

ROLE OF SUFIS IN THE FORMATION OF PAKISTAN: A STUDY OF PIR MEHER ALI SHAH AND PIR OF MANKI SHARIF

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Abstract:

During the Indian freedom movement, three communities— the Hindus, Muslims and the British Government— were confronted with each other. This ideological as well as realpolitik battle was fought in whole Indian subcontinent. It is ironical that the Muslim community was divided into two schools of thought as far as their response of nationalism was concerned. Some were the proponent of the concept of Indian nationalism and were struggling for India to remain united. While the other strand among the Muslims were the strong supporters of Muslim nationalism and were in the favor of creation of a separate state for the Muslim majority areas culminating in the shape of Pakistan. It was this time when religious and political leadership was struggling for the protection of the rights of Muslim community. These rights were political as well as religious. This article aims at signifying the role of religious leadership especially Sufis or Sajjada Nashins in the freedom movement and the creation of Pakistan. This contribution of Sajjada Nashins was being played at three levels: their personal appeal, their Sufi institutional support and their engagement with the leading Muslim political party i.e. All India Muslim League. This effort has been made to analyze the services of two leading Sufi personalities, Pir Meher Ali Shah and the Pir of Manki Sharif, to highlight their contribution for Muslim community and the creation of Pakistan. The study is exploratory, descriptive and analytical.

Keywords: Freedom movement, Communities, Battle, Indian Nationalism, Religious personalities

Introduction

This article explores the relationship between religion and politics with a particular focus on role of Sufis for the political rights of the minorities like Muslims. The focus is also on the relation of state and Sufis and their relation with the people. Though the Sufis always disliked the direct involvement of religious personalities in politics but inspite of this, they or their shrines emerged as political and religious authority that influenced the disciples or the general masses of the society. Different writers like Richard M. Eaton (The Political and Religious authority of the Shrine of

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Baba Farid), David Gilmartin, werbner, Saghir Ahmad, Ibbetson, Ewing, Muhammad Azam Choudhary, Ghafar have written on Sufism, shrines and their impact on society along with religious practices at Sufi shrines. This article is a political analysis of the religious personalities during freedom movement. Pir Meher Ali Shah's (1856-1937) indirect role in the politics of India and the direct role of Amin-ul-Hassanat, popularly known as Pir of Manki Sharif have been analyzed. Their timeframe is different and they also belong to two different Sufi Orders. The popular tradition of Chishtiya Order warned their disciples against consorting with kings and rulers. They did not have desire of government services or never accepted endowments due to their belief that after Khalifat-i-Rashida the paths of religion and politics had separated. But it is also fact that during the British rule in the subcontinent, the close relationship was developed between the political and religious institutions. Meher Ali shah followed Chishtiya tradition of non-interaction with kings and courts.

(a) Attitude towards British Government

British government tried to establish cordial relations with Meher Ali shah through different incentives like about four hundred squares of land to upgrade the facilities of education at madrassa of Golra Sharif but he refused to accept such kind of endowments and adopted the policy of non-cooperation with the British government. Even the British government also invited him on coronation ceremony which was being celebrated on the occasion of the visit of King George V to India in 1911 but he refused to attend with the justification that it was not suitable for him to attend the darbars of kings and emperors. The policy of non-cooperation with the British government created problems for Pir Meher Ali Shah and the British government adopted the following measures:

1. He was directed by the government to present himself before the Deputy Commissioner of Rawalpindi but he agains refused to go to the court of the Deputy Commissioner
2. Meher Ali shah was brought up the charge that he was the Pir (spiritual leader) of the thieves and robbers living in the different villages
3. It was also alleged that he was providing means of livelihood to dependants of escaped convicts of the area
4. The government decided to deport him from the country on the basis of confidential recommendations and this news was conveyed by a Muslim government servant in the British government
5. He was kept under observation by the Police Intelligence Department.¹

Meher Ali shah did not feel frightened of the existing rulers and believed upon God inspite of the threats from the British government. He even

never visited the residences of the officers and kept himself aloof from the state machinery. Meher Ali Shah was against the British Government in the sub-continent and even he was also apprehensive of English literature which he regarded harmful for religious and national cohesion.

1st World War (1914-18) compelled the British government to recruit the Indians for war and this campaign provided an opportunity to loyalists including aristocrats, Pirs and Sajada Nashines to persuade their followers to enlist themselves in the British Indian Army. Meher Ali Shah was approached by the loyalists of the British government for persuading his followers but he refused with the argument that they should not expect from him and other ulema for their support in recruitment campaign.

