

Historiography of the Jihad Movement: A Critique of the Selected Portions of Muhammad Wazir Khan and Ghulam Rasul Mihr's Works²

Abstract:

Sayyid Ahmad Barailvi (1786-1831) of Rae Baraily, Oudh State (present Uttar Pradesh, India) started a reform movement in Northern India later migrated to Peshawar valley to wage Jihad against Sikhs. His Mujahidin Movement set three attacks against the Sikhs and eight fights with those people whom he had intended to liberate from the Sikh rule. Sayyid Ahmad fall fighting against the Sikhs at Balakot in 1831. Much has been written on the movement of Sayyid Ahmad since then. Many writers have portrayed him a pious soul, leader of the reformist Islam, pioneer of revivalist notion and a martyr for the cause of Islam. There are however, writers who have tried to prove him an infidel, an agent of the English and a traitor. Another category of writers have tried to prove him a disturber of peace in the Sikh's domain. The fourth category of writers, mainly locals have either tried to associate him with English or have raised questions over his cause. It is pertinent to note that the present paper is neither aimed at discussing the motives and objectives of the Jihad Movement nor to discuss details of other primary sources like his letters. The present paper is an attempt to briefly introduce different categories of writers who have written on Sayyid Ahmad and his Jihad Movement. However, the major focus of the paper is to analyse the selected portions of two major sources i.e. Muhammad Wazir Khan and Ghulam Rasul Mihr's works on this important episode of South Asian Muslim history. The discussion is limited to the Sayyid Ahmad's selection of the North-West Frontier for hijrat and subsequent jihad; the declaration of imarat; and the battle of Shaidu.

Keywords: Historiography, Hagiography, Sayyid Ahmad Barailvi, Jihad Movement, North-West Frontier, Militancy.

Introduction

The Mujahidin Movement of Sayyid Ahmad Barailvi (1786-1831)¹ is one of the major historical episodes of the South Asian Muslims, which has been interpreted by various writers according to their social background, religious orientation and academic training. Looking into the literature one can safely divide these writers into four major categories.

The first category of such literature has produced by the associates and ideological followers of Sayyid Ahmad, some journalists and by a few academics.

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of History, University of Peshawar. Email: altafqadir@upesh.edu.pk

* An abridgment of this paper was presented in 24th International Pakistan History Conference on History & Historiography of South Asia held on 14–16 April, 2014 at University of the Punjab, Lahore, organized by Department of History, University of the Punjab and Pakistan Historical Society, Karachi, Pakistan.

This category include writers like Khan²; Mihr³; Nadvi;⁴ Abdullah Butt;⁵ Zahur-ud-Din Butt;⁶ Khan;⁷ Nasiri;⁸ Qeyamuddin Ahmad;⁹ Mohiuddin Ahmad;¹⁰ Hedayatullah;¹¹ Masud Nadvi;¹² Husain;¹³ Qureshi;¹⁴ Ikram;¹⁵ Madani;¹⁶ Sindhi;¹⁷ Mian;¹⁸ Shahjahanpuri;¹⁹ and Thanasari²⁰ apart from few others. Due to their ideological affiliation with Sayyid Ahmad, their assertion seems subjective at times and usually do not accept the errors committed by him. They further understand that the inhabitants of the North-West Frontier betrayed him for their vested interests and tribal prestige. These writers failed to understand the local dynamics and thus could not critically assess the steps of Sayyid Ahmad which created opposition for his movement. They might be justified while writing in the environment they lived in. The list of writers who wrote in favor of his movement includes a few writers i.e. Madani and Sindhi, who have tried to portray Sayyid Ahmad an Indian Nationalist.

The second category who worked in this area includes foreign visitors, colonial agents, and inhabitants of the area both contemporary and later. The important among those to mention are Masson;²¹ *James Settlement Report 1853*;²² Bellew;²³ *Gazetteer of Hazara*;²⁴ *Gazetteer of Peshawar*;²⁵ Plowden;²⁶ Caroe;²⁷ Cunningham;²⁸ Elphinstone;²⁹ Raverty;³⁰ Ibbeston;³¹ Latif;³² Das;³³ Kakakhel;³⁴ Panni;³⁵ Quddusi;³⁶ Yusafi;³⁷ Sithanavi;³⁸ Sabir;³⁹ Abdul Ghaffar;⁴⁰ Khalil;⁴¹ Shaheen;⁴² and Mahsud.⁴³ These sources have mainly two limitations: the colonial sources have element of subjectivity due to the reflection of imperial interests and the struggle of Mujahidin against them. With the exception of a few most of the local sources have either ideological blend or tilted to Pukhtun ethno nationalism.

