

## STRUCTURE AND DYNAMICS OF POLITICAL ROLE OF RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP: A HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE ROLE OF ABDUL GHAFOOR AND WALI AHMAD

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### Abstract

*Swat, currently a district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan has a long history. The Yusufzai Afghans of Kabul occupied Swat in the sixteenth century, but they did not succeed in establishing a formal government and were divided into factions and lived in a tribal way, however during this time, the religious leaders played considerable political role in uniting the people of Swat. They have performed a great role in creating political awareness in the people of Swat. They mobilized and guided the people in time of trouble. On the basis of their influence, they altered the political history of Swat to a great extent. The present research aims at examining political role of two religious' leaders, i.e Abdul Ghafoor and Wali Ahmad in Swat. Mostly, primary and reliable secondary sources have been used to build a logical and coherent argument in the article.*

**Key words:** Abdul Ghafoor, Dir, Political Role, Religious Leadership, Swat, Wali Ahmad.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The valley of Swat is situated in the north of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Province of Pakistan. Due to its strategic location and beauty, foreign invaders and visitors had accorded it greater importance (Begum, 1992). Though this valley has an ancient history, but in the light of historical documents, its recorded history begins with the invasion of Alexander (Khan, 1958). Alexander conquered Swat in 326 B.C, but the people threw up allegiance to the Greeks after the departure of Alexander (Hassan,

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1988-90). In 304 BC, the general of Alexander, Salukis once again attacked on Swat. He gave Swat to Chandragupta. Ashoka, the grandson of Chandragupta adopted Buddhism and spread it in the region. In his time, Swat was viewed as a sacred place for Buddhists (Sultan-i-Rome, 2008).

In the beginning of the eleventh century, the last Buddhist ruler in Swat was Raja Gira. In 1001 A.D, Mahmud Ghaznavi attacked on Swat. A battle was fought between Raja Gira and Mahmud Ghaznavi in which the former was killed and as a result of this battle the Buddhist era came to an end and Muslim era began in Swat (Khan, 1958). The Yusufzai Afghans occupied Swat in the sixteenth century, but they did not establish a formal government and were divided into factions and lived in a tribal way. They were divided into opposite blocks, always at rivalry with each other for primacy in the area (Sultan-i-Rome, 2008). However, during this time, the religious leaders have played a vital political role in the society. The role of religious leaders in Swat was not only religious but also political in nature. They assumed the role of freedom fighters and effective mediators in tribal troubles and involved in power politics. They have played such a role in the politics of Swat that without its reference the political history of Swat is incomplete.

## **2. POLITICAL ROLE OF ABDUL GHAFOOR (SAIDU BABA)**

Swat has observed the emergence of many religious leaders who have played political role in the society. Among those religious leaders who played political role in Swat, one was, Abdul Ghafoor, popularly known as Saidu Baba. He was born at Jabrai a hamlet in Swat, in 1794 (Aamir, 2009). He was the son of Abdul Wahid Khan. He belonged to a Safi tribe of Mohmand (Hay, 1934). As there was no educational institution in Swat in those days, therefore, after receiving some early education at home, he decided to go to other places for search of knowledge.

He went to Brangola a village in Dir and learned reading and writing from a priest. There he also learnt the Holy Quran by heart. After acquiring basic education at Brangola, he went to Gujar Garhi, a village in Mardan and became the student of Maulana Abdul Hakeem for some time (Nasar, 1950). After a while he went to Chamkani a village in Peshawar, where he received education from Abdullah Miangul. After that, he went to Ziarat Kaka Sahib a village in Nowshera, where he became a

disciple of Hazrat Mian Muhammad Naeem Kakakhel. Thus, he moved from place to place in search of knowledge (Qadria, 1977).

From his early life he was interested in spiritualism. During his stay at Ziarat Kaka Sahib, he meditated at a mosque for spiritual exercise. In search of a spiritual guide he went to Peshawar and became the disciple of Hazratji Peshawari. When he completed his spiritual training according to the Naqashbandiyya order, he decided to go to Tordher a village in Swabi to become the disciple of Maulana Muhammad Shuaib, who was a famous Sufi of Qadariyya order in those days. He took oath of allegiance to Sheikh Sahib and became his disciple. The sincerity and honesty of Abdul Ghafoor, so much impressed him that he paid full attention to him, and taught him about spiritualism. When he completed his spiritual training according to the Qadriyya order, Shaykh Sahib allowed him to preach the teachings of Qadariyya order (Khan, 1958).

