

ATA'ULLAH SHAH BUKHARI: 20TH CENTURY MUSLIM FIREBRAND AND ORATOR OF FREEDOM MOVEMENT IN SOUTH ASIA

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Abstract

Ata'ullah Shah Bukhari was a Muslim firebrand who emerged on the Twentieth century Colonial Indian scene, and hailed from Patna (Bihar). Syed by cast, he obtained Madrasah-education as the *Ashraaf* tradition of his times. Later, he migrated to Delhi where he was recognized for his oratorical skills and later used to hold audiences spell bound for hours. He spent his life as a prominent Muslim urban leader and very distinguished orator among the freedom fighters in British India. He inspired millions through his oratory and did the spade work for the freedom movement against the colonial rulers. Though, he belonged to the second layer of the Muslim leadership in India before partition, and his political party was mainly based in the province of the Punjab, yet he and his party were a strong factor in the provincial politics of Punjab and ideological politics at the national level. The story of the freedom movement cannot be completed without highlighting the contribution of such influential voices. This article highlights the ideological orientation and religio-political struggle of Ata'ullah Shah Bukhari.

Keywords: Ata'ullah Shah Bukhari, Masjid Shaheed Ganj, Shuddhi, Sanghtan, Ahrar

While analyzing persona, the context around character, attitude and atmosphere seem to be central. An individual is shaped through the challenges of his times and responses are generated through individual reactions and collective movements. Therefore, studying an era, both

individual and collective forces need to be analyzed to get the real essence of the historical process. In order to study the freedom struggle in South Asia, a study of the significant personalities is vital. The present article is aimed to evaluate the role of Ata'ullah Shah Bukhari (1891-1961)¹ in the freedom struggle against the British Raj in India. The article is divided into five parts. Part-1 elaborates the role of an individual in a society, particularly indicating Muslim mindset in the British Indian context. Part II presents a brief biographical sketch of Ata'ullah Shah Bukhari. Part III discusses Bukhari's religious orientation and his struggle to reform and defend his community in Colonial India. Part IV discusses Bukhari's political ideology and his role in the freedom movement. Part V concludes the discussion.

I

Individuals represent their times, environments of specific nature and socio-economic milieu in which they exist. Through challenges and responses individuals produce social forces which affect the course of history. Seldom have these forces lead towards anticipated outcomes, more often they achieve the opposite of what they intended. The urban-Muslim leadership in Colonial India appeared and was molded by the challenges created through times. Actions they took were largely determined by ideals and values given by Islam which they practiced and by the challenges they faced due to their contemporary circumstances. Although their efforts to reconcile with divergent existing political ideologies went well, but they remained inflexible with regard to their faith. The study of their character and engagements interestingly reveal the dynamics of contemporary politics. Thus, according to E H Carr, who makes us believe 'it is rather man, real living man who does everything, who possesses and fights'², we put cursor of our investigation on individual like Ata'ullah Shah Bukhari to conclude, as Carr writes, that 'facts of history are indeed...acts about the relations of individuals to one another in society.'³

Summarizing here, we have a set of questions to explore more through subsequent discussion: 1) while studying individuals in history it is imperative to study them in the context of their society and times; 2) ideals determine individual actions, only then one can have a true understanding of their conscious and unconscious motives and actions. Muslim political leaders were generally influenced by the preferences taken up as Muslim society (community), in competition with an assertive Hindu revivalism and the colonial political control and the framework it inherited for onward political action.⁴

The system of values and institutions of a community advocate effective pleas and symbols to be used for organization and mobilization of the groups in new directions.⁵ Elite and masses understand and pursue their interests within the framework of ideas they possess for understanding the world. These ideas act as a motivating force in a mysterious dialectic between ideas and reality. Sometimes ideas are used to legitimize actions, yet sometimes ideas act as a prime force in directing the conducts of men.⁶ Muslim elite profess ideas that affect their political action. Their ideas motivate them to act vehemently. The idea of community has developed a tendency among the Muslims to be politically organized on the basis of their faith. This idea of community is nurtured by the key rituals of their 'acknowledging one book, following one law, praying the same way preferably communally, ...giving alms to support community, fasting, and performing Hajj' and distinctive features, 'of love for Arabic script, concept of non-Muslims as infidels and *dhimmi*s, sense of pre-eminence being the followers of Islam that is historically final amongst religions.'⁷ This context helps in assessing the Muslim responses to the challenges of history or in understanding their relationships with men of other faiths. The Muslims' successful assertion of political power over a large part of the world for the first hundred years and the concept of indivisibility of Church and State engendered the feeling among the Muslims that the ideals of Islam could be realized only with political power.⁸ The study of Muslim politics in Colonial India points to the fact that both the leaders and the masses were heavily influenced by their religious ideals.

