

An Analysis Of The Effects And Implications Of Syed Aḥmad Shahīd's Movement Of Jihād: A Continuous Struggle In Its Different Forms

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Abstract

In the first half of the nineteenth century, in the British India Syed Aḥmad Shahīd's movement of Jihād was initiated to revive the political dominance of Islam. His movement was an amalgamation of Sufism and Sharī'ah to revive the spirit of Jihād. Despite its failure, this movement remained alive in different forms in different parts of the subcontinent. A portion of its affiliates turned towards Madrassah religious education and came back into action only when the democratic political platform was set by the British government. At this point, the movement split into two main groups: the Jamī'at 'Ulamā'-e-Hind sided with the Indian National Congress, while the Jamī'at 'Ulamā'-e-Islam joined the All India Muslim League. JUH demanded freedom from the British rule and favoured multiethnic common nationalism and secularism to coexist with the majority Hindu population by sharing power with them; while the JUI favoured the demand of a separate Muslim land, Pakistan, for the Muslims majority areas of the subcontinent to establish political Islam, a close replica of the state of Madīna, this was an outlook closer to Syed Aḥmad Shahīd's ideology.

In this research paper the author presents a critical analysis of the armed struggle of Syed Aḥmad and his ideology

Keywords: Syed Aḥmad Shahīd; Khilāfah; Private Jihād; Dār al-Ḥarb; Imāmat

1. Introduction

The armed campaign of Syed Aḥmad Shahīd Brailvī (1786-1831) was a comprehensive campaign of Sufism and Islamism i.e., revival of Islamic Khilāfah or Kingdom of God in the face of the diminishing political power of Muslims in the subcontinent. This set a precedent for the Islamists to establish an Islamic state through private Jihād. After the writings of Syed Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Nadawī, Ghuālm Rasūl Mahar, ‘Alī Ṭantāwī and some others this campaign has been afresh to catch the attention of Islamists across the world. It left its legacy in the form of Madāris in the subcontinent which cherish its ideology in the one way or the other.

In this paper, while reviewing the brief history of the armed struggle of Syed Aḥmad in different forms, we will study its effects and implications and academically appraise its ideology, strategy and aims of this campaign, which are still alive and active.

2. Socio-Political Scenario of the First Half of the 19th Century:

The sociopolitical scenario of the Indian subcontinent in the first half of the nineteenth century was described by ‘Abād Shāhpūrī, the biographer of Syed Aḥmad Shahīd, as:

Mughal rule in India had almost ceased to exist and political scene was dominated by British Empire, represented by East India Company,

which controlled most of northern India, the Marhattas in southern and central India, Sikhs in north-west and hundreds of powerless rulers of princely states”. (Shāhpūrī, 1982, p. 17)

About the Sikh rule of Punjab, the Indian historian K.K. Khullar writes:

Present Punjab, Kashmir and Khyber Pakhtūkhwa of Pakistan were being ruled by Maharaja Ranjīt Singh, who was considered a tyrannical autocrat. Sikh militia took the control of Lahore on 7 July 1799 and consequently Ranjīt Singh was crowned on 12 April 1801. The Muslims were being persecuted and humiliated and their personal and religious properties were encroached by Maharaja’s army.” (Khullar, 1980, p. 7)

However, the historians like Dr Mubarak Alī are of the opinion that Ranjīt Singh was by and large a ruler with fair dealings with his subjects. Still the prospects of his army mostly comprising of Sikh for being cruel to Muslims in certain cases cannot be ruled out as stated by Dr Mubarak Alī. (Mubarak Ali, *Almiyah Tarikh*, 2012, p. 107)

No any princely states in the Subcontinent run under any Muslim ruler in a position to claim to be Islamic in the sense that it Islam is official religion and Judiciary works under Sharī‘ah law. They were just local independent states frequently at

war with each other irrespective of the religion of their opponent. In this scenario it Syed Aḥmad took upon himself the obligation to struggle to establish an Islamic government on some territory in the subcontinent in line with the epitome of the Khilāfah established right after the Prophet Muḥammad.

3. Brief Biography of Syed Aḥmad

Syed Aḥmad was born on 29 November 1786, at Rā'ai Brailī, Uttar Pradesh, India. He became a disciple of Shāh 'Abdul 'Azīz, and Shāh 'Abdul Qādir the sons of Shāh Walī Uallāh, the renowned Islamic Scholar of 18th century. He joined the army of the Nawāb Amīr Khān, the ruler of Tonk, but when the Nawāb signed a peace pact with the British, he left his army. (Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Nadawī, 2011, vol 1, p. 344)

He started his campaign for Jihād in 1826. He could collect only around 500 people from India to accompany him in the movement of Jihād. He chose Peshawar and the tribal areas as the hub of his military activities. He wrote a warning letter to him, following the example of the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ), offering him to embrace Islam, or to pay Jizyah or get ready to fight. After the expected denial of the offers, he, with his 700 (around 200 from the local people) fighters (Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Nadawī, 2011, vol 1, p. 502), made a

night assault on a troop of 7000 Sikhs at Akorā. He succeeded to sack the Sikh army.

