

Indigenous Challenges and Potent Response: Zainulabdin Zeno Shah Gilani (1875-1960) as 'Salar' of Multani Muslim Community

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Abstract

Three India-centric major themes determine the scope of the study of Pre-Partition Muslim politics in the region: fast-growing communalism in the Muslim minority areas, administrative regionalism or provincial structure and elite structure of politics in the Muslim majority areas. This sort of scheme neglects an advanced sense of religious identity among the common masses and emergence of a leadership devoted to the regional-communal issues of the Muslim Community during a time of growing militancy. This paper evolves around the theme that emergence of Muslim leadership at regional level was the result of a process involving the potent response to indigenous regional-communal challenges posed by the growing threat of Hindu militancy. This leadership belonged to the middle class and not only potentially resisted the administrative pressures of the government, but also developed a parallel system to influence the development of central Muslim leadership as well as to the Muslim leadership's policies. For, paper focuses the Multan city of Punjab with a view that

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Zainulabdin emerged as a leader out of his role during the Khilafat Movement, on his services for the preservation of Muslims' interests during the communal riots of 1922, 1924, 1927 and on his stance on Pul-Shawalah Mosque issue, Kashmir issue of 1930 and Shaheed Gang Mosque issue. His militant leaning made him the 'Salar' of Multani Muslim Community. Zainulabdin's joining All India Muslim League provided the League with a mass-base and the Gilani elite potentially utilized this situation to counter the influence of opponent elites among the masses and to develop a monopoly over the leadership-structure of the Multan District Muslim League.

Introduction

Pre-Partition Muslim politics in South Asia has been analyzed under three major themes: communalism, administrative-regionalism and elite structure of leadership. In this system, fast-growing communal consciousness emerges as a major political force affecting the political process at large.¹ Francis Robinson, Leotzion and J. Voll², analyze the phenomena in the global context of declining Muslim political power and resultant revivalism among the Muslims all over the world.³ However, for Robinson, the trends were patronized by Muslim political elite of Muslim minority areas, especially of U.P., for the defense of their socio-political interests.⁴ The approach is forwarded by Ayesha Jalal,⁵

| 1 See for details Zarina Salamat, *The Punjab in 1920's: A Case Study of Muslims*, (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 1997); Also see Samina Yasmeen, *Communal Politics in Punjab (1925-1947)*, (Ph.D. Thesis, Department of Pakistan Studies, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, 2006); P.J. Marshal, ed., *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970); Torkel Brekke, 'The Conceptual Foundation of Missionary Hinduism', *The Journal of Religious History*, Vol. XXIII/2 (June 1999), pp.203-14.

| 2 See Leotzion and J. Voll, *Eighteenth Century Revival and Reform in Islam* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1981).

| 3 A lecture delivered by Francis Robinson at Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, dated February 18, 2008; Francis Robinson, 'Religious change and the self in Muslim South Asia since 1800', *South Asia*, XXII, Special Issue, 1999.

| 4 See for details the writings of Francis Robinson especially, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims — The Politics of United provinces Muslims* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

| 5 See Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

Stanley Wolpert⁶ and Khushwant Singh⁷ through the depiction of a secular character of Muslim leadership, especially Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

On the same line, group of academicians having interest in Punjab and represented by Imran Ali,⁸ S. Qalb-i-Abid⁹ and Ian Talbot,¹⁰ see conciliatory and mediatory trends dominant in the Muslim majority regions, especially in the Punjab, with a regional approach to the politics under the Unionist Party, blocking the way of communal politics. The elites in Punjab, feudal and *sajjadah nishins* of shrines, dominantly rural, were strongly attached with the imperial administration. Therefore, the politics in the Punjab was lacking public leadership. However Ayesha Jalal is of the view that introduction of electoral politics along with urbanization was the cause of growing communal consciousness.¹¹ For David Gilmartin the failure of Unionist Party due to factionalism within the party was the cause of the rise of communalism and Muslim League as ‘the party could not entirely isolate such leaders [*sajjadah nishins*] from symbolic religious politics’.¹²

These three themes appear to be Indo-centric and are constructed on the deductive model of administrative-structural unity of India, promoted by the ‘Imperial Masters’ and reflecting a trickled-down influence of Imperialism and leadership, from the hierarchical level of political elites to the common masses, having no direct place in the imperial system of political representation. The regional structure of politics finds a space within this structure

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- 6 See Stanley Wolpert, *Jinnah of Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2002).
 7 See Jaswant Singh, *Jinnah: India Partition Independence* (Delhi: Rupa Publishers, 2009).
 8 See Imran Ali, *The Punjab under Imperialism* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1989).
 9 See S. Qalb-i-Abid, *Muslim Politics in the Punjab 1921-1947* (Lahore: Vanguard, 1992).
 10 See Ian A. Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj 1849-1947* (Delhi: Manohar, 1984); *The Punjab Unionist Party and the Partition of India* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2002).
 11 See Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).
 12 David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1988), pp. 136-40.

of administration-centric view of provincial politics. Multan is dealt with the same approach by David Gilmartin. David Gilmartin analyses the politics of Multan within the paradigm of Punjab's administration-centered elites' factional politics of Qureshis and Gilanis, always under imperial administration's pressures.¹³ For the analysis of the themes, the paper evolves around the person and leadership of Syed Zainulabdin Zeno Shah Gilani, one of the most daring Muslim communal activists of Multan during the second quarter of twentieth century with a thematic assumption that leadership emerges out of potent response to indigenous challenges. It requires an analyses of the development of Zainulabdin's personality and sense of his personal status, the nature of Hindu-Muslim relations and place of the Imperial Master in the relations, nature and role of Muslim leadership and Zainulabdin's motives, methods and achievements to become the 'Salar' of the community. The study focuses to cover a span up to the formation of Pakistan.