(b) Khilafat Movement and Meher Ali shah

The Turkish Khilafat, being the successor of the Orthodox Caliphate of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), was respected by the Muslims of all over the world. The Muslims of India also had great respect for the Caliph and the institution of the Khilafat due to its central authority and power. During the 1st World War, Ottoman Empire also indulged in to the war to fight the allies and allied itself with Germany. At the end of the War, the victorious European powers and their ally USA succeeded in destroying and dismembering the once vast Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire was being considered as the last remaining symbol of Islam's majesty and grandeur. The political and religious leadership of the Muslims pledged to grid up for the defense of the Islamic Caliphate. They launched the Khilafat Movement for the protection of the Ottoman Empire and of the Holy Places.

Meher Ali Shah and some other Ulema adopted a different stance on the issue of Khilafat Movement and did not rank it as an Islamic Khilafat. He was of the opinion that the real Khilafat remained during the period of Khilafat-i-Rashida and after death of Hadrat Hassan (5th Caliph), the monarchy started. He held that in accordance with an Ahadith of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), the righteous Caliphate would remain in existence for only thirty years after passing away the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and thereafter would be changed into a monarchy for which the words "Adudiyat" (Bitterness) and "Jabr" (Coercion) were used in the Ahadith. Due to this Ahadith, Meher Ali Shah passed a fatwa that Khilafat remained only for thirty years and thereafter it changed into monarchy because Yazid Bin Mu'awiyah and Mansur could not be regarded as the vicegerents of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) due to their traits. He was regular follower of the Shariat of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and took every issue political or religious according to the teachings of the Holy Prophet and Islam. In 1919, the Hindus and the Muslims launched non-cooperation movement and the Muslims did some un-Islamic things which

did not fall under the teachings of the Islam like a resolution about the abandoning of cow slaughter. Due to such kind of things, Meher Ali Shah followed the following things

1. He showed his displeasure over the resolution about abandoning the cow slaughter and declared it un-islamic
2. Meher Ali shah declared unlawful for the Muslims to obey the orders of Gandhi and that's why, he ruled out the Gandhi's suggestion of using Khaddar for purpose of dress on common scale
3. He denied the legality and permissibility of the Muslim's cooperation, not only with the Hindus but also with the Christians and Jews
4. He declared Gandhi's non-cooperation movement and boycott of the British goods as nefarious designs to use Muslim cooperation only as means of converting Hindu Congress into a national movement
5. He rejected all the measures during the Khilafat Movement on the basis of Quran and the Sunnah
6. When the ulema proposed Muslims to leave India as they declared it Dar-ul-Harb, Meher Ali shah made it clear that there was no justification in Quran and Sunnah for such kind of migration. At that time, the Muslim population in India was about seven million, if the country was to be declared Dar-ul-Harb, it would be difficult for the Muslims to observe Islamic rituals and ceremonies.²

The political and religious leadership of the Muslims tried to convince Meher Ali Shah but he denied deviating from Islamic way of life and opposed the Khilafat Movement along with all methods adopted by Gandhi and Muslim leadership and declared it un-Islamic.

(c) The Issue of Rowlett Act

After the 1st World War, Rioting was started against the Rowlett Act in India because the Indians used to think that they had been tricked by the British. On 13 April 1919, people decided to stage a demonstration at Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar. General Dyer and his forces surrounded the gathering and ordered firing to disperse the mob. A total of six hundred and fifty rounds were fired and three hundred and seventy nine people were killed and twelve hundred persons were murdered. When the governor of the Punjab, Sir Micheal Francies O' Dwyer was recalled to England, some people of Lahore arranged farewell party. Some Sajjada Nashines of the various shrines participated in this ceremony along with other people and some loyalists proposed to present Micheal Francies O' Dwyer a vote of thanks on behalf of the participants. Meher Ali Shah was also invited in this ceremony but he refused to join it. On the insistence of Malik Umer Hayat Khan Tiwana, he sent his son Ghulam Muhyud Din. On this occasion, the sipasnama was presented and were asked to the

participants to sign on it. The son of Meher Ali Shah signed it on the request of Umer Hayat Tiwana. Maulana Ata Ullah Shah Bukhari, a disciple of Meher Ali Shah, showed reaction on this decision and criticized the Sajjada Nashines of the shrines. Dr Allama Muhammad Iqbal also showed displeasure at the role of the Pirs and Sajjada Nashines of the Punjab. In one of his poem “Punjab Ka Pirzadon Say”, he criticized them due to sipasnama presented to Micheal Francies O’ Dwyer.³