Then he declared himself as Imām (spiritual and political leader of the Muslims). The chiefs of Pakhtūn tribes pledged their allegiance to him. He was able to gather an army of around 100,000 fighters. But the Chief of Durrānī tribe, Yār Muḥammad Khān betrayed him, poisoned him during the Battle of Shaidū, and left the battlefield. Syed Aḥmad survived but lost the battle. Later on, all his power spent in fighting with the local Pashtun chiefs of the tribes, who rebelled against him for fear of Sikhs and for his strict imposition of Sharī'ah.

Syed Aḥmad defeated Sultān Muḥammad Khān and took Peshawar from him, but he gave it back to him. Sultān Muḥammad Khān, with other chiefs of tribes, conspired to assassinate his 150 officials. He decided to migrate to Hazarah and Kashmir. But his local opponents led the Sikh army to the Mujāhidīn at Bālākōt. Sikh army attacked him. Syed Aḥmad along with almost all the leadership lost their lives on 6 May, 1831. (Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Nadawī, 2011, vol 2, pp. 468-475)

Educational and Political Mode of Syed Aḥmad's Movement:

After the failure of 1857, the movement turned into an educational movement at Deoband and

Sahāranpūr, which later gave birth to the political movement of Jamī‘at ‘Ulamā’-e-Hind and Jamī‘at ‘Ulamā’-e-Islam.

In the words of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Nadawī:

“The movement of Nithār ‘Alī, (Titū Miān) in the Eastern Bengal, the organization of Ahl al-Ḥadīth of the subcontinent, the center of Sādiqpūr Patna for Jihād and training, the educational efforts of the Ghāzid family of Amritsar and their preaching, Dār al-‘Ulūm Deoband, and Mazāhir al-‘Ulūm Sahāranpūr, and the Madāris of their kind in hundreds of numbers spread far and wide of the this subcontinent, Madāris of Salafī school of thought, Nadvah al-‘Ulamā’ of Lucknow, all took their inspiration from this source of light.” (al-Nadawī, 1979, p. 43)

After 1885, political activism started in India with the formation of the Indian National Congress. In that new scenario, the ideologues of this movement pragmatically decided to modify their ideology. They transformed the idea of armed resistance into political and democratic struggle and the ideology of supremacy of Islam over other religions into the equality of the religions under secularism. This modification in their stance seems to be taken from the teachings of Shāh Walī Ullāh, who gave concession to the Muslims to make peace with the

non-Muslims if they are weak, till they attain enough power to dominate the non-Muslims. (Walī Ullāh, 2005, vol 2, p. 271). Anyhow, they behaved according to the socio-political scenario at hand. They hailed the formation of the congress. Asghar ‘Alī writes:

“founder of Darul Ulum Deoband, Maulana Qasim Ahmed Nanotvi, a prominent alim himself, issued a fatwa urging Muslims to join Indian National congress and throw the British out of the country. He not only issued a fatwa but also collected hundred such fatwas and published them in the form of a book and named it Nusrat al-Ahrar i.e. for the help of freedom fighters. These ‘Ulamā’ were mass leaders and were determined to throw out foreign rulers. (Asghar ‘Alī, 2010)

They formed a political party, Jamī‘at ‘Ulamā’-e-Hind, in 1919 and favoured the Congress for its struggle for freedom from the British and for the cause of common nationalism. On the other hand, a faction of JUH parted with them in 1945, for they were not ready to give up the ideal of an Islamic state. They adopted the title Jamī‘at ‘Ulamā’-e-Islam. They sided with the All India Muslim League, which was struggling for a separate homeland for the Muslims of the North Western and Eastern zones of the subcontinent, where the Muslims were in majority. They seemed to them closer in their

approach to the actual aim and ideology of Syed Aḥmad and Shāh Walī Ullāh. However, they changed the strategy of armed struggle to political struggle.

This dream of theirs to establish an ideal Islamic State proved to be a delusion after the creation of Pakistan. All they could achieve was the Objective Resolution (1951) as an integral part of the constitution to stop the aspirations of the secular lobby in Pakistan, some Islamic articles in the constitution of 1973 and ordinances like Ḥudūd Ordinance and the Blasphemy Law.

In 1951, all the representative scholars and leaders of almost all the religious sects of Pakistan gathered to unanimously declare a 22 point agenda for the imposition Islamic law in the country. The Islamic Institutions like the Federal Shari‘ah Court and the Islamic Research Institute were established. The educational, social and political struggle of Jamā‘at-e-Islāmī and the propagation for Islamic Khilāfah by Tanzīm-e-Islāmī are the episodes of the same story.

Back to Arms

This yearning and efforts for the imposition of Shari‘ah gradually turned into mass protest and then to armed struggle. Tehrik-e-Nizām-e-Muṣṭafā 1977, and the more aggressive one, the movement of Nifādh-e-Shari‘at (founded in 1992) in Dīr and Sawat by Sufī Muḥammad

were launched to pursue the same goal. But all these movements and campaigns failed. Frustrated with this situation, the ‘Ulamā’ and the students of the Madāris, which own the legacy of Syed Aḥmad, and who were military trained by the Pakistani army to counter the Russian invasion on Afghanistan during late 20th century, resorted to more aggressive measures. They appeared on the scene with the title of the Tehrik-e-Tālibān Pakistan (TTP). The momentary success of the Tālibān of Afghanistan by founding the Islamic Khilāfah in Afghanistan proved a great impetus to them to practice the same in Pakistan.