At the age of twenty years, he settled in a place on the bank of river Indus in the village of Beka, near Hund in 1816. There he built a room for himself on the bank of the river and lived there for twelve years. Due to his sanctity and holiness he got the attraction of the people and people gave him the title of the Akhund. In 1935, he returned to Swat and stayed in a mosque at Maloch (Khan, 1958). From Maloch he went to Rangeela and after staying there for some time he went to Hoodigram. From Hoodigram he went to Marghuzar and settled down there (Qasmi, n.d). In the meantime, a delegation from Spal Bandai came to him and invited him to Spal Bandai, he accepted this offer and went to Spal Bandai. He married a pious lady belonging to the family of Nekpi Khel (Caroe, 1984). Allah blessed him with two sons and one daughter. His two sons were Miangul Abdul Hanan and Miangul Abdul khaliq. He left Spal Bandai in 1845 and went to Saidu Sharif where he spent the rest of his life (Khan, 1985).

In those days, when Abdul Ghafoor returned to Swat in 1835, there was political instability, anarchy and confusion in the area (Aamir, 2009). Every tribe and every individual were free to do whatever they liked. There was bloodshed and carnage. According to the system prevailed there, land was distributed among the various tribes by drawing lots, which was repeated after every four, seven or ten years. On every such occasion, people who lost their lands were forced to move from place to place like nomads (Shaheen, 1982). There was Khanism in Swat at that time. The Khan was the most powerful person in the village. The poor people of the village cannot do anything

against the Khan. Farmers and laborers, who lived on the tenements owned by the Khan, were called *Kandaryan*. The Khan forced obedience from them by subjecting them to oppression and suppression (Shaheen, 1982).

In the absence of a proper government in the region, factionalism and forming parties was considered an important means of uniting the people. Factionalism was a favorite hobby of the people. Proving one's loyalty to one's faction, fighting for it and killing and dying for its sake was considered a matter of great honor by the Pukhtoons. Every Khan had a party and his party men helped him in time of need. The people of Swat were divided into two important groups, namely the land owners and the clergymen. These two groups dominated the politics of Swat at that time. The tribal chiefs were enjoying the support of their party men and the religious leaders were enjoying the support of their disciples. These two groups were often at strife with one another. In that period of darkness and ignorance, spilling human blood was considered a routine matter. Each party tried to strengthen its own position in the society (Shaheen, 1982).

A new era in the history of Swat started when Punjab was annexed by the British in 1849. On reaching the British power on their doorstep, the chiefs of Swat feared about their independence. In order to preserve their independence, they held *Jirgas* and consulted with Abdul Ghafoor. He was the most influential religious leader in Swat and was considered spiritual head of the people of Swat. He put forward the need of an organized government to face any future threats against the British. He suggested to the *Jirga*, that they should choose a king for Swat. The people wanted to make Abdul Ghafoor as the head of the Pukhtoon tribes in Swat, but he rejected this offer and suggested the name of Sayed Akbar Shah of Sithana for kingship. All the chiefs accepted his proposal and Sayed Akbar Shah of Sithana a descendent of Pir Baba was declared as the king of Swat in 1849 (Caroe, 1957). This was a good decision of Abdul Ghafoor, because Syed Akbar Shah was a religious leader and succeeded in creating unity in the people (Khan, 1977).

Abdul Ghafoor was not only a staunch Muslim but was also a wise politician and a champion of freedom who dedicated his whole life for the service of humanity. On the instance of Abdul Ghafoor, Syed Akbar Shah raised an army, in order to keep an effective check on the oppressive forces in the region. Now the position of the king

was strong and no one in the region could challenge the authority of the king. This military power proved a decisive factor in settling the inter-tribal disputes. (Rahman, Momand & Kaka khel, 1978).

Abdul Ghafoor and Syed Akbar Shah tried to guide the people towards Islam and created unity among them. Syed Akbar Shah died on 11th May, 1857. After his death, his son Mubarak Ali Shah, became the king but he was dethroned and expelled by the Swati tribes from Swat after only a few weeks reign (Sultan-Rome, 2008).