Syed Zainulabdin Zeno Shah Gilani (1875-1960).

Syed Zainulabdin Zeno Shah Gilani was one of the most active leaders of Multani Muslim community during the second quarter of the twentieth century. He played a very prominent, but a very controversial role in the communal politics of the region during the period. For the Muslims he was a well venerated personality titled '*Mujahid-i-Azam*' (the Great Fighter for Din), '*Ghazi-i-Millat*' (Knight of the Community)¹⁴ and '*Shah-i-Multan*' (King of Multan) who potentially challenged the imperial authority of the British in the city and even announced a parallel government. For the Hindus, he was '*Fasadi Shah*' (King of Communal Riots). The British always tried to keep him behind the bars as '*Baghi Shah*' (rebel) to control the public risings.¹⁵ However, the people of Multan crowned him with gold several times.

13 *Ibid.*, p.140.

14 The titles are written on the grave-plate of Zainulabidin Shah in the tomb of Hazrat Muhammad Yahya Alias Sakhi Nawab inside Harram-Gate Multan.

15 Sheikh Riaz Parvaiz, *Talkh-o-Shirin Yadain* (Multan: Atiq Academy, n.d.) p.709.

The Challenge of Ancestral Religio-Political Status and Responsibilities

Zainulabdin was born in a well known religious family of Gilani Pirs of Multan in 1875. As follower of Qadri branch of Muslim mysticism, the family claims a dual lineage to the Prophet through Hazrat Imam Hassan and Hazrat Imam Hussain, thus has been paid high veneration by both popular sects of Islam: the Shias and Sunnis. His father, Pir Peray Shah, although having no place in the hierarchy of religious mendicants and standing nowhere among the hierarchy of feudals, was well venerated among the local population due to his simplicity, paucity of character, his relations with the family of *sajjadah nishin* and chain of Qadri saints, and most of all due to his tender behaviour with the common people. Zainulabdin Shah was educated in traditional religious sciences at the monastery of Musa-Pak Shaheed, a well known sixteenth century Qadri Saint of Multan, situated in the middle of the walled city. The *sajjadah nishins* of the monastery were either the cousins of Zainulabdin or his father's. Zainulabdin Shah passed his matriculation from University of the Punjab in between the years 1895 and 1900.¹⁶

Believing in the concept of '*Imamah*' as divine attribute passed on to the family of the Prophet (PBUH), proud of the services of his ancestors, especially of Hazrat Imam Hassan and Hussain for the defense of Islam, claiming sublime divine attributes of Qadri branch of Muslim mysticism, Zainulabdin saw the history of Gilanis as a continuous struggle against what they considered against the Islamic beliefs. Gilanis of Multan were the successors of this tradition for Zainulabdin and he wanted to continue that tradition.¹⁷

Zainulabdin not only was well aware of the veneration paid to the Shrine of Musa-Pak and to the Gilani family of Multan by the common masses and government authorities such as Hindus and Muslims of Multan, Mughal Emperors, Ranjeet Singh, the British authorities, Khan of Kalat and rulers of Turkistan, but was also

16 The exact dates of his matriculation are not available as the family has lost the record of his documents.

17 The contents of Zainulabdin's *A Brief History of Gilani Sayyads of Multan* indicate his deep rooted sense of pride in his ancestral history, which determined his ideals.

proud of large estates granted to the Gilanis in lieu of their religious services.¹⁸ Therefore, Zainulabdin, like the other members of Gilani family, wanted not only to take up the ancestral responsibilities of the defense of the rights of Muslims all over the world, but also the responsibility of the rights of the Multani Muslims in an environment of communal tension.

This nature of Gilanis' role discard David Gilmartin's view that the family was tied 'to the religious crosscurrents of urban politics' and masses, more than their counter parts, Qureshis, who were the *sajjadah nishin* of the shrine of Suhrawardy mystic Bahauddin Zakariya and were the champions of the cause of landed aristocracy, due to the two basic 'pressures': first that Gilanis 'had not emerged with large rural estates and; second that Gilanis 'depended for income on the offerings of religious devotees'.¹⁹

Known as 'City of Pirs', the Pirs of Multan, especially Gilanis had ever felt the responsibility of the defense of the religious and communal interests of the Muslims throughout the world. During the First quarter of the twentieth century, the Gilanis of Multan had developed a four ladder hierarchical system of leadership for Multani Muslims. At one end, the hierarchy was religiously linked with the Ottomans and Hashemis as heads of the political and clan successors of the Prophet, and at the other end, they were associated with the British 'Imperial Masters' as active members of imperial Indian administration. The two extremes were tied up with each other in the name of dissemination of modern knowledge to the Muslims on the 'Aligarh Model'²⁰ of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan

18 For that Zainulabidin wrote *A Brief History of Gilani Sayyads of Multan* in probably Urdu. The original text is not available, yet an English translation by Sayyad Ghulam Mustafa Shah Gilani has no date of publication. However the contents show that the history was completed in 1910-11. Zainulabidin's mentioning such information shows his pride in the political, religious and administrative influence the family has enjoyed in the history of Multan.

19 Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan*, p.138.

20 See the proceedings of the meeting of the Anjuman-i-Himayat-e-Urdu at the retirement of Mir Wahid Ali, Civil Surgeon Multan, quoted from a periodical "Alwaiz", by Shabir Hassan Akhtar, *Multan Urdu Ki Janam Bhomi* (Multan: Bahauddin Zakariya University, 2005).

to which the Gilani *sajjadah nishins* had potentially patronized.²¹ For that, they were closely associated with the institutions responsible for the welfare of the people at local level under British administration such as Municipal Committee and District Board. After the introduction of electoral politics, the Gilanis came into political competition with the Qureshis.

