

## Chapter 6

### **Nineteenth century: Muslim unrest and militancy**

#### **The British in Bengal**

Briefly the British conquest of India starting from Plassey in 1757, Baxar in 1764 to the Punjab in 1849, in the words of Pundit Nehru, went like this: “The battle of Plassey in 1757 for the first time brought a vast area under their control, and within a few years Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, and the east coast were subject to them. The next big step forward was taken about forty years later, at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This brought them to the gates of Delhi (occupied in 1803 – mam). The third major advance took place after the last defeat of the Marathas in 1818; the fourth in 1849, after the Sikh wars, completed the picture.”.[1]

[1] Jawaharlal Nehru: The Discovery of India: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial fund  
Edition: 13<sup>th</sup> Print 1993. P. 296

That the East India Company’s directors in London “had taken alarm at the decline of the Bengal remittances as early as 1758”, just a year after Plassey, perhaps indicated that the significance of Plassey was not grasped by them who had come “for trade and went into politics to preserve their trade.” By the time of Plassey, they had been in Bengal for about one hundred years and it was considered by them “a wealthy Indian province.” What source of making money the Englishmen had found that “men made fortunes, returned to England, lost them, and returned to India for more”. The strangest thing seems to be that what lied ahead would be so different, a British empire and Indians fighting against it, nobody could have the slightest idea about. [2]

The craze of quick and more profits of the British did not take long to show its results. The famine of 1769-70 is an everlasting proof of British and human behaviour in those days. ‘One-third of the population was said to have died and one-third of the cultivated lands to have become waste.’ According to the British themselves: The husbandmen sold their cattle; they sold their implements of agriculture; they devoured their seed grain; they sold their sons and their daughters, till at length no buyer of children could be found; they ate the leaves of trees and the grass of the field; and in June 1770 the Resident at the Durbar affirmed that the living were feeding on the dead. Day and night a torrent of famished and disease-stricken wretches poured into the great cities. At an early period of the year pestilence had broken out. In March we find small-pox at Moorshedabad, where it glided through the Viceregal mutes and cut off the Prince Syfut in his palace.

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Internment could not do its work quick enough, even the dogs and jackals, the public scavengers of the East, became unable to accomplish their revolting work, and the multitude of mangled and festering corpses at length threatened the existence of the citizens. [3]

What a way to say: ‘multitude of mangled and festering corpses at length threatened the existence of the citizens’. Obviously those who were suffering were not the citizens!

It is inconceivable to believe that the famine of 1769-70 had no British-made causes. It occurred within five years of British take over in 1764 after Baxar. One has to stretch one’s imagination to have a glimpse of the reality of the famine. Imagine the living feeding on the dead: “The husbandmen sold their cattle; they sold their implements of agriculture; they devoured their seed grain; they sold their sons and their daughters, till at length no buyer of children could be found; they ate the leaves of trees and the grass of the field; and in June 1770 the Resident at the Durbar affirmed that the living were feeding on the dead.” “One-third of the population was said to have died and one-third of the cultivated lands to have become waste.” The British historian gives a guarded clue of British-made causes when he writes: **“The speculative buying of rice and its retail at high prices, in which Company’s servants were thought to share, did not make matters better.”**

Anyhow, the system of revenue collection inherited by the British from the Mughals in 1765 was known as *Zamindari*. Under this system, “the peasant paid a fixed share of his produce (in cash or kind) to tax collectors known as *Zamindars* (landholders). The share was traditionally one-third of the gross produce, and might be more or less. The *Zamindar* paid over nine-tenth of what he received to the state, retaining a tenth as remuneration of his exertions. By custom the *Zamindar* had acquired an hereditary right. ... The *Zamindars* of Bengal thus formed a provincial aristocracy.” [4]

The British did not change the system in hurry. At first they “acted through Indian agency and the system went on undisturbed. When Hastings took over the management in 1772 a series of experiments began, which proved the least successful part of his administration.” A five-yearly settlement in which land went for farming the revenues to the highest bidder was tried. [5] The above observation becomes more believable when we read: “In spite of the distress the revenue was collected with ‘cruel severity’. Five percent only was remitted in 1770 and 10 percent added in the year following. It is against this background that must be set accounts of the splendour of Calcutta life in the seventies.” [6]

What a disastrous beginning of the British rule in India! “It meant that Bengal and Bihar, for the first time in centuries, were seriously underpopulated for two

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generations. It dealt a heavy blow at the whole social system. Many of the Zamindars, or hereditary farmers of the revenue, were ruined as the result of inability to collect the regular assessments from a reduced and enfeebled peasantry.” The ruin of two-thirds of the old aristocracy had been estimated from this date. [7]

Another experiment: “Then the annual settlements were tried with resulting unsettlement, loss of confidence, and rural stagnation. Revenue farming became a matter of speculation amongst Calcutta financiers and the ancient personal connection between tax-collector and cultivator was broken in the anxiety to increase receipts and preoccupation with revenue returns”. [8]

In 1784, abandonment of annual leases was insisted, and in 1789 a settlement for ten years was made. And the same was made the ‘Permanent Settlement of 1793’. The *Zamindars* were regarded as landowners, they were to pay nine-tenths as previously. “The cultivators or *ryots* were to be protected by the British collectors.” But the assessment was too high. “Many old established *Zamindars* could not meet their obligations.” They were sold up and their places were taken by moneyed men from Calcutta. Thus the body of *Zamindars* “which emerged into permanence about 1800 was a very different set of families to those who had existed in 1765.” [9]

[2-9] Vincent A. Smith: The Oxford History of India. First Edition 1958 (1967 Reprint). Pp. 474, 501, 534, 534-535, 501, 501, 535, 535

The British had changed so much in Bengal for the worse.