For the first time, the British and the people of Swat confronted at Ambela in 1863 A.D. After annexing Peshawar for the purpose of strengthening their position in NWFP, the British thought it necessary to defeat the tribesmen of the Frontier Region. Hence, they gave attention towards Sithana, which was an important center of the freedom fighters and were attacked on them time and again and created disturbances in the area. These activities were an ever-impending threat to the very existence of the British Raj. So, they decided to eliminate the *Mujahidin* and destroy their strong-hold situated at Malka and thus sent an expedition, known as the Ambela expedition, against the *Mujahidin*, under the command of Brigadier General Nevill B. Chamberlain in 1863 (Bangash, 2011).

When *Mujahidin* came to know about the intentions of the British, they decided to seek the help of tribal chiefs and religious leaders against the British. In this connection their leader Mulvi Abdullah wrote a letter to Abdul Ghafoor and requested him to help them against the British. Abdul Ghafoor decided to help the *Mujahidin* against the British. On the call of Abdul Ghafoor, the people decided to participate in the war against the British. The people of Swat, Buner, Dir and Bajaur went towards Ambela to stop the British advance. The combined tribes stopped the British forces for two months. When the imperial power failed militarily they used their diplomacy, as a treaty was concluded between Abdul Ghafoor and the British. According to the treaty the British Army went towards Malka and burnt a hut in the outskirts of the village and retreated without actually entering the village (Khan, 1958). With this they wanted to cover up their weakness. In this battle 14 British officers and 1000 soldiers died. The spirit and determination of Abdul Ghafoor compelled the British forces to return unsuccessful. When the last soldier of the British Army had left the border of Swat, then Abdul Ghafoor moved to Saidu Sharif. This battle of Ambela is known in the

history as *Ghaza-i-Buner* (Khan, 1958). The battle of Ambela is considered the greatest battle in the history of Asia after the War of 1857. After the battle of Campaign, the people remained peaceful (Khan, 1977).

Abdul Ghafoor earned a good name for the valley of Swat through his noble conduct and work. He dedicated his life for the spreading of Islam and reformation of the society. He organized people and created unity among them. He passed away on January 12th, 1877 at Saidu Sharif, Swat and was buried in the mosque of Saidu Sharif. Abdul Ghafoor was a great religious leader and Sufi, who had a great influence on the people. On the death of Abdul Ghafoor, the people of this region were deprived of a great leader (Khan, 1977).

### **3. POLITICAL ROLE OF WALI AHMAD (SANDAKAI BABA)**

Wali Ahmad, popularly known as Sandakai Baba or Kohistani Mullah, was born at Sandakai, a village in former district Swat and now district Shangla of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He was the son of Maulana Abdul Hamid, who was a renowned religious scholar of his time (Natvi, 2014). Information about his date of birth is not available. He received his early education from his father, Maulana Abdul Hamid (Rah-e-Wafa, 2004). After receiving early knowledge from his father, he went to Jatkol a village in district Shangla and became a student of Maulana Sahibuddin alias Kakaje Baba. From him, he learnt the traditional courses of theology (Natvi 2014, 199). Then he went to Peshawar and received religious knowledge from Maulana Muhammad Israeel. He visited different places in search of knowledge and religious inspiration (Barth, 1985).

When Wali Ahmad completed his religious education, he took interest in spiritualism. Hazrat Najmuddin was a renowned Sufi in Afghanistan in those days. He was famous with the name of Hada Mulla, who belonged to Qadriyya order. Wali Ahmad took oath of allegiance to Hada Mulla. When Wali Ahmad completed his spiritual training according to the Qadriyya order, Hada Mulla authorized him to propagate the teachings of Qadriyya order. He started giving spiritual training to his disciples. Among those who gained spiritual knowledge from him, Maulana Muhammad Qamar and Maulana Syed Mahmud are very famous. Wali Ahmad performed spiritual exercises for six months in the shrine of Khwaja Muinuddin Ajmiri in Ajmir Sharif, India.

When Wali Ahmad returned from his journey, he established a Madrasah in the name of Jamia Rahmaniya at Tahkal, Peshawar. Students from far and near came and took admission in that Madrasah and in a very short period of time this Madrasah became a great center of Islamic learnings (Rah-e-Wafa, 2004). Wali Ahmad was impressed from Haji Sahib Turangzai, who was working against the British. (Khan, 1999).