The third category includes writers who worked the area while applying various theoretical frameworks like settlement, frontier, mobilization, sacred spaces and radicalism. Some of the important sources may be mentioned here i.e., Nichols;⁴⁴ Pearson;⁴⁵ Jafri and Reifeld;⁴⁶ Haroon;⁴⁷ Jalal⁴⁸ and Allen.⁴⁹ These writers have used a lot of sources and can be trusted for several reasons with certain limitation. Nichols main emphasis is on the settlement of tribes during 1500 to 1900 with slight reference to Sayyid Ahmad Movement. Pearson; Jafri and Reiffeld have focused on the reformist aspect of the movement in Northern India. Jalal has treated well though she has written on a very long period and hence some minute details are missed in her work which made the interpretation different.

A good number of the Sikh sources are also available that include Kohli;⁵⁰ Sethi;⁵¹ Ganda Singh;⁵² Harbans Singh;⁵³ Lal⁵⁴ and few others. Some of these writers have written from the perspective of Sikh *darbar*.

Khan's *Waqai Sayyid Ahmad Shahid* is a compilation of Sayyid Ahmad's associates' narratives. A good number of the Mujahidin had settled in Tonk after the battle of Balakot. Muhammad Wazir Khan, the Nawab of Tonk (1834-1864), appointed *katib*—scribe, to record the events of Sayyid Ahmad Barailvi life. The Mujahidin narrated the events; the details were verified by different Mujahidin and then recorded by Haider Ali, the *katib*. The *Waqai* starts with the details of Sayyid Ahmad's ancestry and ends with the Mujahidin's efforts to protect the widow of Sayyid Ahmad and other females of the Mujahidin. It has ended abruptly; no further information is available as what happened after the Mujahidin arrival at Khona. It consists of 2477 pages, with no headings and chapters and at first it

seems a bit difficult for the readers. The *Waqai* covers all major events of Sayyid Ahmad life in northern India and the North-West Frontier.

Ghulam Rasul Mihr's *Sayyid Ahmad Shahid* is a detailed account of the Jihad Movement. It has been written after extensive research and the author has travelled in the areas where Mujahidin had lived after their migration to the North-West Frontier. He has analyzed the movement according to his inspiration. Despite disregarding the socio-political dynamics of Pukhtuns, the author's efforts are appreciated.

Selection of the North-West Frontier for Jihad

The narrative of the *Waqai*, dealing with the migration of Sayyid Ahmad, has not mentioned the reasons for selection of the North-West Frontier for the Jihad programme. However, at a later stage the reasons for the selections are mentioned in one of Sayyid Ahmad speeches. He stated 'Pukhtuns of the North-West Frontier had invited him to migrate to their land and wage *jihad* against the infidels. Hundreds of thousands would assist him in his struggle against the Sikhs. The inhabitants of the area were unhappy with the oppressive policies of Ranjit Singh. The Sikhs demolished mosques, burnt crops and plundered properties of the people. They also captured Muslim women and children and sold them in Punjab.'⁵⁵

The issue of selection of the North-West Frontier has been discussed by Mihr in more details as compared to the *Waqai*. He has not only mentioned the speech of Sayyid Ahmad and invitation of the Pukhtuns to help him in his mission⁵⁶ but also detailed six factors for the selection of the North-West Frontier. Firstly, the entire population of the Frontier was Muslim and a common perception in the region was that Pukhtuns were good fighters. The Mujahidin were expecting that Pukhtuns could not only save their country from Sikhs' domination but also liberate Punjab; and ultimately can lead to the liberation of India in case to support Sayyid Ahmad according to his movement and instructions. Secondly, they were victim of Sikhs atrocities and could be easily organized for their defense. Thirdly, they had not lost their independence yet rather it was threatened and for them it was of their top priority to save its independence. Fourth, almost all North-West of Frontier was surrounded by Muslims' territories, where he was expecting active support and no opposition. The fifth reason behind selection was the favourable geographical location of N-W.F.P. that could be attacked from one side only and Sayyid Ahmad based his battlefield selection on such reason. Sixth, in addition to Pukhtuns the penalized population of Punjab, the principalities of Bahawalpur, Sindh and Balochistan would also support Sayyid Ahmad in case of attack.⁵⁷ Last but not the least; it was not prudent or possible for Sayyid Ahmad, to start armed struggle from mainland India in areas governed directly by the English or by princes who were under their suzerainty. The headquarters inside India would be a place in occupation, where no help could reach from outside. The English could easily crush the movement in its infancy by enlisting the support of other classes and segments of society.⁵⁸