The Permanent Settlement meant the virtual closing of the door to landlordism to Muslims. It has been opined that nine-tenths of the *zamindaris* in Bengal were held by Hindus. And many Muslim rulers of Bengal were descendants of immigrants from the area of modern Uttar Pradesh. Moreover when, after the Permanent Settlement, speculators moved in to buy the new proprietary *zamindaris*, few Muslims were among them. The Muslim aristocracy no longer had the means for land purchase. The East India Company’s command of the treasuries meant that the Muslim military aristocracy no longer possessed the liquid resources which could have been used for land purchase. They were also excluded or had excluded themselves from trade. [10]

The long-term effect of the Permanent Settlement was to depress the status of the cultivator, whether Hindu or Muslim, but the Muslims were in majority. [11] As the majority of *zamindars* were Hindus, however, communal antagonism, was inevitable. Moreover the moneylenders into whose grip they fell in order to pay their rents were Hindus. The Muslim revivalist movements in Bengal, therefore,

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took on the character of a Muslim peasant revolt against Hindu landlords and moneylenders. [12]

### **The Muslim revivalist movements: Shah Wali Ullah and Deoband**

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Shah Wali Ullah (1703-1762) actively criticized the practices of popular Islam in India, for example believing in the powers of saints and worshipping at their tombs etc. He made efforts to see Ahmad Shah Abdali as a potential saviour of Islam in India although which was satirized by poet Sauda. By ‘criticizing the influence of the Indian environment on the practice of Islam in India, Shah Wali Ullah was suggesting (as indeed others before him had done) that the less they shared with their non-Muslim neighbours the better servants of God Indian Muslims would be. As the religious appeal was to prove the most effective way of unifying the Muslims of British India, this was a suggestion with the profoundest political implications when, as was to happen under British rule, Muslims outside the old ruling circles came to have a hand in determining their political destiny.’ [13]

A historical change was taking place. There would be no more a king of the Muslims. Who would now wield political power when such time came? When Muslim kings ruled, the king used to be the temporal as well as religious head of the Muslims. Of course, the king was not the religious head of the Muslims as for example the British Queen apart from being political head she is also the Supreme Governor of the Church of England or the Pope in Rome is the head of the Roman Catholics of the whole world. Because unlike Christianity Islam had no organized religious regimes. This being the case, the kings in India symbolized the totality of their wellbeing – temporal as well religious. Therefore, ‘in medieval times, Muslim scholars had looked to the autocratic ruler to save Islam’, Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi\* had written letters to notables; Aurangzeb had used his autocratic authority; Shah Wali-Allah had looked to an Ahmad Shah Abdali or a Najib al-daula to rescue India for Islam.’ [14 ]

\*According to Britannica: Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī, (born 1564?, Sirhind, Patiāla, India—died 1624, Sirhind), Indian mystic and theologian who was largely responsible for the reassertion and revival in India of orthodox Sunnite Islam as a reaction against the syncretistic religious tendencies prevalent during the reign of the Mughal emperor Akbar. ... He reached maturity when Akbar, the renowned Mughal emperor, attempted to unify his empire by forming a new syncretistic faith (Dīn-e-Ilāhī), which sought to combine the various mystical forms of belief and religious practices of the many communities making up his empire. Shaykh Aḥmad

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joined the mystical order Naqshbandīyah, the most important of the Indian Sufi orders, in 1593–94. He spent his life preaching against the inclination of Akbar and his successor, Jahāngīr (ruled 1605–27), toward pantheism and Shī'ite Islam (one of that religion's two major branches). ... In refuting the Naqshbandīyah order's extreme monistic position of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the concept of divine existential unity of God and the world, and hence man), he instead advanced the notion of *waḥdat ash-shuhūd* (the concept of unity of vision). According to this doctrine, any experience of unity between God and the world he has created is purely subjective and occurs only in the mind of the believer; it has no objective counterpart in the real world. The former position, Shaykh Aḥmad felt, led to pantheism, which was contrary to the tenets of Sunnite Islam. ... His teachings were not always popular in official circles. In 1619, by the orders of the Mughal emperor Jahāngīr, who was offended by his aggressive opposition to Shī'ite views, Shaykh Aḥmad was temporarily imprisoned in the fortress at Gwalior. His burial place at Sirhind is still a site of pilgrimage. [15]

[15] [HTTP://WWW.BRITANNICA.COM/BIOGRAPHY/SHAYKH-AHMAD-SIRHINDI](http://www.britannica.com/biography/shaykh-ahmad-sirhindi)

Prior to coming of the Mughals in 1526, six great names of Indian Islam will keep us rightly oriented to grapple with the issues confronting us today. And they were:

- Khawaja Moinuddin Chishti (1141 - 1236)
- Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki (1173 -1235) disciple of Khawaja Moinuddin Chishti
- Fariduddin Masud Ganjshakar (1173 –1266) disciple of Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki
- Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya (1238 – 3 April 1325) disciple of Fariduddin Masud Ganjshakar
- Nasiruddin Mahmud Chirag-e-Delhi (ca 1274 -1356) disciple of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya
- Amir Khusrow (1253 –1325) disciple of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya

After the defeat of Muslim power in any area of India and its replacement with British power, the British became supreme in temporal domain but the religious domain became headless. Who would head the Muslims in this domain? The reformist movements of the nineteenth century enlisted Muslims outside the former ruling circles – of whom Saiyid Ahmad was openly critical for their willingness to act as collaborators of the British – in effect trying to achieve a juster

and more god-fearing society by popular co-operation. In this way without the Muslim king, the *ulama* became independent in religious power and there was no bar on them to enter the political field.