Tālibān do not believe in the peaceful, political or democratic struggle to achieve this goal of Khilāfah. They believe in using force to establish Islamic Shari‘ah. They believe that if other Muslims or the Muslim government impede their way to Khilāfah, they should fight against them, too. (Ibrahim, 2013)

4. Sources of Syed Aḥmad’s Inspiration

Syed Aḥmad was a disciple of Shāh Walī Ullāh’s family. It can rightly be assumed that he must have been influenced by the ideology of Jihād and Imamāt as present by Shāh Walī Ullāh and his son Shāh ‘Abdul ‘Azīz. The concept of establishment of an Islamic government or to make Islam political supreme in a land is a legacy of our conventional fiqh. Shāh Walī

Ullāh just another representative of the same. Since he is the nearest to Syed Aḥmad, it would suffice to quote him to know what was the idea behind the campaign of armed struggle of Syed Aḥmad.

Regarding non-Muslim Shāh Walī Ullā tells the Imām (the religio-political leader of the Muslims) of Muslims:

فَلَيْسَتْ الرَّحْمَةُ فِي حَقِّ أَوْلِيكَ أَنْ يَقْتَصِرَ عَلَى إِيْتَابِ الْحُجَّةِ عَلَيْهِمْ، بَلِ الرَّحْمَةُ فِي حَقِّهِمْ أَنْ يَقْهَرُوا؛ لِيَدْخُلَ الْإِيمَانُ عَلَيْهِمْ عَلَى رَغْمِ أَنْفِهِمْ بِمَثْرَلَةِ إِبْجَادِ الدَّوَاءِ الْمَرِّ، وَلَا قَهْرٍ إِلَّا بِقَتْلِ مَنْ لَهُ مِنْهُمْ بِكِنَايَةِ شَدِيدَةٍ وَتَمْنَعِ قَوِيٍّ، أَوْ تَفْرِيقِ مَنَعَتِهِمْ وَسَلْبِ أَمْوَالِهِمْ حَتَّى يَصِيرُوا لَا يَقْدِرُونَ عَلَى شَيْءٍ، فَعِنْدَ ذَلِكَ يَدْخُلُ أَتْبَاعُهُمْ وَذُرَارِيَهُمْ فِي الْإِيمَانِ بِرَغْبَةٍ وَطَوْعٍ.
(Walī Ullāh, 2005, vol 2 p. 263)

The mercy in their case is not just to communicate truth to them conclusively, but for the sake of mercy, they must be dominated?, so that the faith may enter into them regardless of their wish and will, just like a bitter medicine, and there is no oppression without severely killing those who are hardliners and powerful, they must be dispersed and their property confiscated, so that their power be broken and they become helpless. At this point their followers and children will willingly enter into the fold of Islam.

Though, most of the Muslim scholars do not agree with Shāh on this particular assertion of his, yet for his

reverence in the Muslim circles, this verdict can serve an argument or excuse for his followers to adopt his idea.

- The aim of Jihād according to Shāh is:

اعْلَمْ أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ بَعَثَ بِالْخِلاَفَةِ الْعَامَّةِ، وَغَلَبَةَ دِينِهِ عَلَى سَائِرِ الْأَدْيَانِ لَا يَتَحَقَّقُ إِلَّا بِالْجِهَادِ وَإِعْدَادِ آلَاتِهِ، فَإِذَا تَرَكُوا الْجِهَادَ، وَاتَّبَعُوا أَذْنَابَ الْبُفْرِ أَخَاطَ بِهِمُ الذَّلُّ؛ وَغَلَبَ عَلَيْهِمْ أَهْلُ سَائِرِ الْأَدْيَانِ. (Walī Ullāh, 2005, p. 268)

You should know that the Prophet was sent with a general Khilāfah to make his religion supreme over all the other religions and this cannot be done except through Jihād and the preparation of the weaponry required for it. And when the Muslims will forsake Jihād and turn towards tending their cattle, humiliation will surround them and other religions will dominate them.

وَيُقَاتِلُ أَهْلَ الْكُتَابِ وَالْمَجُوسِ حَتَّى يَسْلَمُوا أَوْ يُعْطُوا الْجِزْيَةَ عَنْ يَدٍ وَهُمْ صَاغِرُونَ (Walī Ullāh, 2005, p. 271)

The Imām (the leader of the Muslims) should fight the people of the Book and Magians, until they surrender and pay al-Jizyah with humiliation.

It is clear that Shāh Walī Ullāh believed in the Islamic jurisprudential stance of كسر شوكة الكفر, which means to subdue the rule of non-Muslims and subjugate them, because non-Muslims have no right to rule any part of the

world because they deny believing in the religion of Islam.