One may discuss the factors in details for a comparative assessment. Firstly, Sayyid Ahmad's claim of invitation by the Pukhtuns is neither supported by any reliable source nor was it referred unless opposition to Sayyid Ahmad

started in Peshawar valley. Secondly, the common perception of Pukhtun fighting strength may not be rejected. It should, however, be pertinent to note that tribal mentality needs a lot of homework for utilizing its strength for a common cause. The Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) organized the tribal Arabs for a cause but despite his charismatic leadership and divine blessings, it took a long time and it could not work for long after His (PBUH) demise. Sayyid Ahmad did not work on the same lines rather initiated an armed struggle immediately after his arrival in the Frontier. The strategy, adopted by Sayyid Ahmad was different from that of Shah Waliullah. The latter had requested Ahmad Shah Abdali and Najib-ud-Daulah to assist the declining Mughal Empire. Sayyid Ahmad, on the other hand, appealed to the masses and led the Jihad in person. The inhabitants of the North-West Frontier had been living at a distance from the power centre and like other tribal and peripheral entities, have resisted the central authorities, who have attempted to occupy their lands and interfere in their internal socio-political structure. Thirdly, no doubt their independence was threatened by the Sikhs and they were defeated by the Sikhs in the battle of Pir Sabaq (1823) but Sikhs' rule was limited to collection of levy in certain days. The Sikhs had yet not interfered in their internal affairs and nominal payment to state authorities have been paid by the inhabitants of Peshawar valley for centuries. Fourthly, like Pukhtuns, the independence of Sindh and Kalat was also threatened by the Sikhs but Sayyid Ahmad did not stay there to initiate an armed struggle from their lands. The family of Sayyid Ahmad had been serving the rulers in different capacities and that opportunity was lost with the disintegration of Muslim empire in India. Sayyid Ahmad might have in mind to establish his own principality. The North-West Frontier could become a base ground for him if could study the tribal structure and play his cards wisely. This was not possible in Sindh and Kalat which had established principalities. Fifthly, the Muslim principalities around North-West Frontier were shrinking since long and their independence was threatened by the expanding Tsarist Russia. Waging Jihad at the expectation of their assistance and strength was not a wise decision on the part of Sayyid Ahmad. Sixthly, the guerilla warfare in the North-West Frontier against the occupying force was not a bad idea but establishing a state as a result of guerilla activities rarely accomplishes without an active external support.

Attack on Hazro and Declaration of *Imarat*

The second important episode of the Jihad Movement is the attack on Hazro and subsequent declaration of *Imarat*. After establishing himself at Hund, Sayyid Ahmad sent letters and envoys to the local chiefs, inviting them to join the *jihad* and liberate their country from the Sikhs. Many chiefs joined Sayyid Ahmad.

The attack on Hazro has also been discussed in details by most of the sources. This was a business centre, lying across the Indus in Sikh jurisdiction. *Waqai* has narrated that the whole scheme was planned and enacted during Sayyid Ahmad's stay in Bazar, Hund. Advocates tried to convince Sayyid Ahmad to attack because the town was a major business centre, but only had a small Sikh contingent and one cannon. A huge booty was expected from the attack. Akhund Zahur Ullah, on the instructions of Sayyid Ahmad, explained to the advocates of attack that some of his Mujahidin were killed in the battle of Akora Khattak while others were injured and they also did not know the customs of the locals. It has

also been recorded that Sayyid Ahmad hesitated to join the raid on Hazro, but when some of the Qandahari Mujahidin wished to join the local Pukhtuns, he conditionally allowed them that they would not harm the non combatant Muslims of the town. His advice was based on the Islamic injunction that the Muslims of that town had not yet been invited for *jihad*. The town was attacked and that local Pukhtuns were busy in plundering until the majority of them fled when the Sikhs retaliated and only the Qandaharis stood firm. This resulted in heavy casualties. Fleeing tribesmen were shot dead by the Sikhs. They panicked and many of them drowned in the river while crossing towards Hund. Sayyid Ahmad instructed Khadi Khan to take Sayyid Anwar Shah and assist the Qandaharis. Though he had instructed Hindustanis to take arms and get ready. Few of the Hindustanis joined Khadi Khan without the instructions of the Sayyid. They joined the Qandaharis and repulsed the Sikhs. During this time few Hindustanis were killed in the combat. Sayyid Anwar Shah and his associates crossed Indus in the evening and joined the main body of the Mujahidin. Khadi Khan had tried to collect the booty but the locals resisted. Sayyid Ahmad asked him to return their plundered luggage.⁵⁹ Mihr asserts that though the Pukhtuns were ready to fight but they were not aware of the principles of *jihad*. Their *jihad* was limited to plunder. The Sikhs and the Pukhtuns were at loggerhead and the attack on Hazro was neither against the teaching of *sharia* nor unjustified. However, attacking for plunder was against the objectives of Sayyid Ahmad. Rest of the details of both sources are uniform with two additions by Mihr. First, according to Sayyid Ahmad's estimate around four to five hundred locals drowned in the river during their attempt to cross the river. Second, two or three days later, the Sikhs gathered across Indus. The Mujahidin collected on the other side of the river. The Sikhs artillery dispersed the locals and Ashraf Khan of Zaida efforts failed to organize them against the Sikhs. However, a few of the Pukhtuns took *mashk*⁶⁰ and opened firing on the Sikhs from the middle of the river. The Sikhs dispersed due to the tribesmen's enthusiasm.⁶¹