Pir of Manki Sharif

Amin-ul-hassanat, popularly known as the Pir of Manki Sharif belonged to the Dalazek tribe of the Pakhtuns, NWFP⁴. His grandfather was a follower of Qadriah spiritual order⁵ and had taken part in the battle of Ambella against the British. His father Abd-ur-Rauf was also an eminent saint and died in 1934. Amin-ul-Hassanat was born on February 01, 1922 and succeeded his father Abd-ur-Rauf in 1934. In his early life he remained aloof from active politics and attended only religious gatherings organized by his disciples. He was not in favor of Sufi’s involvement in practical politics and at the same time he was anxious about the welfare of the Muslim nation. Practically, he indulged into politics during the days of Quite India movement (1942)⁶. He was of the opinion that the main aim of the Congress in asking the British to leave India without partitioning it between the Hindus and the Muslims was the establishment of Hindu rule over whole of India.⁷

(a) Simla Conference

The arrival of Lord Wavell as viceroy of India provided an opportunity to the Muslim league and Congress to settle their disputes because the correspondence between Jinnah and Gandhi had failed over the question of Pakistan and no agreement was insight. Lord Wavell was convinced that the issues of the Congress and Muslim league could not be resolved without the intervention of the third party, the British government. Therefore, he proposed to call a conference of the party leaders and representative of the minorities for discussing formation of a provisional government at the center whose talks would be to carry on the war against Japan and formed the constituent assembly for drawing the future constitution of India and negotiate with the British government a treaty for the transfer of power. In June 1945, the conference of political leaders and Chief Ministers of the provinces was held at Simla. The leaders of the Muslim league insisted that

1. All Muslim members of the viceroy’s executive council were to be nominated by the Muslim league.
2. Muslims right to self determination.

3. Equality for Muslims with all other communities in the interim government.

Though the Simla conference was failed due to the attitude of the viceroy and the congress leaders because they refused to accept the claim of the league as the sole representative of the Muslims of India. It was a turning point in the life of Pir Amin ul Hassnat who got convinced that the Hindu-Muslim alliance was impossible and the political leadership had failed in achieving their targets. He realized that the religious leaders should come forward for the welfare of the Muslim nation and he decided to join Muslim league form the core of his heart. He used to protect the interests of Muslims of India along with political leaders such as Abdul Qaiyum khan, Arbab Abdul Ghafoor and Ghulam Muhammad Lund Khawar from the plate form of Muslim league. He started his active politics and gathered the religious personalities like Allama Shabir Ahmed Usmani, Molana Abdul Hamid Badayuni, Pir Jammal Ali Shah and the Pir of Zakori in his native town of manki in Nosherawa. With the collaboration of these religious personalities, he established an association with the name of Jamiat ul Asifiya and indulged into the practical politics with two main objectives

1. To fight with the British and the Hindus.
2. To support the Muslim league in the coming elections.

(b) Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Pir of Manki Sharif

1. Pir of Manki Sharif sent a letter to Jinnah about the political developments in NWFP. Muhammad Ali Jinnah replied with thanks for their whole hearted support to the cause of Pakistan.
2. In November 1945, the Quaid-i-Azam paid his second visit to Peshawar. During this visit he stayed with the Pir of Manki at his village and took tea with him. Muhammad Ali Jinnah was given warm reception by the disciples of the Pir of Manki Sharif and announced their support for the attainment of Pakistan and Muslim league in the coming elections of 1945-46.
3. The viceroy lord Wavell announced elections on January 26 and February 19, 1946. The congress was contesting elections with maintaining the unity of India and league focused on the creations of Pakistan. During elections, the Pir of Manki Sharif played a very important role in support of Muslim league and sent a letter to Jinnah about the bitter organizational and financial condition of the frontier Muslim league.
4. On the directions of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the Pir sahib of Manki Sharif and his disciples visited various parts of the province and urged the Muslims to vote for the Muslim league. Due to the strenuous efforts of Pir sahib, the Muslim league performance

was exemplary and the popular Muslim vote secured by the Muslim league in NWFP was larger than those obtained by the congress.⁸

5. On April 28, 1947, the Muslim League leaders including Pir of Manki Sharif met Mountbatten at Peshawar and presented the demands of the Muslims of NWFP. In their talks with the viceroy Mountbatten, they demanded that they be allowed to go to Delhi for consultation with Jinnah. The viceroy allowed them and a Muslim league delegation consisting of the Pir of Manki Shrif, Khan Abdul Qaiyum Khan, Samin Jan Khan, Mian Abdullah Shah and Arbab Noor Muhammad Khan met with Jinnah on May 2, 1947. They held two meetings with Jinnah. They apprised Jinnah for not calling of the civil disobedience movement against congress ministry.

