

Q3 Keeping in view the socio-political circumstances of sub-continent, discuss the role of Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindi, who revived Islamic Ideology and established Muslim identity in sub-continent.

## 1 Introduction

Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindi was born in 1564 in Sirhind, India. He is also known by the title of 'Mujaddid Al-Jam'at'. He played a vital role in the revival of Islam in 16<sup>th</sup> century. He received his early education in Holy Quran, Hadith and theology in Sirhind and Sialkot. He later pursued learning of 'Tafsir of Holy Quran' and philosophy. He was focused firmly on the teachings of Holy Quran.

At the age of 36, he moved to Lahore and joined Haqshbandiya Sufi order. He became the student of Sufi saint Baqi Billah and pursued teachings of Islam under his guidance. Baqi Billah impressed by the devotion

of Sheikh Ahmed towards Islam predicted that he will become the greatest guide of Islam in the world.

## 2 Socio-Politico Situation at that time

Mughal Emperor Akbar was the ruler at that time. He had his own concept of religion called 'Deen-i-Ilahi'. Muslims were influenced by unIslamic practices. Muslim scholars were deviated from the teachings of Holy Quran and were inclined towards worldly luxuries. Scholars even made alcohol and gambling permissible to please the emperor. They refused to believe on jinn, angels and even excluded Hajj as the pillar of Islam. They termed Hajj as unnecessary in that time.

On the other hand Hindus were empowered due to the liberal policies of Akbar. They were in majority in the noble court. As a result they started implementing policies that were against Muslims. Hindus openly

demolished Mosques. Muslim orthodox scholars were disregarded and Hindu courtiers were becoming more influential. In these deplorable conditions Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindi termed that period as "The era of Islamic poverty."

### 3 Sheikh's Reforms

After the death of Akbar, Sheikh Ahmed started his efforts to revive the true essence of Islam. He wrote letter to the emperor Jahangir to adopt true teachings of Islam in the noble court. Jahangir called him in his court and asked him to bow down before him. It was a common ritual of emperor's court at that time. But, Sheikh Ahmed refused to bow before him stating that bowing down is only permissible to Allah only. Jahangir became angered and imprisoned him for two years at Fort Gwalior.

## a Preaching from Prison

Sheikh Ahmed continued his mission of revival of Islam from prison. He converted thousands of non-Muslims to Islam. He wrote extensively from prison. Jahangir started influencing from his writings and devotion to Islam. He reduced his imprisonment period from two years to one year and also gave him the title of 'Khilaf-i-Fakira' and approved one thousand stipend for him.

## b Disciples

Sheikh Ahmed trained groups of disciples and sent them to different cities of India and also other countries. The goal and objective of these disciples was to preach actual teachings of Islam to the people who were deviated from the teachings of Islam. This boosted his mission of revival of Islam.

## c Opposition to Deen-i-Ilahi

Akbar was influenced by the Bhakti movement of Hindu Vaishnava saints. He gave his own concept of religion and merged Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. There was no concept of one God and Akbar was the only authority. Sheikh Ahmed opposed this idea and preached real Islam. He stated that Ram and Rahim can never be same and this is illogical to think that creation and creator are same.

## d Opposition to Bid'at

Heresy (addition of new practices in religion) was common at that time. Scholars termed it as good innovations or bad innovations. Sheikh Ahmed rejected the idea by saying there is no such thing as good innovation or bad innovation. All kind of heresy is strongly against the teaching of Islam.

## e Opposition to Sufism

Sheikh Ahmed clearly defined the difference between prophetic way and sufi way. He emphasized that Shariah is focused on prayer, fasting, good deed, remembrance of Allah, and there is no space for meditation and other such practices in Islam.

## f Concept of Wahdat ul Shakhud

Ibn Arabi wrote the term 'Wahdat ul Hajrat' in his book. It means the 'unity of being'. According to this concept, God and creation are one and every creation is God within. In simple words, all is God and God is all. Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindi opposed this idea and gave the concept of 'Wahdat ul Shakhud' which means the 'unity of vision'. It says that God and creation are different from each other.

## g Foundation of Two-Nation Theory:

Sheikh Ahmed reformed paved the way for Two-Nation Theory. He stated that Muslims should keep themselves away from shirk and Bid'at. They must stay away from Hindus otherwise their religious identity will damage, as such in the case of Hinduism and Buddhism.

## 4 Conclusion

In conclusion, Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindi played a vital role in the revival of Muslim identity through his efforts and successfully laid the foundation of Two-Nation Theory among Muslims which later became the basis of creation of Pakistan. His continuous efforts towards Islam and Muslims are praiseworthy.