II

Ata'ullah Shah Bukhari was renowned among the leaders of urban Muslim India whose actions were motivated by his religious ideals. He was famous for his oratory and mesmerizing huge crowds for unusually long hours with his fiery speeches. W. C. Smith called him "India's most effective demagogue".⁹ He had deep love and desire for freedom which inspired him to struggle against the British colonial rulers for his country.¹⁰ Five hundred ulama once conferred on him title of *Amir-i-Shari'at* at the proposal of Allama Anwar Shah Kashmiri in the annual meeting of Anjuman-i- Khuddamud-din, Lahore in March 1930.¹¹

Ata'ullah Shah Bukhari was supported and admired by the people of the Punjab and Kashmir. The Muslim press including the *Inqilab* and the *Zamindar* supported him, providing wide coverage to his struggle in both areas. The colonial masters took Ahrar agitation under his leadership quite seriously, and put the movement and its leadership particularly Ata'ullah Shah under constant surveillance which is evident from the

secret intelligence reports. One such report was prepared by the British authorities in the Punjab under the title of *The Ahrar Movement in Punjab, 1931-1938* which is an important source on the role of Ahrar Movement and its leadership.¹²

Ata'ullah Shah Bukhari was born on Ist Rabiulawal 1310 Hijri 1891 A.D. at Patna, District, Bihar.¹³ Syed Zia-ud- din Ahmed, his father was a Hafiz-i-Qurān. He was 36th descendent of Hazrat-i-Imam Hussain whose ancestors migrated from Bukhara to Kashmir and settled in Gujrat, Amritsar and Patna. Ata'ullah Shah Bukhari's mother Syeda Fatima Andrabi belonged to the family of Hazrat Khwaja Baqi Billah. She died in his childhood¹⁴ and he was brought up by his grandmother. He did not receive any formal education and learned Persian and Arabic at home.¹⁵ He migrated to Amritsar and learned the Holy Qurān from Maulana Noor Ahmad,¹⁶ *Fiqh* from Maulana Ghulam Mustafa Qasmi, and *Hadith Muslim Sharif* from Hazrat Mufti Muhammad Hasan.¹⁷ He memorized the Holy Qurān under guidance of his grandmother. He learned *Qir'at* from Syed Muhammad Umar Asim. At age of fourteen, he moved to Nagriyan, Gujrat, Punjab, to study in Madrasa Arabiya in Jamia Masjid Khairuddin. In 1912, he returned to Amritsar to master the art of oratory under the supervision of Maulana Ghulam Mustafa Qasimi and delivered his first speech in a Masjid inside Gulawali Gate in Bazar Kumbaran, Amritsar. In 1914, he married Syeda Muzzamila Begam, daughter of Syed Mian Murtaza Shah Shatab. He had four sons and a daughter.¹⁸ He died in 1961, in Pakistan. Maulana Ihteshamul Haq Thanvi called his death 'a loss suffered across the Muslim world.'¹⁹

III

Ata'ullah Shah Bukhari's beliefs are important to study and to understand his system of thought which inspired his actions. A review of his religious orientation will help readers understand his political ideology and actions. Being a devoted Muslim and influenced by Deoband school of thought, he was inspired by scholars likes, Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi, Allama Anwar Shah Kashmiri, Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani and Maulana Shabbir Ahmed Usmani. He considered both the *Qadianies* (followers of Mirza Bashir Ahmed from Qadian) and Farangees (British) as enemies of Islam and the Muslims. He preached against both, their faith and their policies. He mobilized Muslims and Hindus alike to oppose Imperialists who unethically ruled India and exhorted them 'to throw-away their yoke of slavery whenever and wherever they were threatened'. In the ensuing pages a few incidents are narrated that how on purely religious grounds Ata'ullah Shah motivated and mobilized Indian Muslims for 'the honor of Islam'.

Being a scholar and Hafiz-i-Qur'ān, Ata'ullah Shah Bukhari elaborated the message of *Tawhid* through his Qira'at (oral recitation). He had a beautiful voice and when he used to recite verses of the Holy Qurān he would mesmerize the audience with his recitation. By his power of speech, he reiterated the message that Allah being the Creator of existence and embodiment of all attributes generates a sense of responsibility among believers.²⁰ The responsibility demands sole submission from His creations. He repeated through examples from the Holy Qurān that *Nabuwwat* (Prophethood) and *Tauheed* (Belief in One God) are indispensable for Muslims. Prophets being messengers of God convey His words and are accountable to God²¹. He taught Muslims that the Holy Qurān was revealed upon Prophet Muhammad (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace) as the *only* source of guidance for them and the rest of humanity. He referred to miracles of the Holy Qurān as “there was no paper, no pen, no staff, no government or worldly means to publish and distribute the book, yet the Holy Qurān is even preserved in the hearts of millions of people²². He challenged scholars to bring any book which had been published in such abundance or preserved in the hearts of so many people²³. This shows that Bukhari like his contemporaries, tried to create a ‘public space’ for Muslim minority in Indian environment.