- To Shāh, It is incumbent on Imām to make the Muslims politically powerful and to weaken the Kuffār:

وَيَجِبُ عَلَى الْإِمَامِ أَنْ يَنْظُرَ فِي أَسْبَابِ
ظُهُورِ شَوْكَةِ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَقَطْعِ أَيْدِي
الْكُفَّارِ عَنْهُمْ، وَيَجْتَهِدُ، وَيَتَأَمَّلُ فِي ذَلِكَ
فِيَفْعَلُ مَا أَدَّى إِلَيْهِ اجْتِهَادَهُ (Walī
Ullāh, 2005, p. 270)

It is incumbent on the Imām to look for the things necessary show off the glory of the Muslims, and he should prevent the hands of the kuffār from them, and he should work hard for that and ponder upon it, then, he should act upon the conclusions of his Ijtihād.

- According to Shāh, to take military help from the non-Muslims is not preferable:

فَلَا يَقْبَلُ... مُشْرِكًا لِقَوْلِهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ
وَسَلَّمَ: " إِنَّا لَا نَسْتَعِينُ بِمُشْرِكٍ إِلَّا عِنْدَ ضَرُورَةٍ
وَوَثُوقٍ بِهِ (Walī Ullāh, 2005, p. 270)

And he (Imām) should not accept... help of polytheists except it is necessary and they are trustworthy.

- Peace with non-Muslims can only be made when it is unavoidable for the Muslims due to their weakness or some strategic need, otherwise the only option is to fight them, subdue and subjugate them.

وَيُصَالِحُهُمْ بِمَالٍ وَيُغَيِّرُ مَالَ فَإِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ رُبَّمَا
يَضْعَفُونَ عَنْ مَقَاتِلَةِ الْكُفَّارِ فَيَحْتَاجُونَ إِلَى الصُّلْحِ
وَرُبَّمَا يَحْتَاجُونَ إِلَى الْمَالِ يَتَّقُونَ بِهِ، أَوْ إِلَى أَنْ
يَأْمَنُوا مِنْ شَرِّ قَوْمٍ فَيُجَاهِدُوا آخَرِينَ (Walī
Ullāh, 2005, p. 271)

Imām can make peace with them with money or without money, it is because sometimes Muslims do not find enough power to fight the kuffār, so they need peace, and sometimes they need money to strengthen themselves or they need to defend themselves from evil of a people to fight another.

Shāh's thoughts on political Islam are summarized by Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, the renowned scholar and critic of Shāh Walī Ullāh:

Explaining this distinctive ideological feature of the Islamic state, Shāh Walī Allāh points out that the "supremacy of the Religion of Islam over all other religions was inconceivable without contemplating among the Muslims a khalīfah, who can put those who might transgress the ideological frontiers, and commit acts which have been prohibited by their Religion or omit their obligations under it, into open disrepute". Further, he should be able to subdue the followers of all other religions and receive Jizyah from them, while they submit to the supremacy of the Sharī'ah. For, in his view, without establishing the supremacy of Islam over other religions and creeds, no preference of the Muslim community over non-

Muslims could be visibly demonstrated. (al-Ghazālī, 2001)

Syed Aḥmad tried to translate these ideas into reality. Following the tradition of the Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad, he wrote letter to Ranjīts Singh before he attached his forces on the border, inviting him to islam, if declined, then to pay Jizya, if declined then to fight. He implemented strict Shari‘ah in the territories he could lay his hand on. If prevailed his rule, he would levy Jizya on the non-Muslims after subduing him with might and of course after great bloodshed.

5. Dār al-Ḥarb

One step further, Shāh ‘Abdul ‘Azīz declared India Dār al-Ḥarb, which meant that since most parts of the subcontinent were occupied by the non-Muslim forces, so, India had become a non-Islamic land or Dār al-Ḥarb. While mentioning the reason to declare India Dār al-Ḥarb, Shāh ‘Abdul ‘Azīz states, “The writ and decree of Imām al-Muslimīn is not established, on the contrary the injunctions of powerful Christians are followed without any impediments.” (Jones, 1994)

One can quite logically construe that the Fatwas, though not cited by Syed Ahamd in his writings or sermons, must have enhanced his already very ambitious venture to establish an

Islamic government in the subcontinent.

6. Syed Aḥmad’s Thoughts on Jihād and Political Islam:

Now we see reflections of both Shahs’ thoughts in his own line of thinking. In his letter to Shāh Sulaimān, Syed Aḥmad wrote:

- All this warfare aims at to exalt the word of Allāh, to revive the Sunnah of the Prophet (ﷺ) and to release the land of the Muslims from the occupation of the kuffār and polytheists, there is no other aim.” (Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Nadawī, 2011, vol 2, p. 390)
- In another letter, he emphasized the importance of the state in Islam, he wrote:

“The religions and government are twins”... A religion is established through the power of a State. (Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Nadawī, 2011, vol 2, p. 391)

He aimed at purifying India from polytheism after subduing the Sikhs rule of Punjab: After that, I will turn towards India with my Mujāhidīn so that I may purify it from kufr and polytheism. (Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Nadawī, 2011, vol 2, p. 412)

- Furthermore, he wished to bring the whole world under the Islamic rule (Khilāfah):

I only wish that the rule of Allāh, i.e., Islamic Sharī‘ah, is imposed on the majority of the humanity, rather on the majority of the countries of the world. (Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Nadawī, 2011, vol 2, p. 410)

- For the importance of Imāmat (religio-political leadership of the Muslims) he wrote in one of his letters:

“To eradicate kufr and Fasād is obligatory, and for it, the appointment of Imām is obligatory too.” (Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Nadawī, 2011, vol 2, p. 532)

Here reveals his inspiration which apparently comes from Shāh Walī Allāh and his son A’bd al ‘Aziz.

