INRODUCTION

Ahl-e-Ḥadīth

The term Ahl-e-Ḥadīth ‘literally means ‘People of the Ḥadīth, signifying the claim of this group to be the strict followers of the Prophet’s (peace be on him), Sunnah or practice, as reflected in the Ḥadīth (tradition of the Prophet). In addition to the term Ahl-e-Ḥadīth, they refer themselves, as do the Saudi ‘Muwahhidūn’ (the Unitarians), as Salafīs, or those who follow the Sallī-e-Sāliḥ or the ‘pious predecessors’.

Ahl-e-Ḥadīth Movement in India

Ulama-e-Ahl-e-Ḥadīth traced the origin of the movement from the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him), the Khulafā-e –Rāshidūn, Saḥāba, the four Sunni Imams/Jurists (in the light of the Qurʾān and Sunnah) and Sunni Mujtahidun (the followers of Qurʾān and Sunnah). In India scholars are of the opinion that this movement is an off-shoot of Waliullah Movement and the Tariqah-e-Muhammadiyah movement of Sayyid Aḥmad Shāhīd and Shāh Ismāʿīl Shahid. Therefore, to understand the rise of the movement in a proper perspective, it becomes here incumbent to provide a briefing of Shāh Waliullah and his thought.

In the eighteenth century, the Indo-Pak subcontinent witnessed two important processes: the decline of the Mughal Empire, which may conveniently be dated from the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, and the beginning of an intellectual and political re-awakening that signalled Shāh Waliullah (1703-1764 C.E.), and laid the foundations for a Muslim resistance against British rule in India. The first process, the fall of the Mughal Empire and its causes, is not a concern here. However the significant part for discussion here is the second process: the beginning of the intellectual and political re-awakening, an event to which the works of Muhammad Siddīq Ḥasan Khān, Nawab of Bhopal, are closely related. His works were an attempt from an important angle towards the re-awakening of Muslims on an international level. In order to assess the importance of his life and works in their historical perspective, a brief account of the Indian context in which Shāh Waliullah worked will be given. This will be followed by a short description of the activities of Muḥammad Siddīq Ḥasan Khān and his followers.
It was the time when Muslims on the whole were indifferent towards their
religion. They drifted away from their religious institutions and clung instead to time-
honoured customs and traditions. Caste differences and social discrimination, which
were characteristics of Hindu society, found their way into the Muslim social order.
The Hindus, according to the Muslim point of view, worshipped their idols in the
temples; the Muslims, on the other hand, started showing undue respect to their *Pirs*
and Sufi Saints. They gave charity and devotion in their names, hoping that they
would grant their requests. They strongly believed that these *Pirs* and Sufi Saints,
living or dead, were capable of helping them in adversity. Blind faith (*Taqlīd*) was the
order of the day. The *Fatāwā* (religious decrees) of the so-called ‘Ulamā’ (religious
scholars) had replaced the tenets of the *Qur’ān* and the *Sunnah*. These *Fatāwā* were
considered to have the binding force of the commands of God and His Apostle.
Anyone who did not follow one of the four schools of jurisprudence (or *A’immah*),
viz. Imām Abū Ḥanīfa (d.150/767), Imām Mālik (d.179/795), Imām Shāfī’ī (d.
204/819), and Imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), was considered to be no more
within the pale of Islam. Sectarianism was also very common. Religious rivalries and
squabbles were prevalent among the followers of the four *A’immah* and between the
Sunni and Shia who blinded their reason. These activities exhausted the energies and
capabilities of Scholars without yielding any useful outcome; on the contrary, they
were damaging the common interests of the people. Social conditions were even
worse. Widow Remarriage was thought to be immodest—another Hindu influence.
Lavish spending on ceremonies on the eve of wedding, funerals, marriages and
circumcision was thought being honourable, and Muslims borrowed and got into debt
to maintain ceremonial pomp. Islam favours simple celebrations on these occasions,
but long association with Hindus made these ceremonies more and more complicated.