The Issue of Caliphate and the Challenge of Muslim Elites' Role

Syed Zainulabdin Shah had very curiously observed the role of Gilani family and other Muslim elites during the crucial days of transition from his boyhood to maturity and even participated in the religious festivity and enjoyed the political status of the family. He joined the revenue services of the British Punjab government probably in 1905 and had a pride of the military and administrative services rendered by the Gilanis to the British Empire since the British conquest of Multan.²² However, a change seems to be taking place during the period afterwards of his *A Brief History of Gillani Sayyads of Multan* during the First World War (1914-18).

During the War, the devoted, emotional, brave and authoritative Zainulabdin showed his commitment with the Pan-Islamist belief. At the time of out break of First World War in 1914, he was serving as an ex-officio acting *Tehsildar* of Shujabad, a *Tehsil* of Multan District. His services had been confirmed as *Naib-Tehsildar*. Although, his service record is not available, yet his forty years age and this promotion lead to the assumption that he had served almost fifteen years to the revenue department of the British Government. It was a prestigious position and holder of the office under the British government was expected to win high positions in the imperial structure of administration.²³

Zainulabdin observed the situation with growing anxiety and his anti-British feelings began to come to surface. The Muslim community was generally depressed with the situation and

21 For that the Gilanis had re-established *Anjuman-i-Islamiyah* in Multan and launched educational institutions under the leadership of Willayat Hussain Gillani.

22 Syed Zainulabdin Shah Gillani, *A Brief History of Gilani Sayyads of Multan*, Eng.trans. by Sayyad Ghulam Mustafa Shah Gilani (Lahore: n.p., n.d.), pp.24-28.

23 Parvaiz, *Talkh-o-Shirin Yadain*, p.708.

pessimist in behaviour, having no clear vision of how to respond to the situation. The hierarchy of elite Muslim leadership was categorically pro-British and served the cause of British interest developing relations with the indigenous masses and the elites and were not solely with the Muslim interests. Although, like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Gilanis had tried to serve the cause of the Muslims of the region through the establishment of subordinate relations with the British,²⁴ yet, at times of conflict between the British policy and the Muslim interests, they ever felt it difficult to oppose or challenge the British authority. As associates of Imperial British administration, the leading figures of the elites were bound to act in accordance with the wishes of Imperial masters even in their relations with the Hindus.²⁵

Therefore, the Muslim community had initiated a call for reconciliation with the Hindus against the British and supported the anti-war campaign launched by the Congress. The events reported from the Secret Reports of police department mentioned in the Indian Annual Register show that during the War years, the leadership of anti-British movement was in the hands of the Hindus. The Hindus formed the majority of the 'Panchayat' [arbitrary council] of Multan collaborating with the British local administration.²⁶ In this situation, the introduction of Rowlett Act in 1917 had blown up the anti-British feeling among the Hindus and the Muslims alike and over-powered the Hindu-Muslim controversies.²⁷

Having so many disappointments by the post war policy of the British and under the fatwa of Muslim Ulema regarding the

| 24 The Muslims of Multan had joined hands with Sir Syed Ahmed Khan very early in his struggle for the uplift of Muslim society. In Response to Sir Syed's Anglo-Oriental Mohammedan Association and Indian Patriotic Association, in 1882, Muhammedan Society was established in Multan. An Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Urdu was already established in 1881. Multan branch of Muhammedan Educational Conference was established in 1886 and the three societies, on the common ground sent a donation of five thousands for the Aligarh College.

| 25 Ashiq Muhammad Khan Durrani, *Tarikh-i-Multan* (Multan: Bazm-e-Saqafat, 2007), pp.316.

| 26 See Government of India, *Indian Annual Register 1917* (Calcutta: Government Press).

| 27 P.C. Bamford, *Histories of Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movements* (Delhi: Government Press, 1925), p.9.

irreligiosity of the services to the British government, Zainulabdin resigned from the services of the British government and became an activist for the Khilafat Movement by the initiation of Khilafat Committee in November 1919. As the Muslim elites were under the government pressure, therefore, Zainulabdin began to emerge as the leader of Khilafat agitation along with Sadruddin Gillani (1868-1945) the *sajjadah nishin* of the shrine of Musa Pak Shaheed who had resisted the British administration during the war time by refusing the request of the imperial administration for the issuance of a fatwa declaring the Ottomans as heretic.²⁸ Simultaneously, Raza Shah (1893-1949) had left college as protest on the British's caliphate policy.

Although Sadruddin was pressurized by the British not to support the Khilafat Agitation, Zainulabdin organized anti-British rallies in collaboration with the Congress' 'Civil Disobedience Movement' activists. Multan was a main city of the rout adopted for 'Hijrat Movement' during the struggle for the Khilafat. Zainulabdin became a focal person to facilitate the convoys of immigrants to Afghanistan and in this respect he was well aware of the sacrifices done by the majority of the Muslims. Therefore, he was arrested and his landed property of twenty five acres in Mangay Hatti near Lodhran was confiscated.²⁹

Zainulabdin Shah now had to face economic crises. He had limited economic resources through which it was difficult to survive. Rather than accepting the grants from the *sajjadah nishin* and the disciples of the family, Zainulabdin preferred to be a hawker, earning his living selling boiled-eggs in the streets of walled city, in between Haram Gate and Delhi Gate.³⁰ During his tour, he continued to meet the ordinary people, such as street

28 Muhammad Aslam Maitla, *Multan Namah* (Multan: Maitla Publishers, 2005), see chapter on Sadruddin Shah Gilani.

29 Interview with Iqbal Shah Gillani, the son of Zainulabdin's daughter and a claimant of political succession to him, an active trade union leader of Pak-Arab Fertilizer dated, 22 March 2008.