7. Critique on Syed Aḥmad Shahīd’s Ideology and Strategy

The focal point of Syed Aḥmad’s campaign was the establishment of a government in the name of Islam to run Sharī‘ah supreme, in the subcontinent by subduing and subjugating the non-Muslims of India and then to spread Muslim rule further, if possible, to all over the world. Since, there was no Muslim

government there to carry out Jihād for the said purpose; therefore, he took it as mandatory upon himself to pursue it through private Jihād. Now, an Imām was required and this status he gave to himself by himself. To curb the alleged atrocities and persecution of the ruler of Punjab was a secondary, though an immediate target of his larger addenda.

7.1. Supremacy of Political Power of Islam over other Religions

The idea of establishing supremacy of the political power of Islam is a dominant jurisprudential stance of our Fiqh. Shāh Walī Ullāh just favoured it and Syed Aḥmad strived to translate it into a reality. We need to revisit this jurisprudential doctrine of establishment of supremacy of Islam over other religions, to see if it is really a demand of Allāh and his Prophet (ﷺ).

According to the popular stance of the classical Jurists, to subjugate the polytheists and the people of book to levy Jizya tax on them is one of the primary functions of Islamic government. It is necessary to break the power of kuffār (non-Muslims).⁴

The Supportive arguments come from traditions of the prophet Muḥammad like the one we quote here:

لَا يَبْقَى عَلَى وَجْهِ الْأَرْضِ بَيْتٌ مَدْرٍ،
وَلَا وَبِرٍ إِلَّا أَنْخَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْإِسْلَامَ

⁴ (see for example, Ibn al-Hajr Fateh al-Bari, 6/259, Ibn Qudama, al-Mughni, 9/266).

بِعِزِّ عَزِيزٍ وَبِدَلِّ ذَلِيلٍ، إِمَّا يُعِزُّهُمْ
وَيَهْدِيهِمْ إِلَى الْإِسْلَامِ، وَإِمَّا يُذِلُّهُمْ
فَيُؤَدُّوا الْجَزِيَّةَ⁵

There will be no house of city or village left on the face of the earth but Islam will enter into it. It will exalt the one who accept it and humiliate the ones who reject it and then will pay Jizya to Muslims.

However, some modern scholars opine that all the Quranic injunctions and Aḥādīth related to warfare and the military expeditions of the Prophet (ﷺ) and his companions were defensive and preemptive to defend themselves from their hostile neighboring tribes and powers. So Islamic government is not required to wage a war on other lands to subjugate them, nor was it done before for the sole purpose of subjugating them.⁶

But this stance does not stand some strong objections, for example, in Sūrah Tawbah, Allāh declares that the polytheists must be killed after the sacred months are over if they do not embrace Islam and establish prayer and pay Zakah. It was of course not defensive. If people of book were allowed to live in Arabia without

being converted to Islam, why were the polytheist not allowed with the same.

فَإِذَا انْسَلَخَ الْأَشْهُرُ الْحُرْمُ فَاقْتُلُوا
الْمُشْرِكِينَ حَيْثُ وَجَدْتُمُوهُمْ وَخَذُوا
وَأَحْصَرُواهُمْ وَأَقْعُدُوا لَهُمْ كُلَّ
مَرْصِدٍ فَإِن تَابُوا وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوُا
الرَّكَاةَ فَخَلُّوا سَبِيلَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ
رَّحِيمٌ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ (Quran,
9:4-5)

And when the sacred months have passed, then kill the polytheists wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them and sit in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give Zakah, let them [go] on their way. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.

The following Ḥadīth also nullifies defense theory.

أُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَقَاتِلَ النَّاسَ حَتَّى
يَشْهَدُوا أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَأَنْ
مُحَمَّدًا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَيُقِيمُوا
الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُوا الرَّكَاةَ فَإِذَا
فَعَلُوا ذَلِكَ عَصَمُوا مِنِّي
دِمَاءَهُمْ وَأَمْوَالَهُمْ إِلَّا بِحَقِّ

⁵ (al Mujam al Tibrani, 20/254)

⁶ For example, the renowned scholar, Wahabah Zuhaylī maintains this stance in his book al-āthār al-Harb fi al-Fiqh al-Islāmī, Dar al-Fikr Damascus, 1998, at 34 and 35 writes:

و الحقيقة ان الجهاد هو بذل الجهد والكفاح بالوسائل
اسلمية اولاً، ثم عند اقتضاء الامر للمحافظة على
الدعاة و تحصيل البلاد ليجا الى القتال لتحقيق السعادة
الشاملة للبشرية فى دنياها و آخرها كما ارتضاها الاله
الحكيم- ولا يصح بين مفهوم الجهاد بهذا المعنى و بين
الاعتباره وسيلة الاكراه الناس على الاسلام و فرض
الدين على النفوس-

الْإِسْلَامَ وَحَسَابُهُمْ عَلَى اللَّهِ
(al-Bukhārī, Ḥadīth
No. 25)

I have been ordained to keep fighting with the people until they bear this witness that there is no god but Allāh and that Muḥammad (ﷺ) is the prophet of Allāh and that they establish prayer, and pay Zakāh. When they will do all this, they will save their lives and property from me, except for the right of Islam and their accountability is the matter with Allāh.

