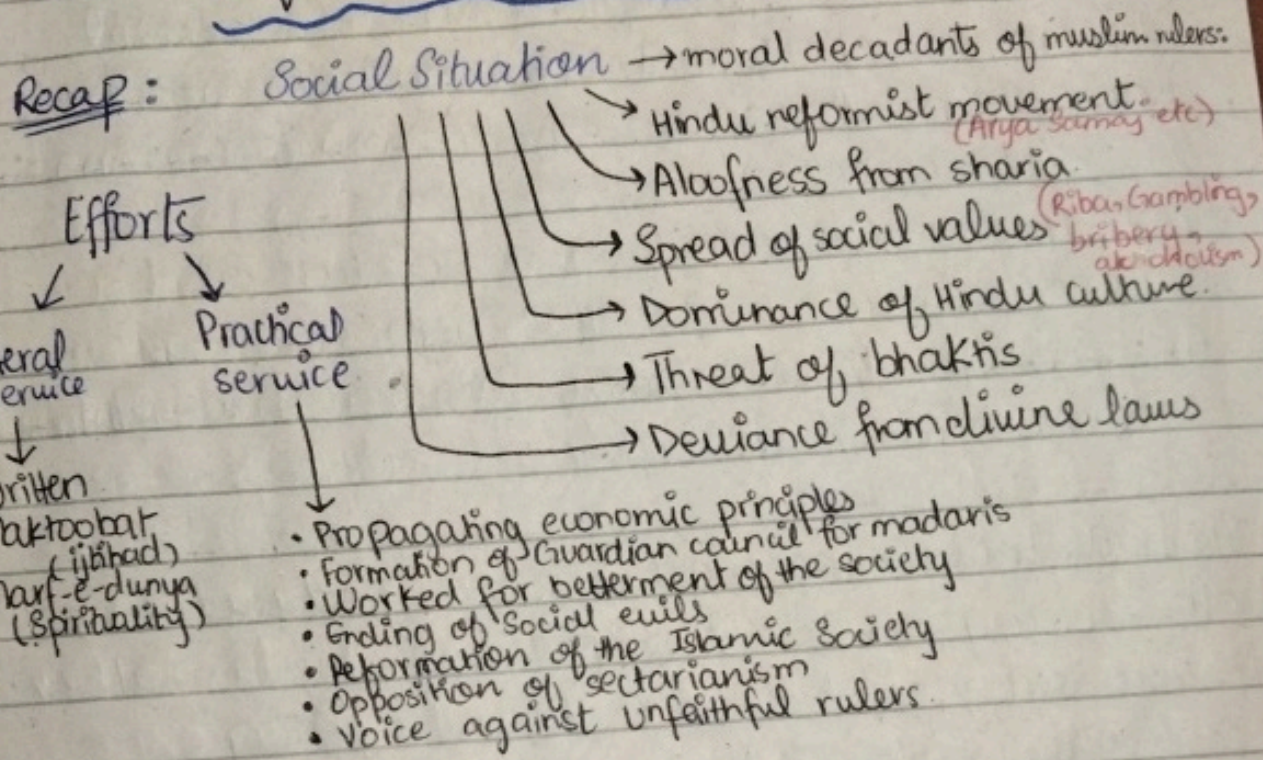
- Jizya would be reintroduced
- All persons detained for carrying on this campaign would be freed.

The emperor accepted all these conditions after which the Shaikh came over to visit him. Jahangir ~~came~~ conferred to all honours on him including a robe. The Shaikh lived for 6 years after that. His sons also moved in. This was interpreted by some as a device on the part of the Queen and her trustees to keep the Shaikh under close surveillance, but the Shaikh took this as a God-given opportunity to watch over the emperor and the imperial household to keep them engaged in the services of his mission.

Maktubat-e-Imam Rabbani: The Magnum One

Shaikh Ahmed adopted an effective method of persuasion by writing letters to the leading nobles of the royal court. His letters are known as Maktubat-e-Imam Rabbani. Through preaching discussions and his maktubat addressed to important nobles and leaders of religious thought, he spread his message amongst the elite in particular.

Letters and messages were sent to them exhorting to serve the cause of Islam. He also requested the scholars to show the right path to the people, and the king. He asked the saints to give up their un-Islamic practices and beliefs.



Quote • Hazrat Biqabilla once said:
 "Shaikh Ahmed is such a light which will illuminate the whole world".

• Allama Iqbal, the poet-philosopher of Islam, pays appropriate tributes to Shaikh Ahmed Sirhindi in Bal-e-Jabril:

Whose neck did not bend before Jahangir,
 Whose breath warms the hearts of freedom fighters
 He was the protector of Islamic faith in India
 One who was alarmed by God at the right moment.