30 M. A. Shamshad, *Khabrain*, Multan; David Gilmartin sees the Zainulabdin's communal attitude as an indicator of his conflict with the main stream Gilani leaderships over the offerings. However the attitude of Zainulabdin rejects his view and reflects a very strong personality of Zainulabdin. David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan*, p.138.

workers, gold smiths, iron smiths, labours, carpenter, painters etc., discussing with them the worsening situation of the Muslim world and encouraging them to play their role in the then current political scenario to pressurize the British. Resultantly the people began to gather around him, taking interest in his vision of the politics. Zainulabdin, losing his job as well as his economic benefits and aware of his fast growing popularity among the common masses, began to appear as an organizer of anti-British protests along the Congressmen as well as a leader of the Muslim masses.³¹ He actively contributed to the protest rallies beginning from Bagh Lange Khan to the Shrine of Musa Pak Shaheed through Ghanta Ghar, Lohari Gate and Hussain Agahi and here from back via Haram Gate and Bohar Gate.³² (See Map attached). The Saraiki catch word '*Na Wakil, Na Dalil Na Appeal*' (Neither a solicitor, nor any argument or appeal) and Persian catch words '*Tang Aamad Bajang Aamad*' (Posed threats invite declaration of war) became catch words of the protestors.³³

Hindu-Muslim Tension and the Rise of Communalism.

Communally, Multan city was composed of Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus. The Muslim population dominantly belonged to the Brelevi sect having a lasting impact of Pirs, especially Gilanis and Qureshis. However, Hindu-Muslim tension was a dominant feature which had been de-escalated through the Hindus respect for the Muslim shrines and Muslim elites' struggle for the maintenance of peaceful environment. The Hindu Muslim relations became cordial after the European powers aggression against the Muslim world during the First World War and a joint stand of Hindus and the Muslims against the British.

The end of 'Civil disobedience Movement' by the Congress in 1922, at a time when Muslim leadership of Khilafat Movement was in the jails, created a sort of feeling of loss, wastage, uselessness of political struggle, debauchery played on the part of

31 Ashiq Muhammad Khan Durrani has mentioned that Zainulabidin Shah resigned from the Khilafat Committee. In the light of these facts it seems not relevant. At so many times Zainulabdin Gilani is confused with the Zainulabdin Shah of Kashmir.

32 Durrani, *Tarikh-i-Multan*, p.316.

33 30th March intelligence report in Government of India, *Punjab Disturbances*, (Lahore: Government of Punjab, 1920).

Hindus, being cheated on the part of Congress and revived the Hindu-Muslim grievance. The Hindus emerged as an ally of the British, at new scene. Many among the Muslims began to think that the Muslims had to face dual enemy with a lesson that the Muslims should rise up for self-defense.³⁴ Zainulabdin was one of them.

The demographic strength of the Hindus in an environment of communal tension in Multan city was a new challenge for the Muslims. Multan was considered a trade city and was surrounded by a wall with six gates to enter in the city: Lohari Gate in the North West; Bohar Gate in South West; Harram Gate in the South; Pak Gate in South East; Delhi Gate in the East and Daulat Gate in the North East.³⁵ The Muslim population in the city was scattered and business centers of the city were dominated by the Hindu.

The locale of the Gilani shrines, where Zainulabdin was fostered and nourished had assigned the Gilanis a leading role in the communal politics of the city. The shrine and the ancestral residence of the family are located in the middle of the walled city approachable from all gates but Pak Gate was named after Musa Pak and the area from Pak gate to the shrine of Musa Pak was an ancestral land of Gilanis, known as Muhalah Gilanian. However it was adjacent to the notorious centers of Hindu religious festivity 'Hanuman Jee Ka Chhajjah' now known as '*Hanu ka Chhajja*' in the West and Arya Muhalah in the North-East. The shrines were surrounded by the popular centers of business, trade and handicrafts, such as Kup Bazar, Sarafa Bazar, Loha Hut, Kaley Mandi etc. reflecting the commercial dominance of Hindus in the Multan city. These Hindu Muhalas and Bazaars were interconnected with each other. On the other hand Muslim Muhalas were divided from each others by Hindu settlements as *Hanu ka Chhajja* was separating Muhalah Gilanian from Shah

34 See for detail P.C. Bamford, *Histories of Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movements*, (Delhi: Government of India, 1925).

35 Multan Fort also had four gates to enter, which were destroyed by the British: Khizri Gate in the North East to the Shrine of Bahauddin Zakariya; Siki Gate towards Aam Khas Bagh in the East; Rehri Gate towards Hussain Agahi Bazar in the south and central Dev Gate in front of Lohari Gate in the West.

Gardais and Arya Muhala from the Northern Muslim Muhallas. (See Map in the appendix)³⁶

These centers of Hindu dominance were source of inspiration for Hindu revivalism and extremism. The Hindu extremist activities as well as organizations were established and fed from these centers, morally and economically. Shudhi, Sanghton, Ariya Samaj, Siva Samati, Sangdal Party, Siva Dal, Mahabir Dal, Partab Sina, Siva Gee Sina, Rashtariya Sawak Singh, Gorukal, Congress Volunteer Corps and Hindu Maha Sabha, with anti-Muslim slogans were active in the surroundings of the Shrine.³⁷

The Hindu Mahajans and money lenders were used to humiliate the Muslims. Therefore, there were frequent events of personal and communal Hindu-Muslim conflicts in the area where Zainulabdin Shah was brought up. One can assume that he could have been well aware of the dominant role of the Gilani family in the suppression of such events.

