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Origins of Muslim Consciousness in India

A World-System Perspective

SYED NESAR AHMAD

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The Faraizi Movement 1805-1862 C.E.

Reform movement

During the nineteenth century when the affairs of the Muslims fell to a low ebb at the political level, reform movements sprang up in the various parts of the Muslim world. The thesis underlying such movements was that the Muslims had fallen on evil days because of their laxity in the observance of the injunctions of Islam. Such movements accordingly aimed at the reinvigoration of Islam so that it could serve as an effective instrument for enabling the Muslims recapture their lost glory. One of such movements launched in Bengal during the early years of the nineteenth century was the Faraizi movement.

Haji Shariat Ullah

The Faraizi movement was founded by Haji Shariat Ullah. He was born in 1781 C.E. in the village of Shamail in Faridpur district of Bengal (now Bangla Desh) in 1781 C.E. He received religious education in his home district and Calcutta. Thereafter he left for Hijaz in 1799 C.E. In Hijaz he came under the influence of the reform movement founded by the Arab reformer Muhammad b Abdul Wahab. On return to Bengal he launched the "Faraizi" movement some time around 1805 C.E. He denounced the superstitions and corrupt practices that had found currency among the Muslims due to contacts with the Hindus. He criticised the Sufi practice of undue veneration for the Pir. For the Pir-Murid relationship, he substituted the Ustad-Shagird relationship. He held that his followers should regard him as a teacher and not as a Pir. He discontinued the practice of laying his hand on the hands of his

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FARĀ'IDĪ MOVEMENT

MUIN-UD-DIN AHMAD KHAN

I

AN HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION

Farā'idī, which is spelt in Bengali as 'Farā'izi', was a religious revivalist movement, launched by Hājī Shari'at Allāh in Bengal in A.D. 1818.¹ It is a significant historical coincidence that *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah* movement which had similar aims and objectives in view, was started by Sayyid Ahmad Shahīd at Delhi during the same year.² The question posed by some scholars as to which of them was older than the other, therefore, does not arise at all.³

Broadly speaking, the *Farā'idī* movement was a manifestation of the Islamic revivalist tendency which had become a conspicuous phenomenon in the Muslim world during the nineteenth century A.D. In this universal perspective it is to be classified with such other *revivalist* movements as the *Muwahhidūn* or so-called Wahhabism of Arabia, *Salafiyah* movement of Egypt, *Sannusiyah* movement of Libya, *Fulānī* movement of Nigeria, *Paduri* movement of Indonesia and *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah* and *Ahl-i-Hadīth* movements of Indo-Pak subcontinent, which strived, in common, (i) to revive the simple and uncompromising monotheism of the Qur'ān and (ii) the normative practice or *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet as transmitted and demonstrated by the first three generations of Muslims, collectively called *Salaf-i-Sālihin*, (iii) to purge the Muslim society of polytheistic accretions (*shirk*) and sinful innovations (*bid'āt*) which crept into it in course of time through foreign influence or in the form of survival of un-Islamic local customs; (iv) to resuscitate the Muslim *Ummah* by rehabilitating the fundamental Islamic values of equality and brotherhood of the Muslims, unity and integrity of the Muslim world and (v) lastly, to arouse the Muslims to the supreme need of waging a holy war or *jihād* for the liberation of the Muslim lands (*Dār-ul-Islām*) from the hands of infidels. The last impulse also led the proponents of these movements to strive overtly or covertly for the establishment of an Islamic order and a political state.

Moreover, as a matter of policy, all the protagonists of these movements imbued themselves with the Islamic spirit of 'egalitarianism' and turned directly to the Muslim masses for support and co-operation.

TA'AIYYUNĪ OPPOSITION TO THE FARĀ'IDĪ MOVEMENT

by

DR. MUIN-UD-DIN AHMAD KHAN

It may be recalled that the nineteenth century religious reform movements, *i.e.*, the *Farā'idī*, the *Ta'aiyyunī*, *Ahl-i-Hadīth* and Patna school struggled side by side and competed with one another in their common pursuit of winning over the *Sābiqīs* or the followers of local customs to their respective doctrines. Hence there was occasional conflict among them. Moreover, though all these reform movements rejected the superstitious customs and ceremonies of the *Sābiqī*, yet the *Ta'aiyyunī*, unlike others, appears to have stood for moderation and detested all kinds of radicalism that were characteristic of the *Farā'idī*, Patna school and *Ahl-i-Hadīth*. The *Ta'aiyyunī* leader Mawlānā Karāmat 'Alī made scathing criticism of the superstitious beliefs and practices of the traditional society on the one hand, and of the radical approaches of the *Farā'idī*, Patna school and *Ahl-i-Hadīth* on the other.¹ Nevertheless, the Mawlānā approved in a modified form, some of the traditional ceremonies, such as, *Fātiḥah* (a rite for the dead), and *Qiyām* (or standing) in the birth day celebration of the Prophet (*Milād*), which were rejected by the three other groups, and wrote several books and pamphlets in vindication of these practices².

1 For Mawlānā Karāmat 'Alī's criticism of the traditional customs, see his *Haqq al-Yāqīn*, *Maqāmi' al-Mubtad'īn* and *Mukāshifāt-i-Rāḥmat* published in *Dhā'irah-i-Karāmat*, vol. I, Calcutta, A.H. 1344; and for his criticism of the reformists see *supra*, Chapter II.