The present study attempts to discuss few aspects of the narration. First, sources agree that Sayyid Ahmad considered the raid on Hazro justified and according to the commandments of *sharia* as the Sikhs and the Mujahidin were at war. In retaliation for attacks by the Sikhs, the Mujahidin were warranted to hurt the Sikhs. Second, it is interesting to note that Sayyid Ahmad in his letter to Indian Muslims, straightforwardly recorded the attack on Hazro. He also wrote that a large amount of booty was captured from Hazro.⁶² This suggests that the distancing of Sayyid Ahmad from the attack is a later phenomenon, written by those who wanted to justify the declaration of *imarat* on the basis of mismanagement during the raid on the plea of absence of central authority. Third, it has been recorded by Khan and Mihr that Sayyid Ahmad asked Khadi Khan not to collect the booty from the locals for onward distribution according to Sayyid Ahmad instructions. The present study infers a different conclusion from the Sayyid Ahmad letter and Rizvi who has asserted that goods worth an estimated Rs. 1,500,000 were brought from the town as booty.⁶³ How could Sayyid Ahmad claim that a huge booty was brought? And was it possible for anyone to record the estimate of booty if it was not collected and taken away by the locals to their respective homes?

The declaration of Sayyid Ahmad *imarat* is another important episode of not only the Jihad Movement but also the South Asian Muslims especially

Deoband School of thought. The *Waqai* narration, in chronological order, on the issue of *imarat* is very short. It has been written that after the attack on Hazro, Sayyid Ahmad wanted to shift to Panjtar as the locals were not acting in an organized body rather everyone was interested in temporal gains. Khadi Khan, however, requested the Sayyid not to move from there and he would call all chiefs to his abode. There was a dispute between Khadi Khan, Ashraf Khan of Zaida and Fateh Khan of Panjtar. Their differences were resolved with the efforts of Sayyid Ahmad. Their reconciliation paved the way for others. They took *ba'it*—oath of allegiance, at the hands of Sayyid Ahmad. It was followed by visits of local *ulama* and the issue of Sayyid Ahmad *imarat* was discussed between them and Shah Ismail. The *ulama* selected him their *Imam*—commander of the faithful.⁶⁴ Mihr's narration is not much different from *Waqai*. He asserts that the skirmishes of Akora Khattak and the attack on Hazro revealed that the Pukhtuns were not organized people and their only concern was plunder. Moreover, the tribal chiefs had differences among them and hence a central organization was required for the management of *jihad*. The aforementioned chiefs took oath of allegiance at the hands of Sayyid Ahmad. The issue of *imarat* was discussed and Sayyid Ahmad was elected Amir as he was the person who could be agreed upon by many people. Thus *bai'at*—oath of allegiance was taken in Sayyid Ahmad's hand on 11 January 1827 (12 *Jamadol Thani*, 1242) and the next day the *khutba*—sermon was read in his name in Friday prayers.⁶⁵

An attempt is made here to discuss the claims of the authors in some details. Importantly in regards to the declaration of *imarat*, the classical literature dealing with the issue of *imarat/khilafat* is very clear. According to the jurists, the establishment of *imarat* is the foremost priority of those at the helm of affairs. Nadvi stated that the burial of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) was delayed as the companions were busy in resolving the issue of *khilafat*.⁶⁶ The justification, provided by the authors for the declaration of *imarat* suggests that Sayyid Ahmad was not aware of the objectives and importance of the establishment of *imarat* and his *imarat* was political move instead of motivated by solid religious grounds.

Some details of the attack are available in Sayyid Ahmad's letter to India, sent soon after declaration of the *imarat*. The followers of Sayyid Ahmad had tried to disassociate themselves from the attack. The reason was obvious, since the reported mismanagement was taken a major factor for the declaration of the *imarat* and the whole responsibility for the mismanaged raid was laid upon the locals.