Being a gifted man, Shāh Waliullah realised the weaknesses and deficiencies of
the Muslim community and determined to rectify it. After a thorough study of the
situation he diagnosed that following underlying factors were responsible for the
decadence of the Muslim community: firstly, indifference towards religious
institutions and lack of concern for the study of the *Qurʾān* and its understanding;
secondly, economic imbalance; and finally, lack of impressive, dynamic and reliable
leadership.
Shāh Waliullah first tried to reform the current belief of the people that the Qur’an could not be translated into another language and to alter their attitude towards the Qur’an, which they had confined to recitation, regarding it good for curing physical rather than spiritual diseases and for removing of evil spirits from children. He knew that the main cause of Muslim decadence throughout the world was their complete ignorance of the meanings of the Qur’an. The Qur’an, the Will of God, was intended to be properly understood and applied in various aspects of individual life, but being in Arabic the people were not familiar with it. Shāh Waliullah, thus embarked upon the urgent but controversial and dangerous task of rendering the Qur’an into a language which the ‘‘Ulamā’’ generally spoke and understood. Therefore, he selected Persian- the only language which could serve the purpose- and rendered the Qur’an into it. It was a clear break with the long and persistent belief of the people, but he convinced them about its necessity, and so it was welcomed. His Persian rendering was followed by an interlinear Urdu rendering by his son, Shāh Abdul Qādir, which proved a further great help in the understanding of the meanings of the Qur’an, and on which Nawāb Šiddīq Ḥasan Khān later on based his own exegesis called Tarjumān al-Qur’an.

Secondly, Shāh Waliullah explained to the people that Ijtihad (independent judgement in a legal or theological question, based on the interpretation of the four Usūl) was necessary throughout the ages and that Islam could not be confined merely to the pronouncement of the four Schools (of jurisprudence). He gave due importance to the contributions of the four A’immah, but added that the necessity of Ijtihad has been and would be realised throughout the history of the Islam because the problems of the people have been increased with the passing of time, and, if the processes of Ijtihad were to be confined to the eras of the four A’immah, it would prevent Islam providing a complete code of conduct for life.

Thirdly, Shāh Waliullah argued that the necessary qualifications for the practitioners of Ijtihad were a sound knowledge of the Qur’an, Ḥadīth, Nāsikh wa Mansūkh (abrogated and abrogating verses of the Qur’an), the decisions and analogies derived by the previous Mujtahidūn (interpreters of the law), and of the Arabic language. He believed in the dynamic nature of Islam and its capability for guiding people in all eras and in all circumstance, but warned the ‘‘Ulamā’’ that if they did not change their stubborn attitude in favour of the inevitability of Ijtihad, its
consequences would be disastrous. Describing the attitude of the ‘Ulamā’ who went beyond the genuine limits of Taqlīd (accepting binding as final authority, the opinion of a particular Imām/Jurist), Shāh Waliullah said that they persistently accepted and preserved the decisions and interpretations of past Mujtahīdūn who were men like themselves and liable to err, and considered their Fatawa as undisputed and authentic code of conduct. This made them ignore the Qurān and the Ḥadīth and lay at the root of their intellectual stagnation.

Shāh Waliullah also attacked the false belief of Muslims in Pirīs and Sufi Saints. He explained to them that it was sheer ignorance and folly to call on Pirīs and Sufi Saints for help, or to go to their tombs and show them undue respect. He said that this kind of reverence shown to the tombs of Pirīs and saints was equivalent to the acts of shirk (polytheism), which Islam came to extinguish. Shah Waliullah also made a shrewd analysis of the causes of economic deterioration which had brought about the decadence of Muslims in India. He said that two things were largely responsible for the instability of the Muslim society: the dependence of a large number of people on the state treasury, without contributing anything in return and, secondly, the exorbitant taxation on the public which they could not afford and which led to revolts against the rulers. Unless these economic ills could be alleviated, society would not lie in peace. Food, clothes, shelter, and raising a family were the basic requirements of life, and without proper provision of these necessities, stability in society is impossible.