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Obviously a democratic process had begun for the Muslims. This was the new development in their history. It was the question of who was more revered in the eyes of the Muslim public. This power in the domain of religion opened up for the committed and the enterprising. Remaining in the domain of religion it was the question of appealing to the Muslims and pointing out to them the reasons of their downfall and disrespectful life. And there was always a thin line between religion and politics. It was the question of time now.

The British continued to rule without disturbing the existing *modus vivendi* between political and the religious establishments and thus *Alamgiri shari'a* norms continued. But during the period 1790-1810, "the East India Company began by legislation to substitute its own rules of evidence, definitions of offences and penalties for those of the shari'a. The leading Delhi scholar, Shah Abdul Aziz (1764-1824), son of Shah Wali Ullah, protested ... by declaring ... India under British supremacy to be *dar al-harb* (the abode of war)." But it was not a call to fight. Saiyid Ahmad of Rai Bareilly (1786-1831) who in 1807 was a pupil of Shah Abdul Aziz called Muslims to stand up for Islam, but he too never took up arms against the British in the territories of East India Company. [16]

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### Saiyid Ahmad Brelvi

'In the year 1820 when Syed Ahmad Barelvi started with his two lieutenants Maulana Muhammad Ismail and Maulana Abdul Haiy on his tour of the eastern and southern parts of India, he exhorted Muslims to follow the law of shari'ah and to abjure un-Islamic practices and innovations, thus preparing the ground for a call to Holy War.' [17]

Saiyid Ahmad was born into an obscure family, possibly in minor official service. Tradition has it that he found reading and writing difficult, but that in 1807 he had been accepted as a pupil by Shah Abdul Aziz and initiated into the Naqshbandi, Qadiri and Chishti orders. From about 1809 to 1818 he was a trooper under the Pindari chieftain, Amir Khan, later the *nawwab* of Tonk. After the suppression of Pindaris, Saiyid Ahmad returned to Delhi where he attached himself to Shah Abdul Aziz. He formed ties with Shah Ismail (1781-1831) and Maulvi Abdul Haiy (d. 1828) nephew and son-in-law respectively of Shah Abdul Aziz. Between the middle of 1819 and July 1821 he stayed in Rai Bareilly; Shah Ismail probably compiled the *Sirat-i-Mustaqim* (The Straight Path), a rendering of Saiyid Ahmad's ideas, during this period and preaching began.

In July 1821 Saiyid started the journey to Mecca, to perform *hajj*, travelling by way of Calcutta. Arriving at Mecca in May 1822, he returned to India in November 1823. The next two year were spent in teaching, organizing his followers and

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collecting funds in the upper provinces. In January 1826, however, he left Rai Bareilly and after a circuitous journey of nearly three thousand miles through Rajputana, Sind, Baluchistan and Afghanistan with his followers he reached Charsadda in the Hashtnagar district. From there he declared a *jihad* against the Sikh ruler of the Punjab, Ranjit Singh. In a night attack upon the Sikhs near Naushera the *mujahidin* were successful and Saiyid Ahmad was joined by neighbouring Pathan chiefs, including the *sardars* of Peshawar.

In January 1827 Saiyid Ahmad was declared imam and bai'a offered to him. It was difficult to impose unity on the Pathan tribesmen and after a betrayal by one of the Peshawar *sardars*, Yar Muhammad Khan, the *mujahidin* were defeated at Shaidu near Akora in March 1827. Saiyid Ahmad now toured the Pathan tribal areas gathering recruits and moved his headquarters to Panjtar. He defeated Yar Muhammad Khan, and was able to establish himself at Peshawar in 1830. The local Pathans resented control by outsiders, even in the name of Islam, and rose against Saiyid Ahmad's tax collectors, murdering many and forcing him to return to Panjtar. In May 1831 at Balakot on the Kaghan river, in an area where he was trying to enlist the local chiefs against the Sikhs in Hazara and Kashmir, he, shah Ismail and nearly six hundred of his followers were killed. [18]

Another version about Sayyid Ahmad Brelvi's life and struggle should further add clarity to the historical view we are trying to assemble. W.W. Hunter (Sir William Wilson Hunter) of the Bengal cadre of the Indian Civil Service wrote a book named 'The Indian Muslims'. The first edition of this book was published in 1871, second edition in 1871 and the third in 1876. I have used the 1999 publication of this book by Niaz Ahmad, Sang-e-Meel Publications, Lahore. I do not know if there was any other edition of this book and which edition was used for the 1999 publication. And 'Bengal' of that time was Bengal, Bihar and Orissa combined. What W.W. Hunter wrote about Sayyid Ahmad Brelvi, I reproduce briefly what is relevant here. W.W. Hunter wrote:

"The Rebel Camp on the Panjab Frontier owes its origin to Sayyid Ahmad, one of those bold spirits whom our extermination of the Pindari Power scattered over India half a century ago. He began his life as a horse soldier in the service of celebrated freebooter (Amir Khan Pindari, afterwards Nuwab of Tonk), and for many a year harried the rich opium-growing villages of Malwa. The stern order which the rising power of the Sikhs under Ranjit Singh imposed on their Muslim neighbours, made the trade of a Muhammadan bandit a perilous and an unprofitable one. At the same time, their strict Hinduism fanned the zeal of the Muhammadans of Northern India into a flame. Sayyid Ahmad wisely suited himself to the times, gave up robbery, and about 1816 went to study the Sacred Law under a Doctor of high repute at Delhi. After a three years' noviciate he started forth as a preacher, and by boldly attacking the abuses which have crept into the Muhammadan faith in India, obtained a zealous and turbulent following.