Bukhari was a staunch believer of Prophet Muhammad (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace) as the Final Messenger/Prophet of Allah, evident from frequent references in his speeches. He propagated the uncompromising concept of Finality of Prophethood (*Khatm-e-Nabuwwat*). He asserted that “historically Prophets were sent for individual nations or territories... Prophet Muhammad (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace) was declared (*Rehmat-ul-lil-Alimeen*) i.e. The Most Beneficent, and Mercy, ‘supreme guide’ and ‘Prophet for the people of the universe²⁴. Bukhari further explained that after inception Prophet Muhammad (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace) the world has essentially reached the unanimous juncture of a pre-requisite of one religion, one government and one language. Humanity contests against religious division. Therefore, the Will of Allah (*Mashiyyat-i-Ilahi*) supersedes eagerness of masses for peace and unity.²⁵

Zafar Ali Khan paid tribute to Bukhari's love for Prophet Muhammad (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace) in the following verse.²⁶

ہر آن گونجتے ہیں بخاری کے زمزمے
بلبل چہک رہا ہے ریاضِ رسول میں

(The chants of Bukhari echo at every moment; like a nightingale singing in the Prophet's paradise)

Colonial India also witnessed his anti-Rajpal movement, an example of Bukhari's love for the Prophet Muhammad (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace). By the end of 1926, a blasphemous book *Rangila Rasool* written by Hindu Professor Pandit Champawati (DAV College Lahore) published by Rajpal infuriated Muslims across India who protested against the publisher at large. Consequently, British administration imposed section 144 in Lahore and ordered a ban on all public meetings. However, Muslims continued their protest against the blasphemer, the Hindu publisher. A protest meeting was held in Abdul Rahim's compound where besides, Ata'ullah Shah Bukhari, Chaudhary Afzal Haque, Mufti Kifayatullah and Maulana Ahmad Sa'eed Dehlavi were also present.²⁷ Ata'ullah Shah extensively used that platform to establish a newly created public sphere to prove the case of Finality of Prophethood: he addressed them thus:

“You have ... to safeguard the honor and pride of all Prophet Muhammad (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace) who strived hard to earn honor and pride for down trodden humans on earth. Now his honor is at stake! You have great regard and love for your Prophet Muhammad (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace). Today the Prophet Muhammad (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace) would not be at ease under his dome. If you sacrifice your lives for the Prophet's honor, it will bring you an everlasting life.²⁸”

Ata'ullah Shah was arrested by British government for his speeches on 10 July 1927. He was tried under Section 107 in Lahore Central Jail and sentenced to one-year rigorous imprisonment in Rohtak Jail, from where he was released in May 1928. The above-mentioned speech motivated Ilm-ud-Din, a young carpenter from Lahore, to punish the publisher. He killed Rajpal on 16 April 1929, was arrested, tried, and hanged on 31 October 1929.²⁹ Ata'ullah Shah along with Maulana Habib-ur-Rehman Ludhianvi and Ghazi Abdur-Rehman, was also sentenced one-year imprisonment in this case.³⁰

Ata'ullah Shah Bukhari's second stance, against *Qadiani* activities also mobilized masses in 1916 to protect the honor of Holy Prophet Muhammad (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace). The issue was again based on the Muslim's belief of finality of prophethood. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908) born in *Qadian* professed and claimed to be in direct communion with God and falsely claimed to have received revelations. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's claim was

a basic denial of a cardinal belief of the Muslim doctrine of *Khatm-e-Nabuwwat* (Finality of Prophethood) that Prophet Muhammad (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace) is the last Prophet of God and will remain as the Guide of humanity till the Day of Judgment.³¹ Ata'ullah Shah believed that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was cultivated by British government who created, nourished and protected him and his creed. He established office of the Majlis-i-Ahrar in Qadian in 1933 to counter Qadiani activities. Majlis-i-Ahrar under his directions held a three-day conference in Qadian from 21-23 October 1934. Around fifty thousand ulama and common Muslims from all schools of thought attended the conference which instilled confidence and courage among the Muslim community. Ata'ullah Shah delivered his speech on 21 October at 09:30 pm till morning. He asserted that "the faith of *Khatm-i-Nabuwwat* is the center of *Tauhid*, *Risalat*, Day of Judgment, Angels, the Holy Qurān, God's Absoluteness and the world here after death."³² He was arrested in Mussoori for this speech. However, he was released on bail in Dera Doon the very next day.³³

The government banned the entry of Ahrars in District Gurdaspur. Violating the ban, Ata'ullah Shah went there for Juma' prayers, and was arrested.³⁴ After four months' trial in the Court of the District Magistrate, he was sentenced to six months' rigorous imprisonment, which Session Judge, Mr. G.D. Khosla reduced to simple imprisonment. Then, he was shifted from Gurdaspur Jail to Central Jail, Lahore and released on 15 April 1936.³⁵

Ata'ullah Shah also tried to counter Qadiani influence in Kashmir politics. Chaudhry Zafrullah Khan tried to enter Kashmir politics through supporting an indigenous resistance movement in 1931. Ata'ullah Shah met Allama Iqbal in September 1931 along with Maulana Habibur-Rehman and informed him about the Qadiani intrigues in the Kashmir Committee. Consequently, Allama Iqbal removed Mirza Bashiruddin from the Kashmir committee and Ahrar were entrusted with the responsibility of leading the Kashmir movement.³⁶ He continued his anti-Qadiani movement after partition, in Pakistan. The agitation was triggered in 1953 by a speech of Sir Zafrullah Khan, the foreign minister of Pakistan before the Anjuman-i-Ahmadiyya at Jahangir Park in Karachi on 18 May 1952.³⁷ The agitation quickly turned into a movement by a broad-based alliance of religious political parties demanding declaration of Ahmadis as non-Muslims and removing them from key posts.³⁸ For the time-being movement failed to achieve its objective, yet it succeeded later when Zulfikar Ali Bhutto declared Ahmadis as non-Muslims through the Constitution of 1973. Maulana Zafar Ali Khan recognized and

appreciated Bukhari's speeches against the Qadiani creed in the following verse.³⁹