Referring to the luxurious life of the rulers, Shāh Waliullah warned that when the ruling class indulges in extravagance and pleasure, society suffers, and administration deteriorates, and the people have to pay the price. The consequences must be chaos and disorder, deterioration of fundamental values, and national demoralisation. At this stage, people lose their independence and the yoke of subjection is put on their shoulders.

Shah Waliullah also emphasised the need for the rulers to respect all professions and to allow the people to adopt professions according to their choice. A barber, Shāh Waliullah argues, is as important and necessary as a shoemaker, or a weaver. He condemned those who favoured class or professional discrimination in society, but suggested agriculture, the backbone of society, should be given top priority over other
callings. “The ratio between agriculture and other professions should be like that of flour and salt,” he wrote. Even this cursory account shows how Shāh Waliullah concerned himself with the entire structure of Muslim political, social, economic and religious institutions in India, and as such, his importance to the history of Muslim revivalism is unquestioned.

Although Shāh Waliullah did not succeed in arresting the decline of Muslim power, yet his fresh and dynamic ideas had a vast impact on Muslim history. After his death in 1764, his mission was carried on by his sons ‘Abdul ‘Azīz (d. 1827), Shāh Rafī al-Dīn (d. 1833), Shāh ‘Abd al- Qādir (d.1826), and Shāh ‘Abdul Ghanī. They all were noted scholars of their times and each of them tried his best to convey to the Indian Muslims message of their father in the simplest possible manner- arranging special groups for the specific purpose of preaching, and writing many books in local languages of the general public.

This reformation movement then took another course- Shāh ‘Abdul ‘Azīz issued a fatwā, declaring India as Dar al-Ḥarb (State of War) and proclaimed a Jihād, against all those who occupied Muslim cities, obligatory on all Indian Muslims. He was constantly on the lookout for a man of outstanding character who could fight against the current non-Islamic customs on the one hand, and lead Jihād against the occupants of the Muslim cities on the other. He found this man in the person of Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd.

Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd was born in his ancestral home Daira Shāh ‘Alam Ullah (now Known as Takia), a village of Rai-Bareli (U.P., India) in 1786. By temperament not a scholar, he made his way to Lucknow in pursuit of employment; he succeeded in finding a post with Amir Khān, who afterwards became the Nawāb of Tonk and supporter of Sayyid Aḥmad’s movement. After some time, he lost interest in this post and resigned. By now he seemed to have developed a taste for learning, so he left for Delhi, which was the centre of learning and the residence of the family of Shāh Waliullah. From Delhi, Shāh ‘Abdul ‘Azīz sent him to Akbarabad, where his brother Shāh ‘Abdul Qādir was lecturing. There he read the Qurʾān and grammar, but did not make much progress with his studies. He was now inclined towards Tasawwuf and, so, he became the pupil of Shāh ‘Abdul Azīz in the Naqashbandī Tarīqah of Tasawwuf.
Sayyid Aḥmad started a comprehensive programme of preaching throughout India. Mawlānā Muḥammad Ismāʿīl (d. 1831) and Mawlānā ‘Abdul Ḥay (d. 1827), the pupil and son in law of Shāh ‘Abdul Azīz, joined him in this task. They travelled over a large part of India- Muzaffarnagar, Saharanpur, Rampur, Bareli, Shahjahanabad, Banaras and Lucknow- and explained to the people the harmful consequences of spending recklessly on ceremonies. To show to the people that widow remarriage was not a heinous act, as it was considered to be, Sayyid Aḥmad himself married a widow. Their insistence was mainly on such things as the unity of Allah, honesty, truthfulness and futility of showing undue respect to Pirs and saints. These teachings were compiled by Muḥammad Ismāʿīl Shāhīd and Mawlānā ‘Abdul Ḥay into book form under the title *Sirāṭ-i-Mustaqīm*.