Wali Ahmad started preparation for *Jihad* against the British due to which the British issued the warrant for his arrest, but before issuing of this order he knew about it and slipped away to Swat in 1910 (Sabir, n.d). When he came to Swat, there was political instability, anarchy and confusion in the area. The people were not accepting the rule of one person and remained active in opposite groups. Their internal fighting paralyzed the tribal culture (Khan, 2008). In this period of darkness and lawlessness spilling human blood was considered a routine matter. Each party tried to strengthen its own position in the society. There was no centralized control in Swat (Qasmi, n.d).

The Nawab of Dir, Sharif Khan attacked on Swat and captured the left bank of the Swat River in 1908 A.D. He erected his forts in Swat and started collecting the revenue from the people by force. When his injustices became intolerable for the people, they requested Wali Ahmad to get them rid from the tyrannies of the Nawab of Dir (Rah-e-Wafa, 2004). Wali Ahmad held meetings with all the tribal chiefs of Swat and concluded that unity is necessary among the people of Swat for ousting the Nawab of Dir from Swat. For creating unity among the people, he convened a *Jirga* in a graveyard in Matta, Swat. The Khans of different tribes participated in this *Jirga* and promised that they will support Wali Ahmad in ousting the Nawab of Dir from Swat (Rah-e-Wafa, 2004).

Wali Ahmad made a *lashker* from the people of Swat and attacked on the forces of Nawab of Dir and ousted the forces of the Nawab from Swat in 1915 and thus, the people of Swat get rid from the tyrannies of the Nawab of Dir. The defeat of the Nawab of Dir made Wali Ahmad very popular among the people. (Natvi, 2014).

After the expulsion of the forces of the Nawab of Dir from Swat, the people of Swat had a fear that the Nawab would again attack on Swat. As there was no centralized government in Swat therefore, Wali Ahmad gave an idea for a centralized government.

He settled the differences among the Khans of Swat and a council of five men, Masam Khan, (from Shamizai), Taj Muhammad Khan (from Sebuji), Zarin Khan, Amir Sultan and Jafar Khan (from Nikpi Khel) were appointed to manage the affairs. All the power was however, in the hands of Wali Ahmad (Sultan-i-Rome, 2008)).

The council, invited Wali Ahmad to be the king of Swat, but he did not accept this offer (Rah-e-Wafa, 2004). After the refusal of Wali Ahmad they invited Miangul Abdul Wadood to be the ruler of Swat. Miangul Abdul Wadood refused to be the ruler of Swat because he had differences with his own brother, which was a hurdle in his way. Therefore, Wali Ahmad proposed the name of Syed Abdul Jabbar Shah, a grandson of the former ruler Syed Akbar Shah to be the king of Swat. A *Jirga* went and meet him and offered him the kingship of Swat. Abdul Jabbar Shah accepted the offer and became the king of Swat in 1915 (Barth, 1985). His capital was Chindakhwara in Nikpi khel area. Fredrik Barth wrote:

“He was always very polite, rather a paternal looking man. He was a good scholar and orator. But he was a stranger to these parts; and though he came, and very swiftly set up some kind of state administration, he never brought his wife and family here. I think he was not confident that he would remain here.”

Abdul Jabbar Shah did not prove himself as a good ruler of Swat. He was an outsider and stranger and had no local party of his own in Swat. The Mianguls were also against him because they had the ambitions for ruling Swat. The Nawab of Dir was also struggling for the reoccupation of the Swati territories. As far as common people were concerned, he failed to give them justice or protection and to alleviate their poverty (Sultan-i-Rome, 2008). To all these problems, another major one was added when he was declared as Qadiyani. Due to these reasons Abdul Jabbar Shah became unpopular. So, Wali Ahmad and other Mullas protested against Abdul Jabbar Shah. They told him to clarify his position by swearing that he was not a Qadiyani or he should leave Swat. When Syed Abdul Jabbar Shah saw that the people of Swat are no more in his favor, he decided to leave Swat and go back to Sithana. Consequently, A *Jirga* of the people of Swat, was held on September 2, 1917, in which Abdul Jabbar Shah was dethroned (Sultan-i-Rome, 2008). The Monograph on Swat State states about this as:



The Swatis were growing impatient with the lack of success of their king. Sayyad Abdul Jabbar Shah is a man with a brilliant intellect, but he lacks stability, courage and proved himself far from a success as a leader in the Field. He has not the force of character, to keep the tribes from quarreling with each other and failed to rise anything in the nature of a standing army, which was essential if the Nawab was to be finally driven out of Swat. Further he was an Ahmadi, and though when he was first arrived, the Swatis paid little attention to this fact, his religious beliefs now began to make him unpopular. The Mianguls were also working against him, and on their promising the tribes to accept the leadership, the later requested to Sayyad Abdul Jabbar Shah to take his departure. He was finally escorted out of the country on September 4th, 1917 (Hay, 1934).