To us, both the concepts: to end the rule of Kufr and the defense theory, are the results of misunderstanding of exclusive or specific divine laws pertaining to the promised rule of the progeny of Abraham and to Rasūl (A special kind of prophet), which was mistaken as general and hence gave forth to a world of confusion. These laws have been defined and elaborated by the renowned scholar Javed Aḥmad Ghamidī in his work Meezan and Burhan. We present a gist of in support of our argument.

7.2. To Establish Islamic System of Governance is not Obligatory

To establish Islamic system of governance (or Khilāfah) is not a religious obligation for which the

Muslims are obliged to strive. There is not a single directive of the Qur'ān, which explicitly makes it mandatory on the Muslims. The best that has been said in favour of this idea is that the implementation of a substantial portion of Sharī'ah depends upon the state power or a great many injunctions of Sharī'ah will stay suspended in the absence of an Islamic government. Well-being and defense of the Muslims community depends upon it, therefore, Muslims at the helm of a country is obligatory for other reasons (Wājib li Ghayrihī), if not in itself (Wājib li Nafsihī).

These arguments stand on a wrong premise. If a poor Muslim community is unable to fulfill monetary obligations of Sharī'ah, i.e., to pay Zakah, offer animal sacrifice, to go for Ḥajj, etc., it is not mandatory on a poor man to earn enough money to fulfill these religious duties. It is in fact the other way around, the monetary Sharī'ah becomes obligatory only when a Muslim attains a certain status of wealth. The same rule applies to all other directives of Sharī'ah. When circumstances lead a Muslim community to power in a peaceful manner whatever it is, the political Sharī'ah of Islam becomes binding on the rulers to apply and implement on the Muslims. It is just like all other injunctions of Sharī'ah, which become obligatory with their conditions are fulfilled.

7.3. Argument from Biography of Prophet Muḥammad

Another argument is derived from the history of the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ). Since the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) established a state and handed over to his successors, therefore it is Sunnah of the Prophet and to follow his Sunnah is obligatory on his followers. The triumph of the prophet on his opponent was a specific divine law, as alluded to above. According to this law, Rasūl is the special prophet to show his people a tangible sign of his truth from Allāh:

كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَأَعْلَيْنَ أَنَا
وَرُسُلِي إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَوِيٌّ
عَزِيزٌ (Quran, 58:21)

Allāh has written, "I will surely overcome, I and My messengers." Indeed, Allāh is Powerful and Exalted in Might.

His deniers are bound to fail, be humiliated and annihilated:

فَكُلًّا أَخَذْنَا بِذَنبِهِ فَمِنْهُمْ مَن أَرْسَلْنَا
عَلَيْهِ حَاصِبًا وَمِنْهُمْ مَن أَخَذَتْهُ
الصَّيْحَةُ وَمِنْهُمْ مَن خَسَفْنَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ
وَمِنْهُمْ مَن أَعْرَفْنَا وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ
لِيُظْلِمَهُمْ وَلَكِن كَانُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ
يَظْلِمُونَ (Quran, 29:40)

So each We seized for his sin; and among them were those upon whom We sent a storm of stones, and among them were those who were seized by the blast [from the sky], and

among them were those whom We caused the earth to swallow, and among them were those whom We drowned. And Allāh would not have wronged them, but it was they who were wronging themselves.

But in case of the prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) this divine scourge of annihilation came through the swords of the Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ):

قَاتِلُوهُمْ يُعَذِّبُهُمُ اللَّهُ بِأَيْدِيكُمْ وَيُخِزُّهُمْ
وَيَنْصُرْكُمْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَيَسْفِ صُدُورَ قَوْمِ
مُؤْمِنِينَ (Quran, 9:14)

Fight them; Allāh will punish them by your hands and will disgrace them and give you victory over them and satisfy the breasts of a believing people

This was actually a divine plan, executed through the human beings. It should be viewed as such and cannot be initiated by the human beings on their own discretion. It was not a part of the al-Sharī‘ah; this was a special law of war in the Arabian Peninsula against the direct opponents of the Prophet (ﷺ). The above-mentioned Ḥadīth, “I have been ordained to keep fighting with the people...” should be viewed in the perspective of the following verse, under this exclusive divine law:

فَإِذَا انْسَلَخَ الْأَشْهُرُ الْحُرْمُ فَاقْتُلُوا
 الْمُشْرِكِينَ حَيْثُ وَجَدْتُمُوهُمْ وَخُذُوهُمْ
 وَأَحْصِرُواهُمْ وَأَقْعُدُوا لَهُمْ كُلَّ
 مَرْصِدٍ فَإِن تَابُوا وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ
 وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ فَخَلُّوا سَبِيلَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ
 غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ (Quran, 9:5)

And when the sacred months have passed, then kill the polytheists wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them and sit in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give Zakāh, let them [go] on their way. Indeed, Allāh is Forgiving and Merciful.