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(pages 11-12) ... In 1822 he made a religious journey to Mecca ... he returned in October of the following year. ... On his way back to Northern India, he enlisted a vast turbulent following in his native district of Bareilly; and in 1824 made his appearance among the wild mountaineers of the Peshawar Frontier, preaching a Holy War against the rich Sikh towns of the Panjab. ... He travelled through Kandahar and Cabul, raising the country as he went, and consolidating his influence by a skilful coalition of the tribes.

(p. 13) ... 'On the 21<sup>st</sup> December 1826, the Jihad against the Infidel Sikhs' began. A fanatical war, of varying success, against the Sikhs followed. ... (p. 14) In spite of a reverse in June 1830, [Sayyid Ahmad's] Army occupied the plains in overwhelming force; and before (p. 15) the end of the year, Peshawar itself, the Western Capital of the Panjab, had fallen. ... He proclaimed himself Khalif, and struck coins bearing the legend, 'Ahmad the Just, Defender of the Faith; the glitter of whose scimitar scatters destruction among the infidels'. But the dismay caused by the fall of Peshawar brought the matchless diplomacy of Ranjit Singh into the field. The wily Sikh (Ranjit Singh – mam) detached the petty Muhammadan Principalities from the Army of Sayyid Ahmad by separate appeals to their self-interest, and Sayyid Ahmad found himself compelled to abandon the city on condition of a ransom being paid. The internal dissensions among his followers soon defied his control. His regular troops consisted of Hindustani fanatics, Muhammadans from the Indian Provinces, who accepted his fortunes for good or for evil, and who, in fact, would have found it impossible to desert him. The army of Sayyid Ahmad, however, was swollen with hosts of Frontier Pathans, who, with all the valour, possessed all the pride and avarice, of mountaineers. On one occasion, an important tribe of these borderers had deserted on the eve of battle (The Barakzais, at the engagement with the Sikhs near Saidu), and the fanatics had afterwards taken severe retribution. Sayyid Ahmad felt the necessity of liberality to the Hindustani followers, on whom he could always depend. At first he confined himself to levying tithes for their support from the Frontier adherents. This they bore with little reluctance, as a religious contribution to the good cause. But after both sides had been inflamed by such exactions, Sayyid Ahmad began to lose ground. His talents were rather those of a fanatical incendiary than of an impartial ruler of a great coalition, and the wonderful influence which he had acquired over the Frontier tribes soon showed signs of melting away. As he found his power waning, he had more frequently recourse (p. 16) to severities, and at length wounded the feelings of the mountaineers in their most tender point. He entered upon an ill-advised effort to reform the marriage customs of the highlanders, who practically sold their daughters in wedlock to the highest bidders; and as his Indian followers had left house and home, and were without wives, he issued an edict that every girl not married within twelve days should become the property of his lieutenants. The tribes rose and massacred his Hindustani retinue, and Sayyid



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Ahmad himself narrowly escaped (from Panjtar to the Valley of Pakli). But his reign was over; and in 1831, while aiding one of his former lieutenants who had set up for himself, he was surprised by Sikh Army under Prince Sher Singh, and slain (at Balakot in May 1831).” 17 [19]

[19] First Edition 1871, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 1871, Third Edition 1876, 1999 publication by Niaz Ahmad, Sang-e-Meel Publications, Lahore and I have quoted above from the 1999 publication. I do not know if there was any other edition of this book and which edition was used for the 1999 publication. (pp. 11-17)

At Sittana a refugee ascetic had earlier establishment himself. His grandson and successor who happened to be the Treasurer of Sayyid Ahmad invited the remnants of Sayyid Ahmad there. Thus Sittana became what W.W. Hunter calls ‘The Standing Rebel Camp on our Frontier’.

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Whatever reasons and as far as I know there is more propaganda for and against him than understanding his case in history. Sayyid Ahmad Brelvi, unfortunately, has not been understood. They praise him while some point out his being in league with the British. And then sectarianism also intervenes. He and the unknown leaders of the Mutiny of 1857 practically exhausted the option of the Muslims to throw the British out with the force of arms and to revert to good old days of Muslim rule or to have a new good era for the Muslims. In a way, he performed a negative historical task without which the distraction of the Muslims would not have ended. The door was thus opened for the reformers like Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan. What reformers did with the opportunity they got is another story.

It would be naive to believe that the British did not support him. But to conclude that he was an agent of the British perhaps is a bigger naivety. The British did what they thought was good for them and Sayyid Sahib did what he thought to be good for the Muslims of India. The paths of both had crossed at a place. It is as simple as that. And his attempt being too audacious cannot be termed foolhardy because the historical experience available to him supported him. What had changed in history, he did not know and could not have been known.