During his Rampur journey, Sayyid Aḥmad met some Afghanis, who told him about the cruel treatment of Muslims by the Sikhs, and invited him to liberate them from these brutalities. In response to this invitation, he determined to initiate Jihād against the Sikhs on the North West Frontier (the Present Peshawar and Malakand Divisions). Before starting the Jihād Sayyid Aḥmad went on a Pilgrimage to Makkah in 1822. His book *Sirāṭ-i-Mustaqīm* was circulated among the pilgrims and greatly appreciated by them. This controverts the opinion of those who say that Sayyid Aḥmad imbibed the doctrines of Muwahhidun or Unitarians during this journey and his future activities in India owe their momentum to them.

After returning to India he started preparations for the Jihād. He sent Maulana Muḥammad Ismāʿīl and Maulanā ‘Abdul Ḥay to various parts of India to convince the people about the legality and necessity of the Jihād. This message of the Jihād was so widely spread that it became a main topic and discussion throughout India. In 1826 he and his 7000 *Mujāhidūn* (warriors) set out on the Jihād. As he could not pass his force through the Punjab, a Sikh controlled area, he first went to Afghanistan and from there to Peshawar through the Khyber Pass.

The first battle against the Sikhs was fought at Akora in 1826 and resulted in the Sikhs’ defeat. The second attack was made at Hadro a village on the east of the Indus River, and the Sikh army was defeated again. These skirmishes went on till the *Mujāhid* forces were defeated at Balakot in 1831 C.E., (Hazara, West Pakistan) and
Sayyid Aḥmad and Maulana Muḥammad Ismā’īl were slain by the forces of Ranjit Singh and Sher Singh.

After his death, the East India Company began to take this movement seriously. Sayyid Aḥmad’s mission was carried on by his followers. Patna, Sitana and Sadiqpur were its main centres. It was by now an organised movement and had a number of bases in all parts of India where volunteers were trained to raise funds for the Jihād, and to preach to the people including the police and the soldiers.

Beside the reform movement of Shāh Waliullah, a contemporary reform movement had also been started in Arabia under the leadership of Muḥammad Ibn ‘Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855) in reaction to the contemporary Muslim society which, under Ottoman rule, was suffering from the same symptoms as those of India. He, therefore, placed great emphasis on the unity of God, a principle that stresses the unity of action and purpose, both essential for the establishment of a dynamic social order; the absurdity of showing undue respect to saints and Pirs, and tombs; return for guidance to the Qur’ān and the Sunnah alone; Rejection of the idea of accepting as a final authority the interpretations of a particular Imām (legal interpreter of the Shari‘ah); the significance of Ijtihād; and the evil consequence of following customary rules and regulation. He did not even hesitate to use force to impose his reformist ideas, in which he succeeded up to a certain extent; but, as he was rigid and tactless, imposing his ideas by the use of force, his movement did not achieve its goal.

‘Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal was followed by another Yemeni scholar, Muḥammad Ibn ‘Alī al-Shawkānī (d.1834), the follower of Ibn Taymiyyah (d.1328), the follower of Imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855). Just as ‘Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal had done, he attacked Taqlīd (imitation of the Jurists), by writing a book, Al-Qawal al-Mufīḍ Fī Ḥukum al-Taqlīd, which created a great stir among his contemporary scholars. His other important contribution in this connection was Nayl al-Awtār, a commentary on Ibn Taymiyyah’s Al-Muntaqa al-Akhbār, a voluminous work, which provides rules and regulations on the problems of Fiqh, based on the authentic Ḥadīth of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Describing the importance of Al-Muntaqa al-Akhbār, and what prompted him to write this commentary, he pointed out, that it “has become a source-book for majority of the ‘Ulamā’ when they are in need of finding a legal proof-especially in this region and in these times; upon this sweet spring, the eyes of original thinkers collide with
one another and the steps of investigators vie with one another in entering its gates. It has thus become a resort for thinkers whither they repair and a heaven for those who wish to flee from the bonds of slavish and blind acceptance of authority.” However, he was rather more rational and tactful than some of the reformers, and his works achieved wide circulation and acceptance among literary circles. Moreover, communication by sea by that time had improved considerably, and with it social intercourse between the ‘Ulamā’ and scholars of India, Yemen and Makkah increased as well. And it was possibly because of this growing contact that during 1860’s ‘Ulamā’, full of the ideas of Ibn Taymiyyah and Shawkani, were found in the courts of the Indian princely states, especially Hyderabad and Bhopal. These scholars introduced the ideas and works of Shawkani and, indirectly, of Ibn Taymiyyah in Bhopal. They gradually spread throughout India.