(c) Direct Action Day

After the failure of Simla conference, the British government announced on February 19, 1946 to send to India a special cabinet mission to seek in association with the viceroy and in consultation with the leaders of the major Indian parties in agreement of constitutional matters relating to future India. The cabinet mission could not bring about an agreement between the Congress and Muslim league after several rounds of talk and ultimately the mission presented its own scheme of three tiers federation of the provinces of India. The Congress rejected the cabinet mission plan. In spite of this, the viceroy Lord Wavell invited the congress leader Mr. Nehru to form the government at the center. It added fuel to fire and the Muslim league passed a resolution which urged the Muslims to observe 16th August as direct action day as a protest against the decision of the British government to hand over power to the congress. The people of NWFP showed keen interest in making this protest successful due to active participation of the Pir of Manki Sharif. At masjid Mahabat Khan Peshawar, he presided over public gatherings and convinced the Muslims to renounce the British awarded titles and to get ready for jails. The disciples of Pir of Manki Sharif showed great enthusiasm in making the direct action day successful.

(d) Civil disobedience Movement

In October 1946 Hindu Muslim clashes had started in various parts of India and Muslim League sent its delegations to those areas where the Muslims had affected. These delegations reported atrocities done by the Hindus. These atrocities created hatred among the Hindus and the Muslims. The Pir of Manki Sharif presided over the meeting of the provincial Muslim League on February 20, 1947 in Peshawar and decided to start a civil disobedience movement in NWFP against the congress ministry. The main objective of the movement was to weaken the

provincial congress government. It was a large scale movement due to the strenuous efforts. He visited the southern district and adjacent tribal areas with motive to prepare people for a Jihad against the Non Muslims. The main demands in these meetings were

1. The release of Muslim League leaders
2. The removal of restrictions placed on Muslim League
3. Restoration of Mr. Pasri, the convert to Islam, to the Muslim to whom she was pledged to have been married
4. Resignation of the provincial government.⁹

The services of Pir of Manki Sharif can be analyzed based upon following facts

1. He remained as the moving spirit behind whole agitation during the civil disobedience movement
2. A large number of his disciples participated in the movement.
3. Most of the meetings of provincial Muslim League in various districts were presided over by Pir of Manki Sharif.
4. On March 28, 1947 he was arrested and his disciples protested against his arrest on 4th April 1947 and observed this day as the “Pir of Manki Day”.¹⁰

The NWFP secret police reports have disclosed the seriousness of this movement that the Muslim league agitation became so tense and the government had to impose section 144 but the demonstrators didn't even care of it. The writ of the provincial government was challenged. The Muslim crowd blocked the railway line near Peshawar, tampered with the track and stoned the troops when asked to disperse. The police officers were injured and the district magistrate imposed 12 hour curfew for three days in Peshawar from 6am to 6pm. All telegraph and telephone lines were cut in Peshawar. Curfew was also imposed in Abbotabad, Haripur, Hawlian, Mansehra, Baffa and Shankiari.¹¹ The number of arrested persons had increased to extent that “the jails were full to overflowing, and arrangements had to be made for temporary accommodation for political prisoners.” By the end of April five thousand political prisoners were in the frontier jails.¹² Due to disturbances in Dera Ismail Khan, Bunnu and Manzil, the curfew was imposed to restore law and order situation. Even the Muslim women in veils also participated in this movement. They entered the local stations of all India radio and damaged offices.¹³

On 24 April, the league leaders Sardar Abdul Rab Nishtar and Malik Feroze Khan Noon visited Peshawar and meet Pir of Manki Sharif and other leaders who were in jail. They express the hope that frontier ministry would remain in office for a week or two and a referendum in expected to be held in frontier. They discussed that their demand was not

for fresh elections but a free election and that could only been done when the present congress ministry went away and section 93 was established.¹⁴

(e) Mountbatten and Pir sahib of Manki Sharif

On 28-29 April 1947, Mountbatten along with Lady Mountbatten visited Peshawar and held meetings with leaders of the congress and the Muslim league. He met the Pir of Manki Sharif and Abdul Qayum Khan. The Muslim leaders made it clear to the viceroy that a reference to the people of the province was the only solution to decide the conflicting claims. The viceroy took conflicting positions with the congress and league leaders. He made it clear to the league leaders that they had used an unconstitutional method for removal of provincial government while he also stressed upon the congress leaders the need for elections before transfer of power. During the visit of Lord and Lady Mountbatten, the Muslim league adopted aggressive attitude. The flag staff house, the residence of the area commander of Peshawar, was fired at on the night of 28 April. The agitators also threw six bombs. The gangs looted and set on fire shops and houses. The viceroy came back from the frontier province with full realization of the gravity of the situation. Fresh elections or a referendum to ascertain the wished of people of frontier province were the two alternatives discussed in political quarters. The viceroy met Gandhi Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan at the viceroy house. He even had meeting with Dr. Khan Sahib who was called from Peshawar. The viceroy was believed to have impressed upon them to settle the political issue of frontier province with Jinnah.¹⁵ On May 18, 1947 Lord Mountbatten went to London with a plan for the transfer of power to the Indians. On June 3, 1947, the partition plan was announced by Mountbatten on all India radio.