یہ مانا بھول جائے قادیاں میرے تحائف کو
مگر کیا بھول سکتا ہے وہ سو غائبیں بخاری کی

(Qadian may forget my gifts; but how could it forget Bukhari's bestowal)

Ata'ullah Shah had great love and respect for the *Sahabis* (Companions) of Holy Prophet Muhammad (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace) who observed and believed his teachings and practices. He referred to the Surah Tawba in the Holy Qurān where Allah has stated that

وَالسَّابِقُونَ السَّابِقُونَ أُولَئِكَ مِنْكُمْ أُولُو الْأَنْصَارِ وَالَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوهُمْ بِإِحْسَانٍ رَضِيَ
اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ وَأَعَدَّ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا
ذَلِكَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ ﴿١٠٠﴾

Translation: (The early vanguard of the Emigrants and the Helpers and those who followed them in virtue, Allah is pleased with them and they are pleased with Him, and He has prepared for them gardens with streams running in them, to remain in them forever. That is the great success.)⁴⁰

He complimented them in these words: “We have to admit that the characters of the Holy companions (R.A) were exemplary. If anyone has any doubt on their character, the Prophethood of Holy Prophet Muhammad (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace) will be at stake.”⁴¹ He particularly referred to Hazrat Umar Farooq-i-Azam (R.A) and Hazrat Khalid bin Walid (R.A) once arch enemies of Islam but who accepted Islam after reckoning the truthfulness of Prophethood. Hazrat Abu-Bakr Siddiq (R.A) was the best Companion of Ḥaḍrat Muhammad *Rasūlullah Khātam un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam* even before *Nabuwat* and became affirmer and defender of his Prophethood. He also highly regarded Hazrat Aisha (R.A) as the Mother of the Faithful and dear wife of Prophet Muhammad (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace) affectionately called Humaira. The Holy Qurān confirmed her flawless character and her residence was the eternal abode of Holy Prophet Muhammad (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace)⁴².

To protect the honor of the companions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace), Ata'ullah Shah started Madaha-i-Sahaba Movement. During his speech in Lucknow, when he mentioned the Companions of Holy Prophet Muhammad (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace) and added the normal blessings, he was informed that it was a crime to bless the holy Companions. He was surprised that the British had promulgated a law at the behest of the Lucknow Shias that the praise of Companions particularly of Hazrat Abu Bakr (R.A), Hazrat 'Umar (R.A) and Hazrat 'Uthman (R.A) was a crime to be punished with two years' rigorous imprisonment. He openly questioned "how praise of anyone could be termed as a criminal offence. Government does not impose any restrictions on gambling, drinking and prostitution but the praise of *Khulfa-i-Rashideen* (the Righteous Caliphs) is an offence?"⁴³ He warned the government, that "I will ...launch a constitutional struggle to get this law repealed. If I am not successful, I am quite capable of using unconstitutional means as well."⁴⁴ He and his companions regularly visited Lucknow. At one time twenty-five thousand Muslims offered arrest. Maulana Mazhar Ali Azhar was leading this movement. At last, the law was repealed in July 1937.⁴⁵ This was a great achievement on the part of Ata'ullah Shah and his companions.

Ata'ullah Shah resolved an incident of Jamia' Masjid at Rawalpindi, which shows his courage and perseverance to defend Islam against the onslaughts of other communities. Gurdawara Parbandha committee started building a cinema hall near Jamia Masjid, Rawalpindi. Ata'ullah Shah called a meeting of all important Hindu, Sikh and Muslim dignitaries as well as the Deputy Commissioner to Jami'a Masjid. He made a speech on the sanctity of religious places and appealed to the Sikh community to resist this move. Sikh leaders promised that they would not construct that cinema. Next morning, Sikhs announced that the construction would continue. In response, he called a meeting at night and delivered a short speech asserting:

Dear brethren! We are not at war with anyone. If a community tends to be unresponsive, we should not be afraid... Let us work in a way that the problem is solved in an amicable way. You must promise to follow my instructions...Dear Brethren! I tried my best to stop the construction of the Cinema. But they did not listen to me. All I want is that Masjid and Cinema should not be in close vicinity. Either of the two must be uprooted.⁴⁶

The whole crowd supported him and ran towards the cinema. In the morning, there was not a single brick in the whole vicinity.