There are contradictions among the writers over the nature and objective of the resulting *bai'at*. *Waqai* has not discussed the nature of *imarat*. It refers to the *bai'at* of Panjtar (February 1829) as the renewal of the previous one.⁶⁷ Mihr asserts that the *bai'at* did not intend the establishment of *imarat* for the imposition of *sharia*—full political authority over the locals. Rather it was intended to organize the *jihad* alone. Sayyid Ahmad was made head of the confederacy, in which each local chief had his share and was free to act in his respective domain. Sayyid Ahmad could preach the commandments of *sharia*, could seek assistance for *jihad* and resolve any dispute among the confederating units but was not authorized to issue orders.⁶⁸

The present study contends that the *bai'at* was meant to collect full political authority beyond just organizing the *jihad*. Mihr had first suggested that the *bai'at* was for organizing the *jihad* only,⁶⁹ but contradicted his own argument when referring to the third clause of the *bai'at* of Ashraf Khan, Fateh Khan and Khadi Khan in February 1829. The third clause of the February oath clearly indicated that they had rendered such an oath earlier and they were renewing their previous oath in front of the *ulama*.⁷⁰ Second, the Friday *khutba* was read in the name of Sayyid Ahmad, which itself was a sign of political authority.⁷¹ Third, Shah Ismail's *Mansab-e-Imamat* was written in response to the objections of Indian *ulama* after the *bai'at*. Fourth, the letters of Sayyid Ahmad to different princes and local chiefs including Prince of Bokhara, Dost Muhammad Khan of Kabul, Faizullah Khan of Hazarkhwani and others, after the *bai'at*, were written in the capacity of *Amir-ul-Mominin*.⁷² One such letter addressed to his Indian associates said that Sayyid Ahmad's authority was recognized.⁷³ Fifth, Sayyid Ahmad preferred Panjtar to Khar, as the chiefs of lower Swat did not come forward for such an oath like the chief of Panjtar.⁷⁴ Sixth, Masson's account of the happenings should not be ignored. According to him, the Barakzai Sardars submitted to Sayyid Ahmad because of his unexpected success in the Yusufzai area. Since he was calling them for a religious cause, and though apprehensive of his real designs, they were unable to oppose him.⁷⁵ The question arises why did Sayyid Ahmad not implement *sharia* soon after the declaration of his *imarat*? The answer is clear; he went to fight the Sikhs in Shaidu and was defeated. His lengthy search for a safe place hindered any plan to implement *sharia*.

Tha Battale of Shaidu

The *bai'at* of *imarat* at the hands of Sayyid Ahmad was followed by taking oath of allegiance by the Pukhtun chiefs and Barakzai brother, the lords of Peshawar. The Pukhtun tribesmen and tribal chiefs showed enthusiasm for a common cause. After a lengthy discussion, it was decided to attack the Sikh force, stationed at Saidu (Shaidu).⁷⁶ The *Waqai* has recorded that the sick Mujahidin were sent to Panjtar, few were left at Hund for the protection their belongings and the rest accompanied Sayyid Ahmad to the battlefield. Khadi Khan, Ashraf Khan and Fateh Khan joined the Mujahidin in the company of some eighty thousand tribesmen. The Durranis had encamped across river Kabul with a twenty thousand force and eight cannons. Sayyid Ahmad crossed the Kabul River near Nowshera and joined the Barakzai brothers encamped on the southern side of the river. Sayyid Ahmad meal was daily sent from Yar Muhammad Khan kitchen. He fell ill in the night before the battle and was unable to participate, though Shah Ismail seated him on an elephant, and took him to the field. All the Hindustanis remained with Sayyid Ahmad except Shadil Khan Kanjwari who was sent to accompany Fateh Khan of Panjtar. As the battle began, initially the tribesmen and the Mujahidin gained an upper hand and many Sikhs were killed. The news was spread that Sayyid Ahmad was poisoned by Yar Muhammad Khan. Yar Muhammad Khan dissented the field, followed by others. Shah Ismail took Sayyid Ahmad out of the field and the tribal *lakhkar* was dispersed.⁷⁷