The alleged British-conspired event of an attack on 'Ta'azia' procession on Sunday 10th of Muharram 1341 H. /September 3rd 1922 and resultant Hindu-Muslim riots escalated the ill-will among the two communities and led to bloody-riots in the city. The years between 1922 and 1924 witnessed a high level communal tension in the city resulting in the Hindu-Muslim riots of 1924. After the out break of communal riots in the Multan city in 1924, the Muslims began to organize themselves for the defense of their rights. Zainuabdin not only organized the Muslim groups to counter the attacks of Hindus from the neighbouring 'Hanu Ka Chhajjah', but also organized relief work for the Muslims affected by the riots. The Muslim League was not yet established in the District and Pirs as champions of the cause of religion had taken up the cause of the community. In reaction to the Gandhi's policy, they had established social checks on the Hindus. In this context Syed Zainulabdin emerged as a reactionary leader with a two fold

| 36 The Map is drawn on the Sketch of walled city provided by Ahmad Nabi Khan, *Multan: History and Architecture* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1980) through a visit of the city and with the help of Shahid Mahmood Lodhi.

| 37 See for details Khawajah Abdul Karim Qasif, *Nawa-i-Waqt*, 10th September, 1979; Meem-Aan, 'Syed Zainulabdin Shah Gillani', in *Rosnamah Khabrain*, 27th March 2003.

agenda: to organize the Muslim force for self defense and resist the Hindu hegemony even by the use of force, thus ultimately denying the power of British administration and establishment of a parallel government.

One British report, in the context of the collapse of Khilafat Movement, Hindu-Muslim Coalition and spread of communal riots in the district in 1924, observed:

Religious tension in the villages is very ordinary ... [but] In Multan city, the case is different, for religious prejudices die hard and although the two communities lie together in peace for years, an unforeseen and trivial incident may stir up latent animosities and give rise to outburst of a fanaticism.³⁸

The Muslim bureaucracy of the district had linked the communal tension of Multan city with the communal issues of the other parts of the subcontinent.³⁹

Zainulabdin, first of all, tried to stop the expansion of Hindu religious establishments, especially Hindu temples in the city. Between 1924 and 1927, the Hindus had tried to erect temples in different parts of the city, especially in the cantonment area which were resisted by the Muslims either through an approach to the British authorities or through the use of public force which had begun to gather around Zainulabdin Shah. A series of events in between 1927 communal riots, and introduction of the constitutional reforms of 1935, such as issue of Pul Shawalah, establishment of Anjuman-i-Fidayan-i-Islam, Kashmir Issue and Masjid Shaheed Gang, confirmed Zainulabdin's place as public leader of Multan.

The Issue of Pul Shawalah Mosque

The issue of Pul Shawalah Mosque, long before the issue of Masjid Shaheed Gang, set the stage for the emergence of Zainulabdin as a sole leader of Multani Muslims. The exact timing

38 Government of Punjab, *Gazetteer of the Multan District, 1923-1924* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1990, reprinted 1926), p.118.

39 Generally the British employees either Muslims or Hindus, coming from central and northern India contributed a lot to link this region with the main stream politics of British India. They not only worked on the history and culture of the region, rather established associations which became the work place for the discourse on the then contemporary political, social and cultural issues.

of the event needs to be explored. There are conflicting evidences of the event in between 1927 and 1929. It is probable that the issue may be on the forefront by the riots of 1927 and had become burning hot by 1929. Anyway the issue left a lasting impact to determine the nature of Hindu-Muslim relation, future of British rule in the region and the Muslim leadership. The issue can be taken as the first incident indicating the assertion of Muslim will against the Hindu-British collaboration.

The Muslim washer-men had reserved a place for prayers near the 'Dhobi Ghat' of Pul Shawalah out-side the Bohar-Gate which took the form of a mosque by the time. As Muslims under the leadership of Zainulabdin had launched a campaign against the Hindu religious establishments and had successfully got a number of temples demolished by the British authorities, therefore, as a reaction, the Hindus began to propagate that the Muslims had occupied the land of the Irrigation Department attached to a Sikh Gurudawarah and had illegally erected a mosque. Resultantly the British authorities decided to demolish the mosque by the use of police force. When it became known to the Muslims, they began to assemble around the mosque under the leadership of Zainulabdin from all over the city. The number rose to thousands. The police ultimatum of dispersal within five minutes and afterwards opening of fire met a strong resistance of shouts of 'Allah-o-Akbar' and for a death of 'martyrdom'. The Muslims refused to disperse. The strong gathering under a brave, reactionary and aggressive leader in the name of Zainulabdin reacted so strongly that they were ready to attack police guard. The clash between the police and Muslims was avoided only through the retreat of British force. Zainulabdin appointed his volunteers for the protection of the mosque. A big procession afterwards was organized which walked through the city to celebrate this⁴⁰ victory over the Hindu-British alliance.⁴¹ The event was fully supported by the Gilani *sajadah*

| 40 Munshi Abdurrehman Khan, *Aina-i-Multan* (Multan: Maktabah-i-Ashraf-al-Maaraf, 1972), p.234.

| 41 I have found the traces of the issue from the hand written explanatory notes of Mumtaz Somroo on Allama Atiq Fikri's *Naqsh-i-Multan* in his personal library book number 5985 now deposited in Department of Saraiki, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan. Later I found fragmented references in the Hanif Chaudhry's *Multan Kay Sahafti Dafenay*, (Multan: Bahauddin Zakariya University, 2006) and

nishin Sadruddin and made Zainulabdin a hero of the Muslim community.

Anjuman-i-Fidayan-i-Islam and the Emergence of Zainulabdin as the ‘Salar’ of Multani Muslim Community

Anjuman-i-Fidayan-i-Islam can be taken as the symbol of Muslim determination to the efforts for self determination as well as an indicator of the emergence of an aggressive, communally conscious and public oriented culture of power and leadership. The Anjuman played a pivotal role not only in the local communal issues but played a powerful and assertive role in the state politics of Kashmir and Bahawalpur. Although it was established as a semi-militia volunteer force, yet it took the form of a socio-political movement which finally provided infrastructure and manpower to the All India Muslim League National Guard.