Ata'ullah Shah enthusiastically protected his community against Shuddhi and Sanghtan movements initiated by extremist Hindu leaders. The literal meaning of Shuddhi is to purify. Swami Shardhanand launched Shuddhi movement in 1921-22. It proclaimed that Hindustan is for Hindus. Its leaders declared that Muslims, Christians and other people living in Hindustan had to live as Hindus. Dr. Ishtiaq Hussain Qureshi pointed out the fact that Shuddhi movement primarily aimed at converting Muslims into Hindus. Others indicated that their prime targets were converted Muslims. This was a period of great trial and tribulations for the Muslims. Ata'ullah Shah devoted all his energies towards exposing the Hindu-British nexus and saving Muslims in the new crisis. Thousands of Muslims were saved through his preaching. He alleged in his speeches that the government is responsible for Hindu-Muslim riots. Consequently, he was arrested for his speeches in January 1925. He refused to pursue his case. Consequently, he was sentenced to six months' rigorous imprisonment with five hundred rupees fine. After release, he once again started a chain of public speeches against Shuddhi Movement.⁴⁷

Sanghtan movement was a contemporary movement. The literal meaning of Sanghtan is 'to mend' and 'the organization'. Historians differ on who was the founder of this movement. The majority considers Pandit Swami Madan Mohan Malvia as its founder but Chaudhary Khaliqquz-zaman credited Lala Lajpat Rai. The founders of Sanghtan movement planned to give training to Hindus in physical exercise, military training, club-fighting and wrestling to defend themselves. Khalid Bin Sayeed has stated another purpose of uniting Hindus by removing the concept of *Chhoot Chhat*, (Untouchability) so that they could live their lives together happily and to encourage them to fight against the Muslims and the Christians. Ata'ullah Shah Bukhari rigorously struggled against Hindu fanaticism. The newspaper *Zamindar* appreciated his struggle against these movements.⁴⁸

Ata'ullah Shah and Majlis-i-Ahrar-i-Islam had attained a key position in the Punjab politics. It was unprecedented as traditionally landlords had a firm grip over the Punjab politics. But Masjid Shaheed Ganj affected its position in the Punjab. The Sikhs occupied a Masjid at Shaheed Ganj near Gurdaspur for a long time and denied that it had ever been a masjid. The masjid was demolished on 7-8 July 1935⁴⁹ which agitated the Muslims. Though the workers of Ahrar were part of the agitation but no prominent Ahrar leader was present during this

movement. Ahrars' dilemma was that if it participated in the movement, it may be crushed on this pretext and if refrained may lose its political weightage.⁵⁰ Ata'ullah Shah clarified his position during a speech in Shahi Masjid that confrontation with Sikhs as well as the British was inevitable yet this is not the right moment for it. The other Muslim parties particularly Zafar Ali Khan's Ittehad-i-Millat bitterly criticized Ahrar leaders' indifference on this issue. Consequently, Ahrar lost its political support and could not win even a single seat from Lahore in the elections of 1937.⁵¹

IV

Ata'ullah Shah had strong commitment to the freedom of the Indian subcontinent. Shorish Kashmiri considers generating strong anti-British feelings among Indian Muslims as his greatest contribution.⁵² He was a staunch believer of the territorial nationalism and campaigned for United India among the Indian Muslims. He infused great vigor in the resistance movement against the British colonialists. His religious and political ideology inspired him to political action. He enthusiastically participated in all the anti-government movements. His love for freedom and hatred for colonial rulers pushed him to forge alliance with the Hindus and the Indian National Congress. His ideology sometimes forced him to make compromises as in the case of Shaheed Gunj Mosque and sometimes pitched him against his own co-religionists as against AIML, Khaksars and *Ittehad-i-Millat*. The ensuing pages discuss his entry into politics and his political struggle against colonialism.

During the First World War, the people of India had openly supported Britain. Almost every political party of the country assured the government of its loyalty. The British had promised that the Ottoman Caliphate would be restored to the Muslims as soon as peace was restored. Besides, on 20 August 1917, the British government announced its policy of gradually establishing self-government institutions in India.⁵³ Contrary to its promises, the British government enacted Rowlatt Act⁵⁴ to strengthen the law enforcing agencies against revolutionary and terrorist activities. Through this Act, the press was divested of its free opinion; judicial powers were delegated to the executive; public officers were empowered to exile or send to prison any person accused of anti-government activities.⁵⁵ Consequently, Indians were disappointed.⁵⁶ On 6 April 1919, the people went on strike. Public meetings and processions were organized throughout the country to protest on this "Black Law".⁵⁷ Police fired a crowd on Amritsar railway station. When dead bodies were brought to the Mosque of Hall Bazar Khairuddin. Ata'ullah Shah washed

the dead bodies and buried them. He served human beings and earned respect among the non-Muslims as well.⁵⁸

At the start of his political career many political leaders inspired him. He mentioned that Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's *Al-Hilal* and Maulana Zafar Ali Khan's *Zamindar* and *Sitara-i-Subh* involved him in the brigade of freedom fighters.⁵⁹ In a procession in Lahore, he remarked that "Zafar Ali Khan! Your *Sitara-i-Subh* has ignited fire in my heart."⁶⁰ Maulana Dawud Ghaznavi wrote that:

"When he established Khilafat Committee in Amritsar, some people instigated Shah Ji against me. I guessed that Shah Ji is ignorant of current trends of politics. I called him and discussed the current situation with him. He neither reads newspapers nor is aware of national politics. He was not fully aware of even the Khilafat Issue. On my request, he spent few days with me and learned everything within a short span of time. Then the world witnessed how this majestic orator inspired the whole country."⁶¹