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**Haji Shari’at-Allah:** Contemporary with Saiyid Ahmad Bareilly there arose in Bengal another religious movement, closer to the daily struggle for existence of the Muslim cultivator – the *fara’izi*. Its founder was Haji Shari’at-Allah (1781-1840). His message was simple, but, in the context of popular Islam in Bengal, revolutionary. It was that Muslims should observe strictly the duties (*fara’iz* hence

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fara'izi) enjoined by Qur'an and *sunna* and maintain God's unity (*tauhid*) and exclusive efficacy. The *fara'izi* must forswear any belief or action smacking of unbelief (*kufri*) or innovation (*bid'at*), such as participating in Hindu ceremonies. The *fara'izis*, however, held that so long as the British ruled in Bengal, the weekly congregational prayers of *jum'a* on Friday and twice a year on *eid* days should not be performed, on the ground that they must not be performed anywhere except in a *misr al-jami'i* (a town where an amir, or governor, and a *qazi*, or religious judge properly appointed by an independent *khalifa* or *sultan*, are stationed). In this doctrine the *fara'izis* claimed to be following *Hanfi* school of thought which they generally followed in legal matters. Although this implied that Bengal was *dar al-harb*, Hajji Shari'atAllah did not preach *jihad* against the British, but concentrated on his mission of religious purification.

**Dudu Miyan:** His son Dudu Miyan (1819-62), however, turned to social and political militancy. Dudu Miyan asserted the equality of man before God and campaigned against the levy of illegal cesses by landlords on the ground that money screwed from Muslim peasants might be spent on Hindu religious rites. Before he died, Dudu Miyan had turned a missionary brotherhood into a military brotherhood. [20]

**Titu Mir:** The most violent of these Bengali Muslim movements, and the one which required British military action for its suppression, was that led by Titu Mir. He was born in 1782 in the Village Chanddur of what is now North 24 Parganas District of West Bengal. By 1827 he was campaigning in favour of a purified Islam, in an idiom similar to that of Saiyid Ahmad Bareilly and Hajji Shari'at-Allah. After several districts of west Bengal had become a battleground between the *zamindars* and the followers of Titu Mir, the government intervened. In November 1831 they destroyed the insurgents' stockade at Narkulbaria, near Calcutta, killed Titu Mir and fifty of his followers and arrested about three hundred and fifty. The Muslim agrarian revolt in west Bengal was thus snuffed out. [21]

It should be noted that all the three reformers, Saiyid Ahmad of Rai Bareilly, Haji Shari'at-Allah and Titu Mir were born within the period 1781-86. All three performed Haj and stayed for some or more time in Mecca. And it was the time that the Arab reformer Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab had already passed away in 1792. Therefore their not being effected by his teachings was simply out of question. The reality of their own situation under the British and surrounded by the Hindu majority population was difficult. Each of them must have found in his own way a ray of hope in Abd al-Wahhab's (1703-1792) teachings for reforming Islam in India.

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**Saiyid Ahmad of Rai Bareilly 1786-1831**

Journey to Mecca and Haj 1821-23

**Haji Shari'at-Allah 1781-1840**

Journey to and stay in Mecca 1799-1818

Second Haj 1821

**Titu Mir 1782-1831**

Journey to and stay in Mecca 1822-1827

Met Saiyid Ahmad of Bareilly in Mecca

**Dudu Miyan son of Haji Shari'at-Allah 1819-62**

**Abd al-Wahhab:** 'The Muslim reform movements of the nineteenth century helped to transform Muslim attitudes towards Hindus.' The preachers were essentially rejections of medieval Islam in India in favour of early Islam in Arabia as recently preached by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792) there, hence their being called *Wahhabis*, although erroneously because their source of inspiration, commonalities apart, was Shah Wali Ullah not Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Their preaching naturally were against the customs which so many Muslims shared with Hindus. The religious and social activism of Dudu Miyian and Titu Mir in Bengal could result in a social and economic conflict assuming a communal guise. 'In the condition of Bengal under the Permanent Settlement, where the majority of *zamindars* were Hindu, the conflation of Muslim and exploited tenant, of Hindu and exploiting landlord was inevitable, although in fact Muslim landlords treated their Muslim tenants no differently than did Hindu landlords.' [22]

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What an irony, as if individuals are slaves in the process of history, doing this and getting that. There is always a state of mind which causes actions. But if that state of mind is unable to read the evolving reality which is normally the case, actions take you there which could never have been imagined earlier. Who could have imagined that Saiyid Ahmad Bareilly and the *fara'izis* were to contribute to unite Indian Muslims under the patronage of the British for political action and that too against Hindus? 'The reform movement of Saiyid Ahmad Bareilly and of the *fara'izis* contributed to the gradual transformation of the Indian Muslim community from an aggregate of believers into a political association with a will for joint action'. [23]

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I ponder what would have been going in the mind of Saiyid Ahmad. Remember all his followers were Muslims. What about Hindus? Perhaps they never existed in any scheme of Muslim Mind. And if they existed, they never accepted them. If this attitude persists in Pakistan even today, one can easily contemplate the situation two centuries earlier. "Saiyid Ahmad Bareilly aimed not to restore the Mughals or the Mughal aristocracy, but to create a facsimile of the early Muslim community on the borders of India, in the belief that it would one day inspire Muslims to conquer India for God. His message appealed not to the higher but to the humbler strata of Muslim society in India." They were the Muslim people, the *awam*. When they got right of vote after 1919, they passionately used it. Those who sympathized with the militants were not to determine the fate of Indian Muslims. Yes, they prepared the constituency of the future leaders of Muslim politics and Muslim India. [24]

The British were being 'educated' by the followers of Saiyid Ahmad Bareilly and Dudu Miyian. 'The militancy of Saiyid Ahmad Bareilly's and Dudu Miyian's followers was to have profound long-term effects on British political strategy in India. It helped to reinforce the British belief after 1857 that Muslims were by nature fanatical and irreconcilable and could only be kept quiet by a judicious mixture of buffets and boons, not necessarily, however, to be administered to the same Muslims. For the reformist movement, with their attacks on landlords and their disrespect for family and position, alarmed the 'better class' Muslims. The British saw this and by offering favours to those Muslims with something to lose were able to isolate and contain the actively disaffected.' [25]

[10, 11, 12, 13,14, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25] pp. 43-44, 44, 45, 29-30, 58, 51, 40, 51-52, 55-56, 57-58, 60, 58, 58, 60 respectively: P. Hardy: The Muslims of British India: First Corrected South Asia Edition 1998: Foundation Books, Ansari Road, New Delhi.