This was the context in which Nawāb Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān was born. His birthplace was Bareli, the village of his maternal grandfather, a village that gave birth to Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd, the champion of the Jihād movement. His father, Sayyid Awlād Ḥasan Khān, was a strong supporter of Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd, and accompanied him in his journey to Afghanistan and rendered great services to the cause of Islam.

After the death of his father in 1837, he remained under the care of his mother. When he grew up, he made several journeys to the surrounding districts and met a great number of his father’s friends there. On his return to Kanauj he went to Delhi and remained under the tutorship of Ṣadr al-Dīn Khān, the Muftī of Delhi. After sixteen months he came back to Kanauj and decided to go to Bhopal in search of employment on his arrival, Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Khān, the prime minister of Bhopal and a supporter of the Jihād movement, recruited him as one of his personal bodyguards. But, soon after, he was relieved of his duties, owing to his alleged involvement in religious debates of an inflammatory nature.

From Bhopal he went to Tonk, where he stayed with the relatives of Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd and worked for eight months as an employee of the Ṣiddīq Ḥasan of Tonk, a strong supporter of the Jihād movement. Once again Jamāl al-Dīn Khān persuaded the Begum to invite him to Bhopal. She assigned him with the duty of writing the history of Bhopal.
Up to this time he was under the influence of the teachings of Shāh Waliullah and Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd. On his arrival in Bhopal, he came into contact with the ‘Ulamā’ from Yemen in the royal court of Bhopal and studied under their supervision the works of Ibn Taymiyyah and Shawkānī. These scholars being imbued with the ideas of Ibn Taymiyyah and Shawkānī, immensely impressed him and, in a few years’ time, fundamentally changed his outlook. His outlook experienced further changes when, in 1869, on his way to Makkah, he read other works of these authors in Hudaydah, Yemen, and Makkah. After his return to Bhopal, he was no more a Muqallid; on the contrary, he started writing books against Taqlīd and the followers of Imām Abū Ḥanīfa who, according to him, were chiefly responsible for the intellectual stagnation of Muslim India. He followed, with certain reservations, Ibn Taymiyyah, Shāh Waliullah and Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd, Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abdul Wahhāb and Shawkānī in his criticism on Taqlīd, non-Islamic customs and traditions (Bid’ah) and in his emphasis on the revival of the institution of Ijtihād and returning to the guidance from the Qur’ān and the Sunnah alone.

The on-going work on the “Impact of the Ahl-e-Ḥadīth Movement on Contemporary Muslim Society in India” is based upon the following scheme:

**Introduction:** The Introduction discusses the scope and Socio-Religious importance of my work.

**Chapter 1: “An Introduction to the Early Phase of the Development of Islam: Ahl-e-Ḥadīth Perspective”**

This chapter highlights the following:

i) The early development of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula and the teachings of Islam, and its significance;

ii) The establishment of Islamic state and early development and compilation of Ḥadīth literature;

iii) Regarding the Ṣiḥāḥ-i Sittah and Imāms (Jurists);

iv) Development of different Schools of Thought in Islam.

**Chapter 2: “Some Prominent ‘Ulamā’ of the Muslim World and their Doctrines: Ahl-e-Ḥadīth Perspective”**

The chapter second deals with:
i) The ancestral particulars and background of Salafī ‘Ulamāʾ of the Muslim world and their life, works, services as teachers, writers and preachers.

ii) Contribution of Salafī ‘Ulamāʾ in the establishment of the Salafī movement all over the world.


iv) Some prominent Salafī ‘Ulamāʾ are: Imām Mālik (713-795 CE); Imām Shāfiʿī (767-795 CE); Imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (780-855 C.E); Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328); Ibn Qayyim (1292–1350) Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abdul Wahhāb (1703-1792) and many others.