Sir Michael O' Dwyer, the Governor of the Punjab damaged the situation with his strict actions.⁶² As Gandhi's Satyagrah movement⁶³ further unnerved the government,⁶⁴ General Dyer banned all public meetings. Unaware of his orders, thousands of villagers from the neighbourhood gathered in Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar to celebrate Baisakhi festival. On 13 April 1919, these people were fired upon and thousands of them were massacred. According to the official report, four hundred people died and several thousand wounded.⁶⁵ This upheaval dragged Ata'ullah Shah into politics. This tragedy intensified rebellious feelings in him, and he began to oppose colonial rule vigorously.⁶⁶ This incident convinced him to co-opt the Hindus for freedom from colonial rulers.

In December 1919, all parties of India including the Indian National Congress, the Muslim League and the Khilafat Conference convened their annual convention in Goal Bagh, Amritsar. From the Khilafat conference platform, Ata'ullah Shah made his debut political speech which raised his stature to that of a national leader. On his appeal, people donated generously for the cause of Khilafat and ten lakh rupees were collected there.⁶⁷ Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar eulogized his speech in his newspaper *Comrade*.

The popular protest in the Punjab against Rowlett Act transformed into the Non-Cooperation movement. Gandhi started Swadeshi

movement to boycott foreign things.⁶⁸ In August 1920, the Prince of Wales was greeted with a strike in India. In February 1921, Ata'ullah Shah addressed Congress Annual Session in Calcutta and on Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's invitation, delivered a speech in support of the Khilafat movement and the Non-Cooperation Movement. After this speech, he became prominent among the top national leaders. He strived hard to establish the branches of Khilafat Committee in all parts of India. Under his persuasion, an office of the Khilafat Committee was established in the house of Mian Sirajuddin Paracha. Syed Habib editor Daily *Siyasat* was elected as its President and Mian Ferozuddin Ahmad was elected its secretary. He toured District Gujrat and encouraged the people to resist British rule. He was supporting Hijrat Movement. Under the influence of his speeches, countless people migrated from Amritsar to Kabul.⁶⁹ He was arrested under 124-A of Indian Penal Code at Amritsar on 27 March 1921. The British Magistrate sentenced him to three years' imprisonment with three months' solitary confinement in Mianwali Jail on 8 April 1921.⁷⁰ He was released on 21 October 1923.⁷¹

In response to the Statutory Commission of British Parliament, in 1927 to review the Indian constitution, the Congress convened an all-parties conference and appointed a committee with Motilal Nehru as chairman which put proposals to the British government generally known as the Nehru Report.⁷² The Muslims opposed it and presented counter proposals in the form of Quadi-i-Azam's Fourteen Points in an All India Muslim Conference at Delhi in 1929.⁷³

The Nehru Report also disillusioned the Ahrar leaders who decided to form their own political party. According to Janbaz Mirza, Majlis-e-Ahrar evolved from an idea into a political party on 29 December 1929⁷⁴. Ata'ullah Shah Bukhari chaired the meeting outside Delhi Gate where Majlis-i-Ahrar was launched.⁷⁵ In his address, he particularly urged the youth to fight for the freedom of their country.⁷⁶ He was elected its first President.⁷⁷ W. C. Smith calls it "an Indian nationalist Muslim group with an ardent and explicitly Muslim enthusiasm for Indian liberty".⁷⁸ During 1930 and 1932, the Ahrars worked side by side with the Congress in the Civil Disobedience Movement offering many sacrifices, thereby contributing a good deal to the nationalist struggle. In a session of Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Hind on 3 May 1930 at Amroha, district Moradabad (UP), Ata'ullah Shah mesmerized the audience continuously for seventeen hours.⁷⁹ He toured the whole subcontinent to motivate people against the government. During this period, he escaped two murder attempts in Agra and Bombay. At last he was arrested in Bengal and sentenced to six

months' imprisonment in Dum Dum jail. He was released in January 1931 under the Gandhi-Irwin Pact.⁸⁰

Another significant contribution of Ata'ullah Shah was his struggle in Kashmir. He participated in the first Conference of Majlis-i-Ahrar under the chairmanship of Maulana Habib-ur-Rehman Ludhianwi in Habibia Hall, Lahore in 1930. Various delegations of Ahrar went to Kashmir in September-October 1931, to negotiate with the Maharaja of Kashmir to redress the grievances of the Kashmiri Muslims.⁸¹ The delegations returned unsuccessful. Ata'ullah Shah criticized the Maharaja in his speeches at various places. He exposed the atrocities of the Maharaja and the miserable plight of the Kashmiri Muslims. Consequently, he was arrested along with about fifty thousand Muslims on 15 October 1931 under section 124 A, and the court sentenced him to 6 months rigorous imprisonment. He was released on 26 October 1932. He once again started anti- government campaign through Ahrars' civil disobedience movement.⁸² They sent Muslim volunteers from the Punjab through Sialkot border to help Kashmiri Muslims. This move was not effective because, as soon as they entered, they were arrested and tortured in jails, yet it proved significant in providing moral support and assistance in indigenous resistance movement.