A clear-cut date for the establishment of *Anjuman-i-Fidayan-i-Islam* is obscure. However, the evidences show that it was organized in between 1927 and 1931. One can assume that the process of the assemblage of Muslim masses for political and communal purposes had begun by the initiation of Khilafat Movement, but it had no structural organization. Although Zainulabdin Shah had taken the lead of Muslim volunteers by 1922, yet it was a group of communally committed friends which had extended its influence to masses by the efforts of Zainulabdin Shah. However it was the establishment of *Anjuman-i-Fidayan-i-Islam* that granted him the status of ‘Salar’ of Multani Muslims. Pul Shawalah Mosque incident indicates the reasons why the group was fast growing and it took the form of a militia. The appointment of volunteers by Zainulabdin at Pul Shawalah Mosque indicates that a loose form of the hierarchy had been established by this time. If 1927 be taken as the date of Pul Shawalah Mosque Issue and 1931 be integrated with Kashmir Issue, then there is a very sufficient logic to assume that the *Anjuman* was established utilizing the fervor of Pul Shawalah Mosque Issue as well as attachment of the masses to the person and leadership of

from the biographical chapters of Malik Munir Ahmed Bhutta, *Multan: Tehzeb-o-Saqafat kay Ainay Mein* (Multan: Jhok Publishers, 1999), pp.143-47.

Zainulabdin Zeno Shah Gilani. However, it was a well organized semi-military association to meet the communal threat.

The *Anjuman* had ranks and discipline similar to the military establishment, from the *Razakar* (volunteer), *Fidai* (life devotee), Captain, Major, Colonel and ‘*Salar*’ (General).⁴² Captain Muhammad Bakhsh became Zainulabdin’s devoted lieutenant who had a complete support of warrior Pathans of Multan along with Gilani elites. Syed Ghulam Nabi Shah, Rab Nawaz Mukhlis, Ghulam Rasul and Abdul Karim Kasif also were Zainulabdin’s associates.

Zainulabdin stood high at the top of this hierarchy as ‘*Salar*’. ‘*Aam Khas Bagh*’ outside ‘Daulat Gate’ was the parade ground for the volunteers of the *Anjuman*. The regular number of these volunteers had been five thousands at one time. Among them five hundred were regular fully trained in the use of common tools of warfare. Every ‘*Fidai*’ was supposed to have a sword with him all the time and when keeping sword was banned by the British authorities, they had to keep a blade (*Kulhari*) with them.⁴³ The ‘*Fidaien*’ were used to parade on the ‘*alang*’ [wall road] from Pak-Gate to Daulat Gate via Delhi Gate or from Pak gate to Harram-Gate and Bohar-Gate to show the power and strength of Muslim masses and to warn the Hindus to refrain away from the Muslims. This force played a balancing role against the growing Hindu militancy in the Multan city. In 1927, Zainulabdin launched a newspaper ‘*Turjuman*’ which was banned due to an editorial on the events of Muharram 1922 and 1924. Zainulabdin himself was arrested but released under the pressure of *Fidaien*.⁴⁴

The role of the *Anjuman* was not limited to militant activities; Zainulabdin extended its role to social reform and as a force to develop political pressure on the Muslim elites as well as British authorities. The *Anjuman* tried to provide guidance for the public life and trade relations and resolved its pledge to curb social evils. For social reform the *Anjuman* adopted the slogan:

Juwa Band Karoo Meday Bhai

42 Bhutta, *Multan: Tehzeb-o-Saqafat kay Ainay Mein*, pp.143-47.

43 Khan, *Aina-i-Multan*, p. 232.

44 *Ibid.*

(Stop the acts of gambling our Brothers)

Sadi Fauj Fidai Aai

(Our life-devoted militia has come)⁴⁵

Due to a tense communal environment, the Anjuman and its Fidain banned the entry of Muslim women in the Hindu dominated markets as it was considered a basic element working behind the escalation of communal tension. Zainulabdin played so vital a role during the period that he was arrested time and again to keep the control of the British administration over the city and every time he was to be released due to the growing pressure of the 'Fidaien'.

Kashmir Issue 1930s, Hindu Campaign Against the Bahawalpur State and Masjid Shaheed Gang

At the Establishment of *Majlis-i-Ahrar*, Zainulabdin and his *Fidaien* cooperated with them to serve the cause of the Muslim community especially on the Kashmir Issue. Zainulabdin strongly supported the Movement for the Independence of Kashmir from the Dogra rule by its initiation in 1930 along with *Majlis-i-Ahrar*. He raised the Saraiki slogan:

Utho, Utho Ghazio, Rukh Karo Kashmir da

(Stand up holly warriors and take up the rout to Kashmir)

Raj Kar tabah Deo Dogra Be-Pir da

(Destroy the rule of Dogra who had no Pir [spiritual guide])⁴⁶

Zainulabdin led his five hundred volunteers to participate in the Kashmiris' movement in 1932 and was arrested on the border of Kashmir along with his *Fidaien*. As a reaction to Zainulabdin's activities against the Dogra Government, and imposition of a tax by the Nawab of Bahawalpur on the Hindus of the state,⁴⁷ the Hindus of Multan launched a militant movement against the Abbasis of Bahawalpur. Zainulabdin's Fidain strongly resisted them by blocking the way of Multan to Bahawalpur. The services were acknowledged by Nawab of Bahawalpur by an offer of

45 Interview with Iqbal Shah Gillani, the son of Zainulabdin's daughter dated, 22 March 2008.

46 *Ibid.*

47 Interview with Dr. Abdul Razzaq Shahid, Department of History, Islamia University, Bahawalpur, dated October 20, 2009.

