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Mo'min and the Mujāhidīn Movement

Mo'min Xān Mo'min was born at the close of the eighteenth century, watershed period in Indian history in general and Muslim Indian history in particular¹. His work, notwithstanding its strict adherence to traditional literary canons, not only brings into focus the contradictions and the aspirations of the first half of the new century, but, far more important, is indicative of the efforts of the intellectuals, and of poets in particular, to come to terms with the evolving social transformation of the period.

The withering away of Muslim political power in the eighteenth century ushered a period of religious reforms² which found in Šāh Valiyu'llāh of Delhi³ its most articulate and profound spokesman. The cornerstone

¹ For a view of eighteenth-century India that balances the picture of decadence and stagnation presented by historians such as Sarkar and Tara Chand see H. Goetz *The Crisis of Indian Civilization in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries*, Calcutta 1948; G. D. Bearce, "Intellectual and Cultural Characteristics of India in a Changing Era, 1740-1800", *Journal of Asian Studies*, XXV, 1965, pp. 3-17; B. D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860-1900*, Princeton 1982; C. A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars. North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770-1870*, Cambridge 1983.

² S. M. Ikrām observes: "The spiritual and moral deviations of the Muslims which had been offuscated by political power become evident. Temporal power has a strange effect on society. It is able to hide many imperfections and to transform shortcomings into virtues... The loss of temporal power forced the Muslims to look critically at the conditions and to evaluate realistically their hopes for their future". S. M. Ikrām, *Mauj-ē Kauşar*, Lāhawr, n.d., p. 9. On the importance of this religious activity see Xalīq Aḥmad Niẓāmī, "1857 se pahle kī Dihlī", in *Tārīxī Maqālāt*, Dihlī 1966, pp. 210-255.

³ Šāh Valiyu'llāh (1703-'62), which according to Bearce "illustrates the greatness of the medieval mind in eighteenth century India" is a figure that still awaits a definite study. For an introduction to Šāh Valiyu'llāh see A. Bausani, "Nota su Shah Waliullah di Delhi", *AION*, 30, 1970, pp. 93-147; Ġulām Jalbānī, *Šāh Valiyu'llāh kī ta'lim*,

of the Šāh's movement, notwithstanding his often cited political involvement⁴, was a Quranic fundamentalism integrated by a correct and critical use of *ḥadīths*. This intellectual approach, complemented by an "inter-juristic eclecticism"⁵ was to lead, he hoped, to a curbing of the sectarian conflicts that were sapping away Muslim vitality, and thus foster a social regeneration of the Muslim community as a whole.

Following the death of Šāh Valiyu'llāh, leadership of the movement passed on to his son Šāh 'Abdu'l 'Azīz⁶. Although he continued to give emphasis to religious learning, the changed situation called for new answers. English political hegemony with the subsequent encroachment on Muslim law⁷ forced 'Abdu'l 'Azīz to devote his attention to the immediate task of offering the needed juridical and moral guidance to a disoriented community. Thus, his often cited *fatwas*, rather than a rejection of the new order are to be seen as an effort to come to terms with it⁸. It is during 'Abdu'l 'Azīz later years that the movement moved away from this moderate approach and Delhi became the center of an aggressive group of young 'Ulamā's militantly carrying forward a radical program of reforms. The recognized leaders of this group were Isma'īl Šahīd and 'Abdu'l Ḥayy⁹. It is at this time that we can trace a wider fracture with the traditional elite and the implementation of a policy aiming at giving a more radical

Lāhawr 1963; S.A.A. Rizvi, *Shah Wali Allah and His Times*, Canberra, 1973; K. A. Nizami "Shah Waliullah of Delhi: His Thought and Contribution", *Islamic Culture*, July 1980, pp. 141-152.