Though Ata'ullah Shah supported the Congress in its struggle for freedom yet whenever Congress took anti-Muslim stance, he condemned it vigorously.⁸³ After the election of 1937, the attitude of Congress grew more rigid towards the Muslims.⁸⁴ Maulana Abul Kalam announced that the prominent Muslims could earn eligibility for cabinet positions only by dissolving their own parliamentary party.⁸⁵ In Lucknow, a meeting of Majlis-i-Ahrar was held from 17-19 April 1937. Mr. Kriplani, Secretary of Congress was also invited to participate in the session. He refused to come declaring Majlis-i-Ahrar a sectarian party. Ata'ullah Shah was shocked over the Congress leaders' unreasonable attitude towards the Muslims. He said that if Congress did not form coalition governments with the AIML, the Congress would lose its respect. Majlis-i-Ahrar announced Civil Disobedience Movement on 10 July 1937. The Congress government suppressed it. Twenty-five thousand Muslims were arrested who were released by the Governor of UP on 14 November 1937.⁸⁶ When Congress rule over India convinced the Muslims that Hindu-Muslim unity could not be achieved, the Muslim League for the first time categorically adopted the idea of partition of India as its final destination in the annual meeting at Lahore on 23 March 1940.⁸⁷

Ata'ullah Shah considered the creation of Pakistan not a perfect solution. He wanted salvation for the whole Muslim nation of the sub-

continent. He indicated that more than 35 percent Muslims of India would remain under permanent Hindu rule. Representatives of various Indian nationalist Muslim parties and groups including the Congress Muslims, the Ahrars, the Jamiat-ul-Ulama-i-Hind, Shia Political Conference, gathered at Delhi in March 1940 except the AIML and the Khaksars. Allah Bakhsh, the Premier of Sindh presided over the Azad Muslim Conference. They criticized the demand for Pakistan and labelled it a British idea and an excuse for political inaction. Ata'ullah Shah Bukhari also criticized Jinnah in his speeches as "the biggest obstacle in the way of India's freedom".⁸⁸ The Ahrars offered a counter proposal of 'Kingdom of God' (*Hukumat-i-Ilahiya*) in India. Ata'ullah Shah Bokhari was a leading proponent of this form of government.

This concept was a kind of righteous and moral order. It meant for the formation of a government based on Islamic *Shari'ah*, where people would be treated with respect and dignity, derived from the Holy Qur'an. Exploitation of the poor by the rich would be curtailed; as all were deemed equal in divine order. Under this divine rule, there would be no scope for untouchability or any kind of racial discrimination, and nobody would be allowed to exploit the weak and the poor. The basis for this order stemmed not from force or coercion but an inner discipline.⁸⁹

It was a utopian concept and difficult to realize practically. The idea was propagated extensively through sermons and pamphlets yet it could not attract the Muslims.⁹⁰ The Ahrar leaders failed to explain the strategy to establish this *Hukumat*. With the inevitability of Pakistan, Ata'ullah Shah, predicted: "There will be an intervening Hindustan between East and West Pakistan and both the parts will not remain together for long under the same government."⁹¹ He feared that "it is very difficult to raise an active leadership from the Muslim League in Pakistan after the Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah. A Government does not function on mere sentimentalism. There is a strong likelihood that both countries would become the agents of superpowers and the threat of war will perpetuate."⁹² Though, Ata'ullah Shah and other Ahrar leaders accepted partition of India yet they disagreed on the geographical boundary of the country. He was against the British Scheme of division of the Punjab Province whereas the Muslim League had been forced to accept it.⁹³

Changed dynamics of post partition politics brought change in the views and policies of Ata'ullah Shah and the Ahrars. He resolved his differences with the Muslim League after the establishment of Pakistan. They accepted their political defeat and resolved to work for the development and prosperity of the new state. Ata'ullah Shah declared that "Pakistan has come into existence; I will go all out for defending every

inch of this land. I love it as much as anyone can claim; I am a man of deeds. If anyone dared to look at it with evil intention, I will take his eyes out. If anyone raised hand, I will chop it off. I consider my life not even worth of a penny as compared to the honor of my country. My blood and honor are destined for the country.”⁹⁴

V

To sum up, Ata'ullah Shah was one of the greatest orators of this century. He inspired millions of people with his speeches. He served his community and whenever his beliefs and his co-religionists were threatened, he devotedly launched movements to protect their interests. His anti-Rajpal movement, Qadiani movement, Madaha-i-Shahaba movement are a proof of his commitment. He paved the way towards freedom of the Indian subcontinent through actively participating and launching anti-British movements. The story of the freedom movement is incomplete without highlighting his contribution. Despite all his contribution to the freedom struggle, he failed to judge the changing dynamics of contemporary politics and chose to oppose the demand of Pakistan. Ata'ullah Shah and other Ahrar leaders failed to take the right decisions at the right moment. They overlooked the fact that the Muslims had determined their destination and so began to march towards it. The popularity of the Lahore Resolution among the Indian Muslims became evident by the results of the elections of 1945-46, in which the All-India Muslim League emerged as the single largest political party of the Indian Muslims. India was partitioned and Pakistan emerged on the map of the world on 14 August 1947.⁹⁵ After independence, he courageously accepted his defeat, announced to support Pakistan Muslim League in politics and continued his movement for religious reformation of the Muslim society in Pakistan. Finally, his life-long struggle against Qadianis succeeded when Ahmadis were declared non-Muslims by the National Assembly through the Constitution of 1973.