Only, the people of the Book, the Jews and the Christians of the time of the Prophet Muḥammad in Arabia (ﷺ) were spared from that annihilation, as a special case. They were basically monotheists and the punishment of annihilation was for polytheists. For the People of Book, their punishment was humiliation:

وَلَوْ لَا أَن كَتَبَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْجَلَاءَ
 لَعَذَّبْتَهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَلَهُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ
 عَذَابٌ النَّارِ (Quran, 59:3)

If Allah had not decreed banishment for them, He would certainly have chastised them in this world. As for the

Hereafter, the chastisement of the Fire awaits them.

The same punishment inflicted upon them in the form of Jizya by Allah when they denied to accept the prophet Muḥammad and his message:

فَاتِلُوا الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَلَا
 بِالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَلَا يُحَرِّمُونَ مَا حَرَّمَ
 اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَلَا يَدِينُونَ دِينَ الْحَقِّ
 مِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ حَتَّى يُعْطُوا
 الْجِزْيَةَ عَن يَدٍ وَهُمْ صَاغِرُونَ
 (Quran, 9:29)

Fight those who do not believe in Allāh or in the Last Day and who do not consider unlawful what Allāh and His Messenger have made unlawful and who do not adopt the religion of truth from those who were given the Scripture - [fight] until they give the Jizyah willingly while they are humbled.

Therefore, the following verse specifies its scope to Rasūl to defeat his direct opponents and be successful in the face of their opposition and aggression and it is not for ordinary Muslims to claim the same:

هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ
 الْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ
 الْمُشْرِكُونَ (Quran, 9:33)

It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to manifest it over all religion, although they who associate others with Allāh dislike it.

Because the al-Din and al-Mushrikūn are with the definite article “al”, which means specific religions of Arabia and the polytheists of Arabia, so the world Kull (all) in the verse above, will be specified to the religions in Arabia upon which Islam had to prevail. The other verse explains it further:

وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّىٰ لَا تَكُونَ فِئْتَةً وَيُكُونَ الدِّينُ كُلُّهُ لِلَّهِ
(Quran, 8:39)

And fight them until there is no Fitnah and [until] the religion, all of it, is for Allāh.

Now, after, that the exclusive law of the divine war was over with the Rasūl, the Muslims are not supposed to fight non-Muslims on the basis of kufr or their denying to accept Islam. They are not obliged to wage the divine wars against the non-Muslims to subdue or subjugate them to accept Islam or to pay Jizyah. On these grounds Syed Aḥmad's ideas to subdue and subjugate the non-Muslim powers and establish the supremacy of Islam were not only impractical but also not a demand of Islam.

7.4. Divine Promise of Supremacy of the Progeny of Abraham

In Quran, God makes a covenant of leadership with Abraham which was extended to his progeny:

وَإِذِ ابْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ (Quran, 2: 124)

And [mention, O Muḥammad], when Abraham was tried by his Lord with commands and he fulfilled them. [Allah] said, "Indeed, I will make you a leader for the people." [Abraham] said, "And of my descendants?" [Allah] said, "My covenant does not include the wrongdoers."

This promise was first made with the Children of Israel:

يَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ اذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتِيَ الَّتِي أَنْعَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَأَوْفُوا بِعَهْدِي أُوفِ بِعَهْدِكُمْ وَإِيَّايَ فَارْهَبُونِ
(البقرة: 2:40)

O CHILDREN of Israel! Remember those blessings of Mine with which I graced you, and fulfil your promise unto Me, [whereupon] I shall fulfil My promise unto you; and of Me, of Me stand in awe!

It is explicit in the Bible:

“If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations

on earth.” (Bible, Deuteronomy, 28:1) ...“However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you (Bible, Deuteronomy, 28:15) ...The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You will come at them from one direction but flee from them in seven, and you will become a thing of horror to all the kingdoms on earth.” (Bible, Deuteronomy, 28:25)

With the advent of the prophet Muḥammad this promise shifted to the children of Ishmael (Ismā‘īl), the elder son of Abraham.

أَمْ يَحْسُدُونَ النَّاسَ عَلَىٰ مَا آتَاهُمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ فَقَدْ آتَيْنَا آلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَآتَيْنَاهُمْ مُلْكًا عَظِيمًا (Quran, 4:54)

Or do they (the people of the Book, the Children of Israel) envy the people (the children of Ismā‘īl) for what Allāh has given them of His bounty? But we had already given the family of Abraham the Scripture and wisdom and conferred upon them a great kingdom.

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَمَا اسْتَخْلَفْنَا الَّذِينَ مَن قَبْلِهِمْ وَلَيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ الَّذِي ارْتَضَىٰ لَهُمْ وَلَيُبَدِّلَنَّهُم مِّن بَعْدِ خَوْفِهِمْ أَمْنًا يَعْبُدُونَنِي لَا يُشْرِكُونَ بِي شَيْئًا وَمَن

كَفَرَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ (Quran, 24:55)

Allah has promised those who have believed among you and done righteous deeds that He will surely grant them succession [to authority] upon the earth just as He granted it to those before them and that He will surely establish for them [therein] their religion which He has preferred for them and that He will surely substitute for them, after their fear, security, [for] they worship Me, not associating anything with Me. But whoever disbelieves after that - then those are the defiantly disobedient.