The narration of Mihr is not different from *Waqai* with more details and interpretation of the events. He has comprehended the attitude of Barakzai brothers and has justified Sayyid Ahmad stand on the issue. He has also given

details of the tribal *lakhkar* and Sikhs force. Space is allocated to the correspondence between Sayyid Ahmad and Budh Singh. The desertion of Yar Muhammad is written with additional information that two persons from Budh Singh went to Yar Muhammad Khan and subsequently he left the field along with his force. Moreover, his desertion news was spread by his people. He was followed by all tribal chiefs except a person and his associates from Peshawar who laid their lives in the field. He has also concluded that the only reason for the Mujahidin defeat was Yar Muhammad Khan desertion and that he deserted as a result of compromise with the Sikhs. On the authority of different sources he further states that around six thousand people on the Sayyid side were killed. He confirms that Sayyid was poisoned by the cook of Yar Muhammad Khan.⁷⁸

Like previous episodes of the Jihad Movement, there are few events in battle of Shaidu which need to be verified by content and situational analysis. First, a story relates that Sayyid Ahmad was poisoned⁷⁹ before the battle, by Nazar Muhammad, a cook of Yar Muhammad Khan, responsible for providing meals to Sayyid Ahmad.⁸⁰ Sayyid Ahmad's own statement reveals that he was poisoned on the night before the battle.⁸¹ A bit different story can be inferred from the narration of *Waqai*. The illness of Sayyid Ahmad, few days prior to the battle of Shaidu, as narrated by *Waqai* tells that slow poison was started soon after Sayyid Ahmad encampment at Nowshera.⁸² The present study asserts that poisoning Sayyid Ahmad is established by many sources though it is not confirmed whether Sayyid Ahmad was poisoned on the night of the fight or it was slow poisoning. Moreover, the *Waqai* has narrated that Nazar Muhammad had poisoned Sayyid Ahmad as the former was a Shia. The present study contends that Sayyid Ahmad was poisoned by the instructions of Yar Muhammad Khan for political reasons only. Giving sectarian colour to the event weakens the weight in the argument that Yar Muhammad wanted to eliminate Sayyid Ahmad's threat to his authority. Second, the figure is exaggerated as the whole population of the Peshawar vale could not provide that many fighting men. H. W. Bellew has estimated the whole population of Yusafzais and Mandanr of Peshawar and Swat vale was about four *lakh* (400,000) in 1864. It was also stated that they could bring 73,200 men to field for fighting.⁸³ The battle of Shaidu was fought 37 years before Bellew wrote his book. Yet another source has recorded that the population of the Peshawar district was 450,099 in 1855.⁸⁴ It is clear that the whole population was not fighting men. The number of troops on Sayyid Ahmad's side could not exceed 30,000. All the sources either written by Sayyid Ahmad's followers or the Sikh writers have exaggerated the number of the tribesmen. The Sikhs wanted to magnify their success, while the Mujahidin wanted to emphasize that Yar Muhammad Khan's desertion resulted in the defeat of such a large force. Third, the present study agrees with Mihr version that Yar Muhammad Khan had reached some compromise with Budh Singh and deserted the Mujahidin without taking part in the battle. This version has been confirmed by many other sources, written by the followers of Sayyid Ahmad, Pukhtuns and the British.⁸⁵ Fourth, the desertion of Yar Muhammad Khan has been widely discussed by Khan and Mihr. There are different views about the desertion of Yar Muhammad Khan. One is that the Sikh commander Budh Singh threatened him that joining hands with Sayyid Ahmad would be disastrous for him and thus he left the field to change the apparent victory of the Mujahidin into a defeat.⁸⁶ Another version suggested that the authoritarian nature of Sayyid Ahmad, treating his allies like subordinates, was the main factor responsible for the

desertion of the Barakzai chiefs and especially Yar Muhammad Khan.⁸⁷ Whatever cause or motive, the desertion of the Barakzai chiefs proved disastrous for the Mujahidin. They were defeated on the battlefield and a large number of them killed.⁸⁸ The Pukhtuns proved unable to face the Sikhs in open battle in the North-West Frontier after their defeat at Shaidu.⁸⁹ All sources agree that Yar Muhammad Khan had dissented the Mujahidin for political reasons. The issue has been discussed in the previous pages and need no further comment. However, a single person's desertion can cause such a defeat raise few questions. It seems that the Mujahidin had taken the action in haste, without proper homework. The Mujahidin lacked second and third tier leadership which could keep them organized in the absence of Sayyid Ahmad and Shah Ismail.⁹⁰

The defeat of the Mujahidin was a great success for the Sikhs on the Frontier front. The event was celebrated with great pomp. Sohan Lal has written that Maharaja Ranjit Singh ordered the illumination of the whole city of Lahore and the firing of guns upon receiving the victory news.⁹¹ Another contemporary source has recorded that the event was not only celebrated by illuminating Lahore and other cities but a huge amount was distributed among the poor people of the Sikh domain.⁹² The defeat at the battle of Shaidu dispersed the large number that was gathered against the Sikhs in the Frontier. This proved the last time that such a large number of Muslims mobilized against the Sikhs.⁹³