⁴ The collapse of Mughal authority that followed Nādir's invasion, led Valiyu'llāh to search for a Muslim prince who would restore political stability. Thus following traditional patterns of political powers, he appealed to Niẓāmu'l-Mulk Aṣaf Jāh, to the Rohilla Najību'l-daula and to the Afghan Abdālī Durrānī. What must be pointed out, however, is that this marginal aspect of the Šāh's activity has been unduly underlined in the historiography of the subcontinent: Pakistani historians tend to read in it a precedent of Muslim nationalism while Indian historians tend to exaggerate its effect on the communal issue.

⁵ Azīz Ahmad, *An Intellectual History of Islam in India*, Edinburgh 1969, p. 8.

⁶ For an introduction to Šāh 'Abdu'l 'Azīz see R.A.A. Rizvi, *Shah Abd al-Aziz-Puritanism, Sectarian Polemics and Jihad*, Canberra 1982.

⁷ For a brief introduction to the question see P. Hardy, *The Muslims of British India*, Cambridge 1972, p. 51.

⁸ B. D. Metcalf, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-52.

⁹ Nephew and son-in-law respectively of Šāh 'Abdu'l 'Azīz who found their death in the *jihād* on the Frontier. As Q. Ahmad observes: "Shah Ismail was inclined to be an extremist and a *ghair muqallid* (non-conformist) while Hai was comparatively moderate and a *Muqallid* (conformist). In fact the two provide an interesting comparative study. The one fiery and vigorous and the other quiet and unassuming": A. Ahmad, *Wahabi Movement*, Calcutta 1966, p. 28. One the figure of Šāh Isma'īl besides the old *Ḥayyat-ē tayyiba* see the study of Paiyām Šāhjahānpūrī, *Ḥayyat-ē Isma'īl Šahīd*, Lāhawr 1973.

political connotation to the whole reform movement. The changed nature of the movement called for new leadership. A leadership ready to translate the fundamentalist ideological message into a viable political program and, far more important, to be itself an embodiment of its ideological framework and a manifestation of its enlarged social base¹⁰. The man chosen for this role was Sayyid Aḥmad Šahīd¹¹.

Sayyid Aḥmad was born in Ra'e Barelli on the 29th of November 1786 in a family known for its religious fervor and learning. This family background and economic difficulties led him to Delhi where, like others, he was trained to propagate the reforming ideas of the movement to Muslims outside of Delhi. After a stay of some years, during which he tried to overcome the deficiencies of his formal education, the Sayyid returned to his native town and later went on to join the forces of Amīr 'Alī¹². He returned to Delhi in 1818 at a time when the movement was changing strategy and goals. It is at this time that the two most important personalities of the movement took *bi'at* to Sayyid Aḥmad, thus explicitly recognizing him as leader of the movement. Sayyid Aḥmad, accompanied by his known

¹⁰ As Stephen Fucks observes: "Unlike the previous leading reformers of Islam in North India, and even his teacher and inspirer Abdu'l 'Aziz, Sayyid Ahmad chose as his sphere of operation not the intellectual and spiritual elite of Islam, but the Muslim masses whom he contacted unceasingly in cities, towns and villages on his many tours and travels". S. Fucks, *Rebellious Prophets*, London 1965, p. 184. The observation, although useful for bringing into the focus the social make up of the movement, may be misleading as far as the extent of Muslim participation is concerned.