All India Sunni Conference 30th April 1946

Pir of Manki Sharif attended All India Sunni conference held in Benaras on 30th April 1946 and made a very detailed and lengthy speech (two and half hour) about Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and the future of the Muslims in Pakistan. He made the following historical announcement

“I’ve made it clear to the Quaid e Azam that if at any stage he deceived the Muslims or tried to introduce in Pakistan a system other than Islam, Mashaikh and his followers would not accept his leadership”.¹⁶

(f) Role of Pir of Manki Sharif in Referendum

According to 3rd June plan referendum was to be held in NWFP to ascertain people’s verdict as to whether they wanted to join Pakistan or remain in the union of India. Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah constituted a four member committee to supervise and control all

arrangements for the referendum. The committee consisted of I.I. Chandigarh, Ghazanfar Ali Khan, The Pir of Manki Sharif and Syed Wajid Ali. The committee remained in close contact with Jinnah and worked according to his guidance. The Pir of Manki Sharif visited all parts of the province and convinced the Muslims to vote for Pakistan and Muslim League in referendum. The congress leaders decided to boycott the referendum on the plea that the option of remaining independent in the partition plan had not been given to the frontier province. The referendum was held from July 6-17, 1947. These were 289, 244 votes for Pakistan against 2, 874 for India. The results of referendum gave verdict in favor of Pakistan and NWFP became a part of Pakistan.

Conclusion

Meher Ali Shah started a journey towards the destination of Pakistan and Pir of Manki Sharif completed its journey through his strenuous efforts. Meher Ali Shah opposed the nefarious designs of Gandhi and the Congress, while Pir of Manki Sharif compelled the British government to bow down before the demands of the Muslims and especially those Muslims who were in favor of Pakistan. There is no blinking fact that Pir of Manki Sharif played very important role in freedom movement for popularizing the Muslim league, weakening the strong hold of Abdul Ghaffar Khan and the congress in the frontier province. It was the leadership of Pir of Manki Sharif under the guidance of Muhammad Ali Jinnah who gave practical shape to the state of Pakistan.

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² Muhammad Ali Charagh, *Akbbirin-e-Tehrik-e-Pakistan*, p. 211.

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⁴ The North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) was a province of British India and subsequently of Pakistan. It was established in 1901 and was known by this name until 2010 (except during its abolition between 1955 and 1970, during the One Unit program of West Pakistan). The area became Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on 19 April 2010 when the Eighteenth Amendment was signed by President Asif Ali Zardari. The province covered an area of 70,709 km², including much of the current Khyber Pakhtunkhwa but excluding the princely states of Amb, Chitral, Dir, Phulra and Swat. The capital was the city of Peshawar, and the province was composed of three divisions (Peshawar, Dera Ismail Khan and Malakand). Until 1947, the province was bordered by five princely states to the north, the minor states of the Gilgit Agency to the northeast, the province of West Punjab to the east and the province of Balochistan to the south. Afghanistan lay to the northwest, with the tribal agencies forming a buffer zone.

⁵ Qadiri Sufi order got its name from Abdul Qadir Gilani (1077-1166) who was from Gilan. The order relies strongly upon adherence to the fundamentals of Islam. The founder of the Qadiriyya, Abdul Qadir Gilani, was a respected scholar

and preacher. Having been a pupil at the madras of Abu Said al-Mubarak, he became the leader of this school after al-Mubarak's death in 1119. Being the new Sheikh, he and his large family lived in the *madrasa* until his death in 1166, when his son, Abdul Razzaq, succeeded his father as sheikh. Abdul Razzaq published a hagiography of his father, emphasizing his reputation as founder of a distinct and prestigious Sufi order.

⁶ The Quit India Movement started by the congress for blackmailing the British government into submitting to their demand of handing over to them the reins of power to exclusion of the Muslims of India had failed. Iftikhar Ahmed Yusufzai, *The Pir of Manki Sharif: His Role in the Pakistan Movement*, Pakistan Vision, Vol. 18 No. 1.

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