If the idea of Saiyid Ahmad Bareilly was to snatch Punjab from the Sikhs and then fight the British to expel them from India, it proved erroneous as instead of him the British conquered Punjab and came to fight his successors who were camped at Sittana. If the British had supported Saiyid Ahmad to weaken the Sikhs for their own occupation of the Punjab at some appropriate time in the future, they proved wrong because that was not needed. The British conspiracies against Sikh rule sufficed and the Sikhs collapsed from within after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Further if in Saiyid Ahmad's scheme of things was to fight the British to expel them from India, he should have strengthened the Sikh rule in the Punjab instead of trying to weaken it as he has been reported to write to the Chief Minister and brother-in-law of the Maharaja of Gwalior, saying 'When India is rid of these

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foreign enemies ... offices and positions in the Government will be given to those who want them and the power and prestige of the Governors and local rulers will become more stable. We humble folk ask only one thing from these rulers of States and chiefs: that they should truly serve the cause of Islam and continue to hold their positions as rulers.' And to another officer of Gwalior State he writes: 'Please explain to His Excellency Hindu Rao that as the larger part of India has passed into the hands of foreigners and they are oppressing and harassing the people everywhere ... and as the big guns in the government have given up all hope of resisting them, a few humble and insignificant persons have undertaken this great task. It behoves these chiefs and rulers who have occupied their positions for a very long time to help these humble people in this crisis and regard this as a means of strengthening their own power.'

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The Muslim militancy against the British in India anywhere, by any leader or leaders and at any time should be seen as manifestation of the same process. Because ultimately leading to 1947 all streams became one big torrent. From ultimate crystallization of all political activity into Hindu-Muslim conflict, we can deduce that what was happening previously was leading towards this end. That in the 1857 revolt by Indian troops against the British Government, the disciples and followers of Shah Abdul Aziz took an active part should be seen from this angle. Most prominent among them were Haji Imdadullah, Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanotvi and Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi.

In 1858, when the British Government had put down the revolt and a reign of terror was established over the country, these *ulama* came together and reviewed the situation. They decided to change the field of their activity and to transfer their mission from the battlefield to the school. One group went into exile to Mecca with Haji Imdadullah, and the other led by Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanotvi established a religious seminary at Deoband (Saharanpur District) to replace the Delhi school of Sha Abdul Aziz (which had to close down during the holocaust of 1857) and to be used as a centre of propagating their religious and political ideas.

About the responsibility of initiation and leadership of the revolt, there must have been on the British mind a big question mark. The matter was settled as time passed with concluding evidence that 'the Mohammedans were the instigators, and induced the Hindus to join them.' [26]

All mutineers in 1857 anywhere 'without exception tried to converge to Delhi, naturally, in search of command, which they had none, indicating thereby the collective weakness of the revolt.' They must have been looking forward to the last

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symbol of the Mughals the 'King' Bahadur Shah Zafar. 'Therefore what happened inside Delhi between May 11 and September 14, 1857 is very important to understand the overall situation, particularly of the Muslims during those eventful days.' And after about mid-day on 14<sup>th</sup> September, 'Mahommedans ceased to oppose the English. They, together with the Sepoys, began to take refuge in the Houses of the Hindus, whom they upbraided for not co-operating with them.' Whatever happened in Delhi during this period, on the whole it was all Muslim. [27]

[26, 27] The Pakistan Problem 1993, Lahore: Manzoor Ahmed Manzoor, pp. 221, 305 & 317.

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### The Militancy and the Mutiny

Even having been de-throned by the British, nineteenth century in India belonged to Muslims. It was the century of unrest, militancy and the mutiny of 1857. It finally took the shape of British consciously deciding and owning Muslims. They never wavered from this policy. Therefore their support for Urdu was a foregone conclusion. An overview is necessary.

(1)

'It was the Yusufzais who so continuously resisted the Sikhs against whom the British launched a punitive expedition in 1847, before the British assumed the responsibility for maintaining law and order' in 1849 in the Punjab. 'The Hassanzais of the Black mountain first achieved notoriety in the autumn of 1851 by' the 'murder of two custom officials who were reconnoitring a preventive line established shortly after annexation along the left bank of the Indus, to stop salt from tribal territory from being smuggled into the Punjab.' 'The destruction of a number of Hassanzai villages together with their grain and other stocks was held to be sufficient punishment'. 'There were subsequently expeditions against the Black Mountain tribes in 1863, 1875, 1888, 1891 and 1892, after which they gave no real trouble.' 'The tribes were not numerous, nor particularly warlike, and most of them miserably poor, but they, and the nest of fanatical hornets they sheltered, for long proved capable of inflicting an altogether disproportionate amount of annoyance.' 'The tribes south of the Chamla would not have figured so prominently in the early picture had they not acted as hosts to the Mujahidin, more generally known as the Hindustani Fanatics. Their founder, Sayed Ahmed Shah Brelwi, was a native of Rae Bareli in Oudh, and not by birth a Pathan.' [28]

[28] The Frontier: 1839-1947 by Major-General J.G. Elliott: 1968: Cassell & Company Ltd, London, WC1. Pp. 123, 125. Sittana, Malka and Mangal Thana are about 42, 50 and 54 KM respectively to the North-West of Abbottabad. Distance

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between Sittana and Malka and between Malka and Mangal Thana is same which is about 9 KM.