¹¹ Historians have devoted much attention to the figure of Sayyid Aḥmad Šahīd and the entire Mujāhidīn movement. These studies, however, often evidence marked ideological and sectarian bias. This has been a favorite theme of Pakistani nationalist historians; besides the work of Ikram, Qureishi and Husayn, this point of view is best exemplified by the following studies: Ġulām Rasūl Mihr, *Sayyid Aḥmad Šahīd*, Lāhawr 1954; Id., *Jamā'at-ē Mujāhidīn*, Lāhawr 1955; Payyām Šāhjahānpūrī, *Šahādatgah-ē Bālākot*, Lāhawr 1971. For an Indian Muslim point of view see M. Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims*, London 1967, pp. 395; Id., *Islamic Influence on Indian Society*, Meerut, 1972, pp. 85. For a non-Muslim Indian treatment see M. A. Karandikar, *Islam in India: Transition to Modernity*, Bombay 1968, p. 133. Besides political connotations, the issue has also become charged with sectarian implications. For a positive picture of Sayyid Aḥmad and the entire movement see: Sayyid Abū'l-Ḥasan 'Alī Nadwī, *Sirat-ē Sayyid Aḥmad Šahīd*, Lakhna'u 1941; Id., *Jab Imam kī Baharā'i*, Karācī 1977; Mohiuddin Ahmad, *Saiyid Ahmad Shahid. His Life and Mission*, Lukhnaw 1975. For an introduction to a different Muslim view of the movement, see Šāh Ḥusayn Girdizī, *Ḥaqā'iq-ē Tahrik-ē Bālākot*, Karācī 1402 a.h.

¹² Sayyid Aḥmad's connection with the Pindari chief has often been presented in apologetic terms. For a different view, see O. Caroe, *The Pathans 550 B.C.-A.D. 1957*, London 1962, p. 301. On the Pindari and the figure of Amīr 'Alī see B. Ghosh, *Central India 1805-1818*, Calcutta 1966.

disciples, took extended tours of Northern India and in 1822, together with a large following, performed Ḥajj¹³.

These were decisive years for the movement. In the first place, Sayyid Aḥmad, thanks to his own charismatic personality and the efforts of his disciples, was vested with the needed halo of leadership. At the same time the movement carried forward intense organizational activity aiming at changing the existing religious network to one with political connotations and functions. Finally, his decision to create a Muslim state led him to lead a *hijrat* to the Frontier where he set up the headquarters of his Muḥāhidīn army. In 1827 he declared himself Imām followed by the declaration of Ḥijāh against the Sikhs¹⁴. Most of his early successful campaigns, against the Sikhs and local chiefs who refused to comply with the stern discipline of the movement were fought around Peshawar and the Swat and Burner regions. In 1831 in the battle of Bālākot against a force led by Kunvār Śer Singh, Sayyid Aḥmad fell on the battlefield. His heroic death, deeming him a martyr, gave the needed impetus for the continuation of the movement¹⁵.

The center of this phase of the movement was Delhi, a city which in this half of the nineteenth century became, under British tutelage¹⁶, the home of "men so talented that their meetings and assemblies recall those of Akbar and Shahjahan, ... men whose like it seems that the soil of Delhi and indeed of all India will not produce again"¹⁷. This sort of Renaissance, as it has been called, was to a great extent the product of the con-

¹³ Due to the fact that the performance of Ḥajj involved the use of Christian ships or the crossing of Śī'ah territory, in the course of the eighteenth century became prevalent opinion that for the Indian Muslims Hajj was no longer obligatory. Sayyid Aḥmad wanted to assert the obligation of this basic duty and this action certainly enhanced his position as budding leader of the movement.

¹⁴ The view that the movement even in the first phase was anti-British was first put forth by W. W. Hunter in his famous *The Indian Mussalman*. This view motivated more by imperial preoccupation than historical data was confuted by Sayyid Aḥmad Xān, Aḥmadīya polemist and by Sayyid Aḥmad Śahīd's early biographer Muḥammad Ĵa'far Thānessarī.

¹⁵ The defeat of Bālākot closed the Delhi period of the movement. From 1831 to 1858 leadership passed to the Patna based 'Alī brothers. The movement in its final phase 1852-1863 came in direct conflict with the British. The disaster of the battle of Sittana brought the Muḥāhidīn activities in the North-West practically to an end.

¹⁶ Following Lord Lake's capture of Delhi, Śāh 'Ālam kept his throne but power passed firmly in British hands. This situation has been described by Zāhir Dilhivī in this verse that is often quoted by Indian historians "The world belongs to God, the realm to the emperor and power to the Company".