Notes and References

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³ *Ibid*, 46.

⁴ Francis Robinson, “Islam and Muslim Separatism”, Athena S. Leoussi, and Steven Grosby, (eds.) *Nationality and Nationalism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 58-59.

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¹¹ Kashmiri, *Syed Ata'ullah Shah Bokhari*, 272.

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- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 307. Also see for details Ashraf Ata, *Kuch Shikasta Daastanei Kuch PreshanTazkaray* (Lahore: Sindh Sagar Academy, 1966), 241-247.
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- ⁵¹In 1936, the issue was resolved through Jinnah's mediation. *Ibid.*, 251; Zulfiqar, *Jadudhd-i-Azadi main Punjab Ka Kirdar*, 308-310.
- ⁵²Kashmiri, *Syed Ata'ullah Shah Bokhari*, 275.
- ⁵³ S. M. Burke, *Landmarks of the Pakistan Movement* (Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, 2011), 146.
- ⁵⁴The Defense Act was replaced with the Rowlatt Act that was based on the recommendation of the Indian Sedition Committee chaired by the British Judge Sir Sydney Rowlatt passed on 18 March 1919. Qalb-i-Abid and Mussrat Abid, *Punjab Politics*, 25-26.
- ⁵⁵ Burke, *Landmarks of the Pakistan Movement*, 147.
- ⁵⁶ Quaid-i-Azam resigned from Legislative Council and Gandhi renounced his title of *Kaiser-e-Hind* by the British government in recognition of his services during the war. *Ibid.*, 147-150
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 147-150.
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- ⁵⁹Cited in Shorish Kashmiri, *Syed Ata'ullah Shah Bokhari*, 48.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁶¹Kashmiri, *Syed Attaullah Shah Bokhari*, 48.
- ⁶² He did not believe in self-government for Indians. Qalb-i-Abid and Mussrat Abid, *Punjab Politics*, 23-25.

⁶³ Which doctrinally believed in superiority of soul-force over material might and it laid a moral obligation of Satyagari to break tyranny to which Dwyer responded that “there is a force mightier than soul force”. *Ibid*, 25.

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⁶⁵ Nearly eight hundred persons were arrested on mere suspicion and kept under custody without trial. Martial Law notices were pasted on the houses of Indian political workers. The students in colleges were called up four times a day to parade under the scorching sun and shadows of machine guns. Burke, *Landmarks of the Pakistan Movement*, 150-154.

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⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 138.

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⁸² *Ibid*, 210-211.

⁸³Provincial Legislative Assemblies Election held in 1937. The Congress won 706 out of a total of 1,771 seats. Non-Congress Hindus won all 211 Hindu seats. Besides, the Congress won only 26 seats out of the total 482 Muslim seats, less than five percent (5%). Unionist Party of Sir Fazl-i-Hussain won majority of the Muslim seats. The Muslim League won only 102 seats. Congress contested only 58 seats and won only 26. In'amullah Khawaja, *The Creation of Pakistan* (Lahore: Pakistan Study Centre & Research Society of Pakistan, 2012), 28.

⁸⁴Gandhi declared “I would not accept any other party except the Congress”. He added, “Damn it by whatever name you may, there can be only one party in India

and that is the Congress.” Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru stated that even a microscope would not reveal the existence of minorities in India. After the election, he declared, “there are only two parties in the country, the Congress and the Government, the rest must lineup, and those who are not with us are against us.” Cited in Naureen, *Role of Ata'ullah Shah*, 110-112.

⁸⁵The Congress hoisted tri-colored flags on buildings. The *Bande Matram* anthem aggravated the tense atmosphere. Congress declared Hindi as official language. Widia Mandir scheme was a plot of depriving non-Hindus, especially Muslims from their culture and aimed at propagating Hinduism. The slaughter of cow was prohibited, and criminal laws were enacted for its defiance. Besides, Hindu-Muslim riots shattered the hopes of Hindu-Muslim unity.

⁸⁶The Congress provincial ministries resigned on 22 December 1939 on the advice of the Congress executive committee on the British government's declaration of War against Germany without taking Congress cabinets into confidence. *Ibid*, 113.

⁸⁷The then Prime Minister of Bengal, A K Fazlul-Haq declared that: “It is the considered view of this session of the All India Muslim League that no conditional plan would be workable in this country or acceptable to the Muslims unless it is designed on the following basic principles; that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted with such territorial readjustment as may be necessary that the Muslims are numerically in the North-Western and Eastern Zones of India should be grouped to which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign. Furthermore, that adequate effective and mandatory safeguards should be specifically provided in the constitutions for minorities in these units for the protection of their religious, cultural, economic, political, administrative and other rights and interests in consultation with them.”

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⁸⁹Awan, *Political Islam in Colonial Punjab*, 129-130.

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⁹⁵*Ibid*, 117.