2 Mawlānā Karāmat 'Alī's *Quwwat al-Imān* and *Haqq al-Yāqīn* may be cited under this category.

SOCIAL ORGANISATION OF THE FARĀ'IDĪS

by

DR. MUIN-UD-DIN AHMAD KHAN

The biographical sketch of the *Farā'idī* leaders discussed earlier gives us an insight into the nature of the gradual evolution of the movement itself. Hājī Shari'at Allāh based his plan of reform on purely religious principles. But his son Dudu Miyān added a new feature, giving a socio-economic bias to the movement. The pattern of the then Muslim society as described by the contemporary English writers needed such an evolution to rest the movement on a solid foundation.¹ It is, therefore, necessary to examine the organisational principles as laid down by Dudu Miyān.

It may be recalled that although the *Farā'idīs* were *Hanafī* and like the vast majority of the Bengali Muslims followed the *Hanāfī* school of law, yet a few peculiar doctrines which they developed gave their movement a distinctive character. Naturally, the *Farā'idī* movement fostered a community of beliefs and interests among its followers, which brought them into a common platform and unified them into a brotherhood. The unifying tendency of the *Farā'idīs* became apparent even at the initial stage when Hājī Shari'at Allāh preached his doctrines at Nayabari. The sense of growing unity among his followers, according to James Wise, alarmed the Hindu *Zamīndārs*, and as a result, he was expelled from the place.²

1 See for instance, "A Police Report of the Zilah Dacca-Jalalpur dealing with the manners and morals of the people, dated A.D. 1799", (edited by the present writer), *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society*, vol. vii, part I, Karachi, January, 1959, pp. 24-35; and James Wise : *Eastern Bengal*, p. 6 f.

2 James Wise : *Eastern Bengal*, p. 22.

HĀJĪ SHARĪ'AT-ALLĀH

The Founder of the *Farā'idī* Movement

(A.D. 1781—1840)

By

DR. MUIN-UD-DIN AHMAD KHAN, M.A., PH.D., KARACHI

Early Life :

Hājī Shari'at Allāh, the founder of the *Farā'idī* movement of Bengal, came to prominence only after he started this religious reform movement about the age of 38 $\frac{1}{2}$. He was born of a petty *Tālukdār* family and hence did not claim a high or aristocratic birth. It is, therefore, not expected that his early life should have been recorded in a horoscope or family genealogy. Naturally, the chronology of his life has been a subject of endless controversy among scholars.³ Nevertheless, a few fresh sources including one tomb inscription, two manuscript biographies—one in Bengali and another in Persian—and a number of printed Bengali *Puthis*,⁴ which have fallen into our hands, have put us on a more advantageous footing to attempt a fuller account of his life.

¹ Hājī Shari'at Allāh was born in A.D. 1781 (see "Tomb Inscription of Hājī Shari'at Allāh", *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan*, Dacca, vol. III, 1958, p. 195), and started his reform movement in A.D. 1818 (see *infra*).

² See *J.A.S.P.*, vol. III, p. 187, foot note 4; J.E. Gastrell: *Geographical and Statistical Report of the Districts of Jessore, Fareedpore and Backergunge*, Calcutta, 1868 (hereafter referred to as *Jessore, Fāreedpore and Backergunge*), p. 36, No. 151; and *Translation of Proceedings held in two cases tried in 1847 before the Session Judge of Dacca in which Doodoo Miyan and his Followers belonging to the Sect of Hadjees or Ferazees*, Calcutta, Military Orphan Press, 1848 (hereafter referred to as *Trial of Dudu Miyān*, p. 268, which confirms that the Hājī was a petty landholder and possessed a estate of his own.

³ For an elaborate discussion of the controversies, see *J.A.S.P.* vol. III, p. 189f.

⁴ These were recovered by the present writer in 1948 and 1949 and are preserved at the Asiatic Society of Pakistan, Dacca.

RELIGIOUS DOCTRINES OF THE FARA'IDIS

by

MUIN-UD-DIN AHMAD KHAN

Since its inception down to the present day, the *Farā'idī* movement pursued a predominantly religious programme. The socio-economic programme of Dūdū Miyān¹ gave added impetus to the movement and gained for it the support of the masses of Eastern Bengal and Assam. Although, its socio-economic aspect appears to have been most attractive to the mass of the people, its religious aspect was never underrated by its adherents.

As we have seen earlier, the *Farā'idīs* identified themselves with the *Hanafī* school of law², to which the rest of the Muslims of Eastern Bengal and Assam generally belonged. There are, however, some peculiarities in the *Farā'idī* doctrines which distinguished them from the rest. A study of these religious peculiarities of the *Farā'idīs* is of special interest to the students of history, because in the first place, it gives us a close view of the various problems—social, religious, economic and political—which were faced by the Muslims of Bengal after the loss of their political power; secondly, because, as a type of religious reform movement, it connects Eastern Bengal with the historical trend of religious reform so common in the nineteenth century Muslim world.

In launching his reform programme, the foremost aim of Hājī Shari'at Allāh was to enforce the original teachings of Islām and to purge the society of various superstitious rites and ceremonies which were practised by the Muslims of Bengal. His first policy was to call upon the Muslims to be penitent

1 See *infra.*, Chapter VIII.

2 See *supra.*, Chapter II.