Strangely, most of the narrators have not mentioned exact date of the battle. M. A. Bari said that the battle was fought in March 1827.⁹⁴ *Waqai* has not recorded any date but Mihr has written that the Mujahidin left Hund for Nowshera in March. And on the authority of *Umdat-ul-Tawarikh*, the date of the battle of Shaidu is given 14 *Phagan*.⁹⁵ The present study accepts Mihr assertion and concludes that the battle of Shaidu was fought on 25 February 1827. The date 14 *Phagan* corresponds to 25 February; the *bai'at* was taken on 11 January and then the Mujahidin would have taken a month or more for preparation. Moreover, the *Waqai Sayyid Ahmad Shahid* has narrated that the defeat was followed by a search for shelter in a season of severe cold and rain.⁹⁶ The usual heavy rain falls in February up to recent times. Moreover, Sayyid Ahmad started his preaching tour in April,⁹⁷ which corresponds to Ramadhan 1242 A.H., after a stay of about one month in Chinglai. This suggests that he arrived there in the first week of March.⁹⁸

Conclusion

The *Waqai Sayyid Ahmad Shahid* and *Sayyid Ahmad Shahid* both are very important sources of the Sayyid Ahmad movement. The former, written by the immediate followers of Sayyid Ahmad is more detailed and usually with no interpretation. The immediate successors of Sayyid Ahmad were not professional writers and they merely narrated whatever they observed. However, several flaws are observed in their style. Sayyid Ahmad and his close associates were practical people, more concerned with active steps for the cause of *jihad* according to their

understanding of Islam. The narrators of the *Waqai* were more inclined to the rituals of Sufism and have narrated plenty supernatural acts of Sayyid Ahmad.

Mihr's *Sayyid Ahmad Shahid* is without doubt a very informative work. The author had taken several years of his life to write the book. He has extensively toured the places of the Mujahidin's abode in the Frontier. Mihr was ideologically inspired and prolific writer. He has extensively interpreted the events and episodes of the Jihad Movement and has tried to provide some sort of justification to the errors and blunders of the Mujahidin. This is the typical South Asian Muslims' way of converting respect in belief. Despite Sayyid Ahmad's efforts for the Muslim political dominance, he cannot be considered faultless. He was either unable to understand the tribal mindset or simply did not consider it by selecting the North-West Frontier as the battleground for his Jihad programme. Instead of reforming the Pukthun society, he shortly after his arrival attached the Sikhs to attract the local population for his support. Taking the mismanagement of the Pukthun a justification for the declaration of *imarat* reveals a serious problem of Sayyid Ahmad religious understanding. The classical literature clearly shows that the establishment of *imarat* is the foremost duty of the Muslims. Mihr has discussed the issue of *imarat* at length but has avoided commenting on Sayyid Ahmad lack of knowledge on this issue. It is needed to discuss the battle of Shaidu more academically instead of blaming Barakzai brothers for the defeat. The result might not be much different even if the Barakzai brothers had not deserted the Mujahidin. The Mujahidin lacked proper planning, resources and homework. They did not have anyone to shoulder the responsibility of leading the body of Mujahidin in the absence of Sayyid Ahmad and Shah Ismail. Instead of preparing the ground, they took the tribesmen for granted and launched the Jihad programme on their strength without studying their psychology. It is pertinent to note the though much has been written on the Jihad Movement and Sayyid Ahmad from different perspectives, rarely the content and situational analysis is undertaken by historians. The need of the time is to understand the phenomena from the immediate narratives of locality where the *jihad* programme was launched. The entire programme, planning, resources and above all strategy of the Jihad movement needs to be study from academic point of view to clear the myths, associated with the Jihad Movement and other such movements.