reward in the form of land allotment to the *Fidaien* which was refused by Zainulabdin Shah.⁴⁸

However, Zainulabdin Shah parted his ways from the *Ahrars* on the issue of Masjid Shaheed Gang. The *Ahrars* remained silent on the issue due to their pro-Congress policy. Therefore, Zainulabdin initiated a cooperation with Maulana Zafar Ali Khan of Zamindar newspaper. He became vice-president of his '*Majlis-i-Itehad-i-Millat*' and contributed potentially to the Shaheed Gang Mosque movement. He sent his volunteers to Lahore to participate in the Movement. Zainulabdin himself was arrested, but released very soon under the public protest and pressure. All such activity made him the '*Salar*' of Multani Muslims. Zainulabdin began to hold his court in the *Aam Khas Bagh* where he was crowned by Sadruddin Shah, the *sajjadah nishin* of Gilani shrines in 1932 as token of his services to the Muslim community and was bestowed title of '*Shah-i-Multan*' (The King of Multan). His lieutenant Hakim Muhammad Akbar was declared his Prime Minister, Hafiz Niaz Ahmed his Commerce Minister and Haji Rahim Bakhsh Minister of Court. In this way Zainulabdin established a parallel government. He was used to hold court proceeding, deciding the conflicts of the public and for the celebration of the rituals of Hindus conversion to Islam.⁴⁹ *Anjuman-i-Fidaien* observed Panipat Day in 1935.

Zainulabdin, Jinnah and Multan Muslim League

The events of late 1930s confirmed Zainulabdin's status as leader of Muslim community. The death of Rajan Bakhsh Gilani (1878-1936) who had been member of Central Assembly and an associate of Jinnah in Independent Party since 1921 created a vacuum of leadership among the Gilani elites as *sajjadah nishin* was not used to participate in the electoral politics. Although Raza Shah Gilani and Sher Shah Gilani tried to fill the gap, the nomination of Sir Murid Hussain Qureshi (d.1960) for Central Assembly, brought the political conflicts between Gilanis and Qureshis to surface. Both the Groups, with the exception of Zainulabdin and his *Anjuman-i-Fidaien-i-Islam* were the members

48 Interview with Iqbal Shah Gilani dated, 22 March 2008.

49 Parvaiz, *Talkh-o-Shirin Yadeen*, p.78.

of the Unionist Party since its formation at provincial level of politics. However the marriage of Sir Murid Hussian Qureshi's cousin's son Ashiq Hussain Qureshi (d.1947) with the daughter of Shaukat Hayat's brother, affected the place of the Gilanis in the Unionist Party. On the other hand Jinnah has lost his friend from Multan Rajan Bakhsh Gilani at a time when he had begun his efforts to reorganize the All India Muslim League, the elections under the Act of 1935 were fast approaching and the branch of Muslim League was not yet established in Multan. In this situation, the mass popularity of Zainulabdin attracted the attention of all leading political parties. In 1936, Congress's president Subash Chandrabose approached Zainulabdin with an offer to join the Congress as President of the Multan Congress which he refused straight forwardly as Congress was involved in the patronage of Hindu communal parties. Simultaneously, *Majlis-i-Ahrar*'s role during the Masjid Shaheed Gang Movement and its blind following of Congress' policies has made Zainulabdin annoyed of *Ahrars*.

The popularity of Zainulabdin also was a threat to the Unionists Party dominated in Multan by the Qureshis who had a full support of Unionist leadership. Therefore Unionists as well as Qureshi tried to win the support of Zainulabdin. Major Ashiq Hussian on the request of Shaukat Hayat arranged his meeting with Zainulabdin in August 1936. Shaukat Hayat requested him to join the Unionist Party with an offer of a thousand acre land grant. Otherwise, he was threatened to be disqualified for contesting incoming elections. However, Zainulabdin rejected the offer as the Unionists also had claimed a non-communal status.⁵⁰ Although Sher Shah Gilani failed to win a Unionist ticket for the Imperial Council, Gilani elites continued the support of the Unionist Party and Willayat Hussian Gilani and Mustafa Shah Gilani won Provincial Assembly seats of Shujabad and Lodhran on the ticket of Unionist Party.

On the other hand Zainulabdin was introduced to Muhammad Ali Jinnah by Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, on the occasion of Jinnah's visit to Lahore regarding the resolution of Shaheed Gang Mosque

50 Interview with Iqbal Shah Gilani dated, 22 March 2008.

issue. Jinnah appreciated the role of Zainulabdin during the Movement and his services for the preservation of the rights of the Muslim community. Accepting Zainulabdin as a sole representative of Multani Muslims, Jinnah requested Zainulabdin to organize All India Muslim League Multan Branch. A loose structure of Muslim League Multan Branch had been established by young Multani students of Government College Lahore, Agha Aziz Mirza and Saeed Ahmed Bokhari in early 1936. There is difference of opinion on when Zainulabdin joined Muslim League. Ashiq Muhammad Khan Durrani is of the opinion that Zainulabdin joined Muslim League in 1939, but the date does not match with the political situation as after meeting with Jinnah Zainulabdin did not join any other political party and no other Muslim leader seems to be leading the League. Simultaneously after Sikander-Jinnah Pact of 1937, allowing the dual membership of the League and the Unionist Party, so many leaders could find the space in Muslim League. Zainulabdin attended the Punjab Muslim League Conference on 19 April 1938 and led the Multan Muslim League delegation for the 21-23 March 1940 session of All India Muslim League at Lahore. Therefore, Riaz Parvaiz's view that Zainulabdin joined the League in 1936 seems more appropriate. Zainulabdin became first formal president of the Multan District Muslim League and continued to serve as President until the formation of Pakistan in 1947. His lieutenant Abdul Karim Kasif became Secretary General of Muslim League. However he was disqualified for the contest of election of 1936.