(2)

W.W. Hunter writes: 'Between 1850 and 1857 the Frontier disorders forced us to send out sixteen distinct expeditions, aggregating, 33,000 Regular Troops; and between 1850 and 1863 the number rose to twenty separate expeditions, aggregating 60,000 Regular Troops, besides Irregular Auxiliaries and Police. During this time the Sittana Colony, although stirring up a perpetual spirit of fanaticism along the Frontier, had wisely avoided direct collision with our troops. They might secretly help the tribes whom they had incited against us, but they did not dare to wage war on their own account.' [29]

(3)

On the frontier, however, the *mujahidin* stirred up the Yusafzais to raid a British camp. Despite their other preoccupations in April and May 1858, the British sent an army of 5,000 men under Sir Sidney Cotton to destroy the base at Sittana. This was the first full-scale war between the British and the *mujahidin* on the frontier. They latter, however, merely formed yet another settlement at Malka and kept the frontier tribes in turmoil. In the summer of 1863 they reoccupied Sittana. [30]

[30] pp. 82-83: P. Hardy: *The Muslims of British India: First Corrected South Asia Edition* 1998: Foundation Books, Ansari Road, New Delhi.

(4)

From the 1857 'Mutiny Report' of Lieutenant-Colonel H.B. Edwardes, Commissioner and Superintendent, Peshawur Division, to R. Montgomery, Judicial Commissioner of the Punjab, dated Peshawur 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 1858: 'Mokurrub Khan, the chief of Punjtar, ... had just called into Punjtar as auxiliaries a detachment of Hindoostanee fanatics from the colony of "Ghazees" (or martyrs) who have for years settled at Sitana on the Indus, supported by secret supplies of money from disaffected Indian princes. ... The most rancorous and seditious letters had been intercepted from Mahomedan bigots, in Patna and Thaneysur, to ... soldiers of the 64<sup>th</sup> Native Infantry, ... These letters alluded to a long series of

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correspondence that had been going on, through these men of the 64<sup>th</sup> Infantry, with the Hindoostanee fanatics in Swat and Sitana.’ [31]

[31] The Pakistan Problem: Manzoor Ahmed Manzoor. Pp. 271-273

(5)

In the preface to the second edition of ‘The Indian Musalmans’, dated 3-10-1871, W.W. Hunter writes: ‘A great public calamity has given most mournful emphasis to these pages. Five days before the first copies ( of first edition of the book dated 23-6-1871 - mam) reached Calcutta, a Musalman assassin struck down the Chief Justice of Bengal under the portico of his own court. I put forward this Second Edition in the hope that it may produce a reaction equally apart from the popular alarm which has followed the crime, and from the popular apathy which had for years preceded it. To know the real truth about our position in India, seems to me to be the sole safeguard against chronic torpor on the one hand, and sudden panic on the other.’

(6)

The Bengal Muhammadans are again in a strange state. For years a rebel colony has threatened our Frontier; from time to time sending forth fanatic swarms, who have attacked our camps, burned our villages, murdered our subjects, and involved our troops in three costly wars. Month by month, this hostile settlement across the border has been systematically recruited from the heart of Bengal. Successive State Trials prove that a network of conspiracy has spread itself over our Provinces, and that bleak mountains which rise beyond the Punjab are united by a chain of treason depots with the tropical swamps through which the Ganges merges into the sea. They disclose an organization which systematically levies money and men in the Delta, and forwards them by regular stages along our highroads to the Rebel Camp two miles off. Men of keen intelligence and ample fortune have embarked in the plot, and a skilful system of remittances has reduced one of the most perilous enterprises of treason to a safe operation of banking. While the more fanatical of the Musalmans have thus engaged in overt sedition, the whole Muhammadan community has been openly deliberating on their obligation to rebel. During the past nine months, the leading newspapers in Bengal have filled their columns with discussions to the duty of the Muhammadans to wage war against the Queen. [32]

[29, 32] pp. 22, 9-10: W.W. Hunter: The Indian Musalman: First Edition 1871, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 1871, Third Edition 1876, 1999 publication by Niaz Ahmad, Sang-e-Meel Publications, Lahore and I have quoted above from the 1999 publication.

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The line of militancy taken up by Saiyid Ahmad to defeat the British militarily finally came to end after about 60 years. Although Saiyid Ahmad was no more but the Mutiny of 1857 cannot be said to be unconnected to his endeavour. Collectively it was the armed struggle which the Indian Muslims waged against the British for 66 years from 1826 when Saiyid Ahmad's Jihad began against the 'Infidel Sikhs' to 1892 when the last British expedition against the tribals and 'Hindustani Fanatics' in the north of present Khyber Pakhtunwhawa province of Pakistan was undertaken.