Chapter 3: “The Advent and Spread of Islam in India”

Chapter three critically examines the following:

i) The historical background of the arrival of Muslims in India.

ii) The Arab conquest of Sind and other parts of India.

iii) The role of Sufī Saints in the spread of Islam in India.

Chapter 4: “Socio-Religious Conditions of the Muslims since the Advent of Islam in India”

Chapter four focuses on the Socio-Religious beliefs of some of the Muslims in India. This chapter emphasises that it is due to non-Muslim cultural assimilation and amalgamation many Muslims adopted un-Islamic beliefs and practices. All such un-Islamic beliefs and practices categorically have been discussed in detail.

Chapter 5: “The Origin Development and Impact of the Ahl-e-Ḥadīth Movement on Contemporary Muslim Society in India”

Chapter five critically analyses the teachings and doctrines of the following:

1. The origin and development of Ahl-e-Ḥadīth movement in India. Some important Indian ‘Ulamāʾ: Ahl-e-Ḥadīth prespective.
2. Maulanā ʿAbdul Ḥaq Muḥaddith Dehlawī (1551-1642 CE ),
3. Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī (1562-1624 CE),
4. Shāh Waliullah (1703-1762 CE),
5. Shāh Abdul ‘Azīz (1749-1824 CE),
6. Shāh Ismā‘īl Shāhīd (1779-1831 C.E),
7. Sayyid Aḥmad Shāhīd (1786-1831 CE),
8. Ḥājī Sharī‘atullah (1781–1840 CE),
9. Dudū Miyān (1819-1862 CE),
10. Nithār ‘Alī alis Tītū Mīr (1782 – 1831 CE),

Chapter five also critically examines the following:

1) The Origin of the Ahl-e-Ḥadīth Movement in India
2) Some prominent Ahl-e-Ḥadīth Ulamā’ of India are as follows:

a) Sayyid Nazīr Ḥusayn Baltawi (1805- 1902 CE)
b) Nawab Siddique Hasan Khan (1832-1890)
c) Maulanā Sana’ullah Amritsarī (1868-1948 CE)
d) Maulanā ‘Abul Kalām Azād (1888-1957 CE)
e) Maulanā ‘Abdul Rauf Jhandanagri (1910-1999 CE)
f) And many others ‘Ulamā’ -e-Ahl-e-Ḥadīth.

According to Jamī‘at-e-Ahl-e-Ḥadīth, the above Indian ‘Ulamā’ rejected Taqlīd and propagated the true spirit of Islam and emphasised to study Qur‘ān and Ḥadīth. The teachings and their works made a significant Impact on Indian Muslim Society, as they tried their best to reject Shirk and Bid‘ah from the Indian Muslim Society in particular and others in general.

Chapter 6: “Establishment of Prominent Ahl-e-Ḥadīth Madrasas in India”
Chapter six is on the establishment of various important Ahl-e-Ḥadīth Madrasas in India are as follows:

(i) Jāmi‘a Salafīyya Banaras, its infrastructure, faculty, syllabus
(ii) Dār-ul-Ḥadīth Raḥmāniyya (Delhi) and its curriculum
(iii) Jāmi‘a Islāmiyya Salafīyya (Assam)
(iv) Al- Jāmiatul- Salafīyya (Mewat, UP)
(v) Jāmi‘a Dār-ul- Huda (Yusuf Pur)
(vi) Jāmi‘a Raḥmāniyya (Monghyr, Bihar)
It also highlights in a detailed manner various rules and regulations for the admission in various courses, of residing, of curriculum etc. in these Madrasas.

Chapter 7: “The Ahl-e-Ḥadīth and Other Muslim Schools of Thought (Doctrinal Divisions) and Their Impact on the Muslim Society in India”

This chapter critically examined the impact of Ahl-e-Ḥadīth movement on the Indian society.

This whole subject-matter is followed by a conclusion that presents a critical assessment and appraisal of the Ahl-e-Ḥadīth doctrines and other Sunni Schools and also the Shia School of Thought. Finally, a list of the resource material in the form of books, articles, papers etc. has been provided to mark the culmination of the thesis.