Zainulabdin's efforts, the Sikander-Jinnah Pact of 1937 and the attitude of the Congress and the working of Congress Ministries created a space for the Muslim League to flourish. As Qureshis were dominating the Unionist Party with dominant interest towards the problems of their Sindhi disciple⁵¹ and Gilanis were hardly provided a place of honour in the Unionist regime, Zainulabdin opened the door of Muslim League to the Gilanis to establish a monopoly. In 1939, Ghulam Nabi Shah Gilani, Sher Shah Gilani, Willayat Hussain Gilani, Rehmat Shah Gilani and

51 See letter of Makhdum Murid Hussain Qureshi to M.A. Jinnah, dated 25 March, 1944, F.579/95-6, in Zawar Hussain Zaidi, *Jinnah Papers*, Vol.1/1 (Islamabad: National Archives of Pakistan, 1993), No.225, pp.234.

Hussain Gardezi joined Muslim League. Zainulabdin established Muslim Students Federation Multan Branch and also Muslim League Women Wing. Zainulabdin's effort made the Muslim League a popular political party, therefore, he led the delegation of Multan Muslim League to the Lahore Session of 21-23 March 1940. In 1942, city Muslim League was established, Ghulam Nabi Shah, a cousin and friend of Zainulabdin, as its President. In 1944, an Organizing Committee was appointed for the Multan Division Abdul Razzaq Gilani as its President.

After the establishment of Muslim League National Guard, Zainulabdin merged his *Anjuman-i-Fidaien-i-Islam* into it and his *Fidaien* became active workers of the Muslim League National Guard. One Muslim League workers report of 1947, indicates a monopoly of Gilanis on the offices of Muslim League in the District and Division.⁵² The report mentioned that Zainulabdin was only devoted leader among the office bearers. Therefore Jinnah has a full confidence in the person of Zainulabdin. Zainulabdin with the help of his *Fidain*, especially Muhammad Nawaz alias Nazoo Bagheela, Captain Muhammad Bakhsh, Rab Nawaz Mukhlis, Ghulam Rasul Pakistan, organized rallies, procession, gatherings etc. He was arrested several times during the Pakistan Movement and was put to jail after the elections of 1946, during the Muslim League's Civil Disobedience Movement. It was due to the efforts of such leaders that Muslim League won the elections of 1947. After the resignation of Khizar Hayat's Unionist Ministry and his release from jail in March 1947, Zainulabdin, leading a big procession of Muslims, over threw the Union jack from the offices of Government and practically declared the end of imperial rule in Multan. On the day of the establishment of Pakistan, Zainulabdin led a large procession of Muslims through the city and placed flag of Pakistan on all important offices.⁵³

However, his role after the establishment of Pakistan was minimized by the political intrigues. After the partition, Zainulabdin appears to be participating in a number of public and private events, but very soon he was depressed by the role of

52 Muhammad Aslam Khan's letter to M.A. Jinnah dated 24 March 1947, F.886/154-356, in Zavar Hussain Zaidi, *Jinnah Papers*, Volume 1/2, No.216, pp.395-7.

53 Durrani, *Tarikh-i-Multan*, p.316; Khan, *Aina-i-Multan*, p.233.

politicians and Gilani Pirs. Therefore, he considered politicians responsible for the imposition of Martial law.⁵⁴ Zainulabdin died on October 8, 1960 and was buried in the tomb of Hazrat Muhammad Yahya alongside his father. He was awarded 'Tehrik-i-Pakistan Gold Medal' post-humously. His son Shamim Mahdi also was a worker of Pakistan movement and was awarded the same gold medal.⁵⁵

Conclusion

The communalism was a powerful element of politics in Multan. Indigenous communal issues, combined with the mobilization of urbanized masses for agitation and militancy, and integrated with anti-imperial motives, were determining the nature of public politics and leadership against rural elites' politics and leadership. It was a trend challenging the imperially projected landed aristocracy. It not only resisted the pressures from the Imperial administration, but had posed serious challenges to the imperial authority. With the time it became a determining force of politics influencing the policy of the Muslim leadership at centre, and was potentially utilized by the Gilanis to counter the influence of the Qureshis and to establish control over the Muslim League in Multan District. The leadership emerged out of the challenge of communal problems responded through a strong sense of ancestral responsibilities to the cause of Islam. Imperialism and then contemporary leaderships' inability to address the interests of the Muslim community were the threats or challenges for the Multani Muslims during the first half of the nineteenth century and a potent response to these challenges contributed potentially to the emergence of Zainulabdin Zeno Shah Gilani as a '*Salar*' (General) of Multani Muslim community. In this capacity, Zainulabdin seems not only contributing to the issues of local interests rather appears to be very actively contributing to the defense of the rights of the Muslims all over the subcontinent. Therefore, regional issues and leadership apparently the politics at all-India level. Zainulabdin's influenced personality appears to be a symbol of Muslim struggle for self determination as well as an indicator of

54 Interview with Iqbal Shah Gillani, dated 22 March 2008.

55 *Ibid.*

the emergence of an aggressive, communally conscious and public oriented culture of power and leadership. His *Anjuman Fidayan-i-Islam* not only reflects the growing militancy, but also indicates a growing sense of organization among the Multani Muslims integrating them with the Muslims of other parts of India through a powerful and assertive role, especially in the state politics of Kashmir and Bahawalpur. Although it was established as a semi-militia volunteer force, yet it took the form of a socio-political movement which finally provided infrastructure and man-power to the All India Muslim League National Guard. The status made regional communal leaders a 'must' for the political success of All India Muslim League in Multan which led to the establishment of a direct contact between Jinnah and Zainulabdin Shah. The success of Muslim League in the election of 1946 was due to the integration of public and political leadership.

Appendix