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### The British Learning and Response

(1)

Most Britons emerged from the events of 1857 with the conviction that Muslims were required by their religion to be antipathetic if not actively hostile to British rule, despite the active military assistance of Muslims from the Panjab and the loyal service of Muslim officials. The *mujahidin* on the frontier seemed to express the real spirit of militant Islam and the presence of many *ulama* among the rebels in 1857-58 merely confirmed a belief that those who devoted their lives to studying the Faith knew what it demanded when opportunity offered. In the embittered and distrustful atmosphere which now prevailed, the British were constantly on the watch for 'rustles in the Muhammadan community', for an out-break of that fanaticism and bigotry 'characteristic of the race'. Aware now of the precariousness of British rule, the earlier British attitude of complaisance towards the *mujahidin* on the frontier and their underground organization in India disappeared. [33]

(2)

If the typical British attitude in 1857 was that a Muslim meant a rebel against them, one observation about the attitude of Muslims towards Hindus by Sir William Muir in October 1857 was: 'The Musulmans, while they thought their cause had a fair chance of final success have frequently compromised themselves by flagrantly traitorous acts. At Allygurh, for instance, the Mussulmans were for a considerable time dominant; they forcibly converted many Hindoos; ...' [34]

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(3)

Before 1857 the servants of the East India Company would have liked to treat India as if it were inhabited by rational individuals capable of pursuing their own enlightened self-interest; after 1857 the officials of the Crown began to regard India as inhabited by communities bound together by unreasoning sentiment and requiring not guidance but manipulation. [35]

(4)

British attitude towards Muslims for a decade after suppression of the Mutiny and the Rising express the dualism of Canning's letter of 21 November 1857 – acceptance of them as an important interest with expectations of fair treatment from their rulers, coupled with severe repression of any political pugnacity. As, however, any British acceptance was strictly on British terms, and as from the middle of the eighties there was open British repression of the followers of Saiyid Ahmad of Bareilly, Muslims could see only British suspicion and antipathy; with the assassination of Chief Justice Norman of the Calcutta High Court by a Muslim in August 1871 and the assassination of the Viceroy, Lord Mayo, by a Muslim in February 1872, it began to appear that the British and the Muslims of northern India were on a collision course. Nevertheless, before Norman's assassination, Lord Mayo had acted to assure Muslims publically that an honourable place was theirs in British India if they were willing to accept it and the two assassinations, instead of killing conciliation, determined the British to confirm it. [36]

(5)

The British recognized that political persecution of devoted Muslims was no way to reduce Islamic passion and stopped the trials of actively-disaffected Muslims, the 'Wahhabi' trials, begun in 1864. They began, slowly at first, to offer educational boons to Muslims in the hope that more Muslims would then become qualified to compete successfully for the political and professional employment created by British rule. The premise of British policy was that it would be possible to balance and rule between the Hindu and Muslim communities, once significant elements of the latter had been convinced that they had more to gain by collaboration than by opposition. [37]

[33, 34, 35, 36, 37] pp. 81-82, 62, 62, 79 respectively. P. Hardy: *The Muslims of British India: First Corrected South Asia Edition 1998*: Foundation Books, Ansari Road, New Delhi.

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**Muslims failed to find a way out**

(1)

The failure of the revolutionary movement did not by any means dampen the spirit of national freedom in the breasts of the crusading *ulama*. Like a suppressed fire it smouldered under the surface. So, in the 1857 revolt by India troops against the British Government, the disciples and followers of Shah Abdul Aziz took an active part. Most prominent among them were Haji Imdadullah, who afterwards migrated to Mecca, Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanotvi, and Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi. [38]

(2)

In 1858, when the British Government had put down the revolt and a reign of terror was established over the country, these *ulama* came together and reviewed the situation. They decided to change the field of their activity and to transfer their mission from the battlefield to the school. One group went into exile to Mecca with Haji Imdadullah, and the other led by Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanotvi established (1866 – mam) a religious seminary at Deoband (Saharanpur District) to replace the Delhi school of Shah Abdul Aziz (which had to close down during the holocaust of 1857) and to be used as a centre of propagating their religious and political ideas. [39]

(3)

Thus the Deoband Seminary, which had drawn its inspiration from Shah Wali Ullah's idea of social revolution, and to some extent from his concept of religious reform, became a stronghold of opposition to the British Government as well as to modern Western civilization – an opposition that had taken roots in the minds of the *ulama* and the masses. A number of similar schools were established in the neighboring districts. [40]

(4)

The Deoband school continued to develop a center of religious Puritanism and of love for political freedom, and attracted students not only from all parts of India but also from some foreign countries, especially Afghanistan. The school kept aloof from practical politics but strove to spread through its education among the religious class of Muslims the spirit of freedom which its founder had infused into it. The influence of this movement soon made itself felt. When Sir Syed started his campaign to keep the Muslims away from the National Indian Congress and to

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persuade them to join the loyalist Indian Patriotic Association which he had founded, the *ulama* of Ludhiana replied in 1888 by publishing a *fatwa* signed by about one hundred religious leaders from all parts in India and some from Madina and Baghdad permitting Muslims to join the National Congress and forbidding them to join the Patriotic Association. Among the supporters of the Congress were Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, the lifelong companion of Maulana Muhammad Qasim who had succeeded him as the Director of Deoband. ... After a quarter of a century Deoband became the centre of a political movement for the freedom of the country. [41]

[38, 39, 40, 41] pp. 41-42, 42, 42, 43-44 respectively: The Destiny of Indian Muslims: S. Abid Husain: Published in Pakistan in 1983 by Qadiria Book Traders, 16-A, Street 56, Sant Nagar, Lahore.

One consequence of about 90 years' of British occupation was the Mutiny of 1857. The observations of Hamidul Haq Chowdhury should give the reader added insight into the whole process which had started from Bengal.

And after the Mutiny, writes Hamidul Haq Chowdhury in his memoirs, the "Muslim Mullahs declared non-cooperation with all systems of education established by the East India Company and the British administration. English education was declared *haram* (forbidden) for the Muslims. So the only education they had was Arabic. Bengali had yet to be established as literary language. This state of affairs continued up to 1880 or 1890." [42]

[42] Memoirs of Hamidul Haq Chowdhury: P. 8 ■