The word, منكم specifies the scope of the word to the companies of the prophet. There is no reason to generalize or extend this promise of God to any movement of Muslims to establish the rule of God on the earth.

So, there was no legitimacy in Islam for the venture of Syed Aḥmad.

7.5. Preparation and Precautions before War

Syed Aḥmad embarked upon challenging the mighty military power of Ranjīt Singh with his so very meager number of fighters and far less arsenal. On the contrary, we find in Quran, that the Muslims are directed by Allāh not to go unprepared in war:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ حَرِّضِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَى الْقِتَالِ إِنْ يَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ عَشْرُونَ صَابِرُونَ يَغْلِبُوا مِائَتِينَ وَإِنْ يَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ مِائَةٌ يَغْلِبُوا أَلْفًا مِنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَا يَفْقَهُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ حَقَّقَ اللَّهُ عِنْتَكُمْ وَعَلِمَ أَنَّ فِيكُمْ ضَعْفًا فَإِنْ يَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ مِائَةٌ صَابِرَةٌ يَغْلِبُوا مِائَتَيْنِ وَإِنْ يَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أَلْفٌ يَغْلِبُوا أَلْفَيْنِ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ (Quran, 8:65-66)

O Prophet, urge the believers to battle. If there are among you twenty [who are] steadfast, they will overcome two hundred. And if there are among you one hundred [who are] steadfast, they will overcome a thousand of those who have disbelieved because they are a people who do not understand. Now, Allāh has lightened [the hardship] for you, and He knows that among you is weakness. So if there are from you one hundred [who are] steadfast, they will overcome two hundred. And if there are among you a thousand, they will overcome two thousand by permission of Allāh. And Allāh is with the steadfast.

If the Companions of the Prophet (ﷺ) were given relaxation in terms of manpower due to their said weakness, despite the certified help of the divine

powers at their back, so Syed Aḥmad's endeavour to fight the mighty power of the Sikh regime with a far less number of the Muslims can't be justified. The Qur'ān says:

وَأَعِدُوا لَهُمْ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ وَمِنْ رِبَاطِ الْخَيْلِ تُرْهِبُونَ بِهِ عَدُوَّ اللَّهِ وَعَدُوَّكُمْ وَأَخْرِينَ مِنْ دُونِهِمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَهُمُ اللَّهُ يَعْلَمُهُمْ □ (Quran, 8:60)

And prepare against them whatever you are able of power and of steeds of war by which you may terrify the enemy of Allāh and your enemy and others besides them whom you do not know [but] whom Allāh knows. And whatever you spend in the cause of Allāh will be fully repaid to you, and you will not be wronged.

Syed Aḥmad's haste or his misplaced trust in God and his assistance led him violate the rules set by God for his followers to follow for warfare. The result was the obvious failure.

7.6. Private Jihād

There is no concept of private Jihād in Islam. Tracing the roots of this idea, we find that the adventure of one of the companions of the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ), Abū al-Baṣīr, was the first example of the private Jihād in Islam. He started his private activities outside Madīnah. The Prophet (ﷺ) overtly disapproved of his venture:

«وَيْلٌ أَمِهِ مَسْعَرٌ حَرْبٍ لَوْ كَانَ لَهُ أَحَدٌ» (al-Bukhārī, Ḥadīth 2832)

“Woe to his mother, this man is a provoker of war. If some men join him,

The Prophet (ﷺ) did not join him, nor did he support him.

We find that all the Quranic directives of Jihād were given to the Muslims after their migration to Madīnah and after they had formed a polity, which was a prerequisite to declare Jihād. It is incorrect to take the directives of Jihād out of their context. The prophet and his companions kept forbearing the persecution at Makkah but did not fight back until they attained political rule of Madīnah that they could regularize the military activities. At time when Jihād was prescribed for the Muslims of Madina, the Muslims of Makkah were still not asked to do the same, rather they were asked to be patients and wait for help from Allah. And the Muslims of Madina were obliged to go to help their brothers in Makkah.

Syed Aḥmad did not have a state to declare Jihād. A valid Islamic Jihād needs a unanimous leader and it can only be obtained with a state. Jihād is a delicate and complicated matter. If private Jihād is allowed, any person may raise to arms against any non-Muslim or Muslim state according to his understanding and there will be chaos as it is now in our society. Then there is the question of agreed upon leadership. When more than one group starts private Jihād, the question of

leadership always becomes a matter of conflict and rift between the groups. We have witnessed it in the Afghan war and also observing it in different groups of the TTP. They start fighting with each other, too.

8. Conclusion

Syed Aḥmad was one of the most influential personalities of the Muslim history. He took upon himself a responsibility which was beyond his capacity.

لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا
(Quran, 2:286)

Allah does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity.

To make Muslims politically dominant is not a divine directive. If Muslims come to power only then it is incumbent on the rulers to follow Islamic law in their state and collective affairs.

The concept of private jihad is alien to Quran, based on misinterpretation of some traditions of the prophet.

The triumph of the prophet and his companions against their opponents was a divine scheme, not an injunction of Sharī‘ah.

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