Miangul Abdul Wadood was the main political leader who played a role in the struggle against Abdul Jabbar Shah. The throne was once again offered to Miangul Abdul Wadood. Wali Ahmad called a *Jirga* at Kabal, Swat, where the ceremonial turban was tied around the head of Miangul Abdul Wadood in September 1917 (Barth, 1959). Thus, Wali Ahmad dethroned Abdul Jabbar Shah and made Miangul Abdul Wadood the ruler of Swat, playing the role of king maker and king breaker. This shows that Wali Ahmad was the real founder of Swat State because he united the people against the Nawab of Dir and ousted the forces of the Nawab of Dir from Swat. Firstly, he installed Abdul Jabbar Shah as the ruler of Swat State and then dethroned him and installed Miangul Abdul Wadood as the ruler of Swat State.

As Wali Ahmad dethroned one king and made another so, his influence increased and the people respected and obeyed him very much. Through his Reformist Movement, he reformed the society from un-Islamic practices. He once again made Shariat court and decided the cases of the people according to the Islamic principles. He lived as a *pir* in Swat and created political awareness in the people.

Due to the increasing influence of Wali Ahmad, Miangul Abdul Wadood felt himself insecure and feared that his increasing influence may cause threat to his power. He thought that for making his position safe, Wali Ahmad should be removed from the way. Khurshid Khan wrote about this as:

International Journal of Pukhtunkhwa

Volume 8 | Issue I | Jul – Dec 2023

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“In spite of the fact that he believed that a Pir and a ruler cannot rule at one and the same time and that one of them should be the ruler, he could not kill or destroy, Wali Ahmad because all the people of Upper Swat and particularly most of the Khans were his supporters. So, he told one or two persons to go and visit Wali Ahmad, and confidentially let it be known to him that Miangul Abdul Wadood was going to kill him” (Khan, 1999).

Miangul Abdul Wadood prepared a follower of Wali Ahmad, Sultanat Khan for convincing Wali Ahmad to migrate from Swat. Now Wali Ahmad felt difficulty in this situation. Although he was enjoying the support of the people, but the position of Miangul Abdul wadood was even stronger than him. As Miangul Abdul Wadood was the king, therefore, the Khans who were the supporters of Wali Ahmad previously now became the supports of Miangul Abdul Wadood. These Khans were getting privileges from Miangul Abdul Wadood. So, they did not want to support Wali Ahmad in his conflict with Miangul Abdul Wadood (Khan, 1999).

In this situation there were two alternatives before Wali Ahmad, either to fight with Miangul Abdul Wadood or migrate from Swat. Fighting with Miangul Abdul Wadood was not easy, because at that time Miangul Abdul Wadood was militarily more powerful than Wali Ahmad and it was difficult for him to face Miangul Abdul Wadood, So, he preferred the second option and migrated to Kohan, Dir along with his disciples. He tried to attack on Miangul Abdul Wadood with the help of the Nawab of Dir but did not succeeded. He died a natural death on 6th February 1927 (Rah-e-Wafa, 2004).

#### CONCLUSION

Religious leaders have played active role in the politics of Swat. They possessed great influence on the people through which they changed the political history of Swat. Abdul Ghafoor dominated the scene in the nineteenth century. When the people of Swat feared about their independence from the British, he nominated Syed Akbar shah as the ruler of swat in 1849. British attempts in defeating the base of Sayed Ahmad Barailvi’s followers in Malka in 1863 was responded by him. He united the people of Swat and counter the British advance. In the beginning of twentieth century another religious leader, Wali Ahmad played pivotal role in the politics of Swat. First, he ousted the Nawab of Dir from Swat and then laid the foundation of Swat State by nominating Syed

Abdul Jabbar Shah as the ruler of Swat in 1915 and then Miangul Abdul Wadood in 1917, thus playing the role of king maker and king breaker

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