Notes and References

- ¹ For the latest work on the Jihad Movement see Altaf Qadir, *Sayyid Ahmad Barailvi: His Movement and Legacy from the Pukhtun Perspective* (Delhi: Sage Publications, 2015). Henceforth Qadir, *Sayyid Ahmad Barailvi*.
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- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 266.
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- ⁶⁰ The pot, made of skin, used for carrying water. It also used for crossing river when it is filled with air.
- ⁶¹ Mihr, *Sayyid Ahmad*, pp. 347-50.
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- ⁷¹ Thanasari, *Maktubat*. p. 62.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 58-120.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 119. Sayyid Ahmad did not consider the Ottoman Caliphate a spiritual entity. Though he never declared it openly, the content of his letters testify to this as he invited the general public and Muslim princes of the different regions to submit to his authority and thus avoid the sin of absence of an *imam* or *caliph*. Thanasari, *Maktubat*. p. 119.
- ⁷⁴ A British colonial source has also stated that Sayyid Ahmad assumed political authority in January 1827. Bellew, *A General Report*. p. 86.
- ⁷⁵ Masson, Charles. 1974. *Narrative of Various Journeys in Balochistan, Afghanistan and the Panjab*, vol. III. Karachi: Oxford University Press. pp. 75-76. Henceforth Masson, *Narrative of Journeys* vol. III.
- ⁷⁶ Shaidu has been destroyed several times due to floods in the Kabul river and the present Shaidu village is not the one where the battle was fought. In personal interviews with locals for this study, they thought that the battle was fought where the old graveyard of the present-day Shaidu is located. The remains of the old Shaidu are visible on the southern bank of the present-day course of the river.
- ⁷⁷ Khan, *Waqai Sayyid Ahmad*. pp. 1127-31.
- ⁷⁸ Mihr, *Sayyid Ahmad*, pp. 360-77.
- ⁷⁹ Latif has narrated that Yar Muhammad Khan tried to remove Sayyid Ahmad by poison in 1829. Latif, *History of the Panjab*. p. 441. Latif has committed many mistakes in narrating different events. All local sources are silent over the allegation of poison, though they have condemned Yar Muhammad Khan for his desertion in the battle of Shaidu. All non-local sources have narrated the story of poison on the authority of the *Waqai Sayyid Ahmad*. Sayyid Ahmad himself said in a letter that during the diagnosing of his sickness he was told that he might have been poisoned.
- ⁸⁰ Mihr, *Sayyid Ahmad*. pp. 373-74; Khan, *Waqai Sayyid Ahmad*. pp. 1126-27.

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- ⁸⁵ Ahmad, *The Wahabi Movement*. p. 49; Lal, *Tarikh-e-Punjab*. pp. 332-33; Ikram, *Mauj-e-Kausar*. p. 26; Hardy has also stated that the defeat of the Mujahidin was due to the betrayal of Yar Muhammad Khan, the Peshawar *sardar*. Hardy, Peter. 1972. *The Muslims of British India*. London: Cambridge University Press. p. 52. Henceforth Hardy, *The Muslims of India*.
- ⁸⁶ Mihr, *Sayyid Ahmad Shahid*. p. 375.
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- ⁸⁸ Dehlavi, *Hayat-e-Tayyaba*. p. 247.
- ⁸⁹ They were demoralized to the extent that even during the Sikh's forced march to Afghanistan in 1839, they did not face them and let the force advance towards Kabul. The Sikh force returned via Wakhan.
- ⁹⁰ This issue has been discussed in details in Qadir, *Sayyid Ahmad Barailvi*.
- ⁹¹ Suri, Lala Sohan Lal. 1961. *Umdat-ul-Tawarikh Daftar II*. Delhi: S. Chand and Co. p. 340.
- ⁹² Diwan Amar Nath, *Zafar Nama-e-Ranjit Singh*. p. 181 as quoted in Nadvi, *Sirat-e-Sayyid Ahmad*, vol. II, p. 12. Sayyid Muhammad Latif has narrated a slightly different version. As mentioned, his narration is inaccurate in many places related to Sayyid Ahmad and his Mujahidin movement, committing serious blunders in recording dates, names and events. For details, see Latif, *History of the Panjab*. pp. 437-43.
- ⁹³ Nadvi, *Sirat-e-Sayyid Ahmad*, vol. II. p. 12.
- ⁹⁴ M. A. Bari, "A Nineteenth-Century Muslim Reform Movement" in George Makdisi (ed.), *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of Hamilton A.R. Gibb* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), p. 97. Henceforth Bari, "A Nineteenth-Century Muslim Reform Movement". It seems that Peter Hardy's narration is based on M. A. Bari's source. Like the rest of the narration he has also stated that the battle of Shaidu was fought in March 1827. Hardy, *The Muslims of India*, p. 52.
- ⁹⁵ Mihr, *Sayyid Ahmad Shahid*. p. 372.
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- ⁹⁷ Mihr, *Sayyid Ahmad Shahid*. p. 392.
- ⁹⁸ Sayyid Ahmad's first *Eid-ul-Fitr* after migration was celebrated between Amar Kot (some people call it Umar Kot) and Pali in Sindh, while the second and first after arrival in North-West Frontier was celebrated on 27 April 1827 (1 Shawal 1242), confirming that the Battle of Shaidu was fought on 25 February 1827.