¹⁷ Ḥālī, *Yādgar-ē ḡālib*, cited in R. Russell, K. Islam, *Ghalib-Life and Letters*, London 1969, p. 30.

traditions characterizing a society which, unable to cope with the harshness of the new reality, took refuge in a kind of "dream" ¹⁸ best symbolized by the empty pageantry of the Mughal court ¹⁹. It was the repose of a society which, forced to comply with the new economic order, appeared vexed more by the "destruction of a way of life than the destruction of livelihood" ²⁰. Ġulām Ḥusayn Zū'l-fiqār, speaking about the literary climate of the period observes:

The background of those poets was a strange mixture of romantic and odd ideas; a struggle between hope and despair, imagination and reality. Below a hazy feeling of despair and hopelessness, there was a pronounced tendency to enjoy the pleasures of life. This widespread illusion was to be shattered by the bitter effect of reality ²¹.

and again:

Although peace and order had been established, the cultural climate of the period was characterized by widespread anguish and despair. People in their weaknesses had accepted British ascendancy and power, but they still lamented the loss of their past glory and strength and grieved the decay of their culture and society ²².

But the real challenge to traditional culture, more than from the British, who in this period were "awed by their own success and respectful towards Mughal culture" ²³, came from the extremism that had percolated in Valiyu'llāh's movement. The growing emphasis of these puritanical reformers on a return to the ideals of the early period of Islam ²⁴ led them to a total rejection of traditional society. The composite medieval Indo-Muslim culture, whose integration had to a great extent been the product of an Islam which had acted as a catalyst to accommodate and give authority to changes and innovations, reacted forcefully to this attempt to undermine its cohesiveness. It was natural, therefore, that this cultural conflict, given also the all-embracing nature of Islam, took on a religious form. Delhi in this period was animated by religious debates and controversies. As Niẓāmī points out:

¹⁸ I. H. Qureishi, "A Year in Pre-Mutiny Delhi 1837 a.c.", *Islamic Culture*, July 1943, p. 290.

¹⁹ For a sympathetic and melancholic picture of the Mughal court which in many ways captures prevalent Muslim feelings see Mrs Meer Hasan Ali, *Observations on the Mussulmans of India*, II, Delhi 1933, p. 158.

²⁰ P. Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

²¹ Ġulām Ḥusayn Zū'l-fiqār, *Urdū šā'iri kā siyāsī aur samāji pas-manẓur*, Lāhawr 1960, pp. 301-302.

²² *Ibid*, *op. cit.*, p.

²³ P. Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

²⁴ On this "classicism of return" see G. E. Grunebaum, *Modern Islam*, Berkeley 1962, p. 78.

Among the people there was increasing interest in religion. In those days during the month of Ramazān several small mosques were reserved for *tarāwih*, while it is surprising to hear Šāh ‘Abdul ‘Azīz account of the many places for *tarāwih* reserved in the jāmi’ masjid... In those times both the sufis and the ‘ulamā’s strove their utmost to make the people observe the injunctions of the Sunnat and the Šarī‘at and in doing so not only protected the Muslims from the surrounding malaise, but also laid the foundations for future generations. To this end in the *xānqāhs* there was instruction on Šarī‘ah while in the *madrasah* the accent was on Ḥadīth and Qur‘ān²⁵

The uncompromising zeal of the reformers and their call for an immediate implementation of their ideas and social practices gave rise to sectarian passions which were cause of divisions and factionalism. The focal point of these controversies was the rigid position of Isma‘il Šahīd whose death was celebrated by a section of the Muslim population of Delhi with the distribution of sweets²⁶. Such widespread and intense sectarian feeling was not confined to the intellectual elite, but influenced a substantial part of the Muslims population who crowded the mosques to hear the exhortations of the different leaders. The effect of Isma‘il Šahīd’s Friday “sermons” is described by his first biographer thus:

At the end of his oration the majority of the Muslims became angry and, whispering to each other, criticized the Maulānā for his disrespect of the great religious leaders and for his attack on the practise of nīyāz-ĕ naẓar. Exaggerating his words, the innocent Maulānā was soon blamed for things which he had not said. Some spread the rumor that he had scoffed at the Prophet; others maintained that he had criticized the Qur‘ān and the Ḥadīth... all those things that would generate enmity were attributed to him. These people were so able in spreading rumors that the whole city was seething with antagonism towards the Maulānā. Those serious people attending the sermons could do little against this general opposition... Every day in the city of Delhi new rumors attributed to Maulānā Šahīd were so widespread that they became the object of the conversation even of ladies who would beat their breast at the mere mention of his name²⁷.

This widespread concern was activated by the fact that the *vahhābīyat*²⁸, as the conservative pīrs and ‘ulamā’s began to call the reformers, questioned ingrained customs and traditions which were not only regarded as an

²⁵ Xalīq Aḥmad Niẓāmī, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

²⁶ Muhammad Husayn, “Sayyid Ahmad Shahid”, in *History of the Freedom Movement*, Karaci 1957, p. 566.

²⁷ Mirzā Ḥayrat Dihlavī, *Ḥayyat-ĕ ṭayyiba*, Lāhawr 1976, pp. 62-63.

²⁸ This term made common by British historians was first used with derogatory intent by traditionalist like Faẓl-ĕ Rasūl Badayunī and Faẓl-ĕ Ḥaqq. Sayyid Aḥmad called his movement the Tariqah-ĕ Muḥammadiyah. On the question see Muin-ud-Din Ahmad Khan, “Tariqa-i-Muhammadiyah Movement: An Analytical Study”, *Islamic Studies*, 1967, pp. 376-387.

integral part of the faith, but had also acquired, for the average Muslim, deep emotional significance²⁹.

The iconoclastic attitude of the reformers, codified in Sayyid Aḥmad's *Ṣirāt-ḥ Mustaqīm*, had, however, a deep influence on Muslim outlook. A feeling of religious rectitude became so widespread that "even the Delhi tailors were moved scrupulously to return remnants of cloth to their employers"³⁰. Moreover such intensification of the faith, notwithstanding the division that it caused, promoted the ideological tension needed to undertake the *jihād*. This is clearly perceived from the first circular letter that Sayyid Aḥmad addressed to all sections of Muslim Indian society:

On everyone belonging to classes or the masses who claims himself to be a follower of this religion of Islam this is obligatory that, when light and darkness are in conflict and when *Kufr* [infidelity] is pitched against Islam, he should display his highpitched feelings and religious susceptibilities demand. And he who, in the prosecution of the object, does not join the ranks of the helpers of the Truth [Islam] without doubt is guilty of disagreeing with and detaching himself [from the Muslims]... And he who, in this regard, avoids participation in this struggle places himself out the pale of Islam³¹.

The movement was able to gather considerable popular support³²; yet, far more important was its deep impact on the intellectual life of the community. The controversies of the period, whose echo may be detected in many later developments, made fundamentalism a constant current of thought in the Muslim culture of the Subcontinent. In the field of Urdu literature, the influence of this phase of the movement was very important.

²⁹ On the question Barbara D. Metcalf observes: "The concern of this group was to eliminate what they called "customs" (rasm, pl. rusum; riwāg; dastūr). They analyzed customs as observances and occasions socially practiced, those that involved family (kumbā) and the extended brotherhood (birādārī) of intermarrying relations. They also exposed certain objectionable individual practices – keeping dogs or sporting an unacceptable haircut – but their greatest criticism was directed toward ceremonies that marked life stages and the festivals of the calendrical year... The opponents to reform saw it as nothing less than lack of respect for religiously ordained social relationship and, more serious yet, lack of respect for the beloved saints and even the Prophet of God." B. D. Metcalf, *Islam and Customs in Nineteenth-Century India*, in K. Ishvaran & B. L. Smith, eds., *Contribution to Asian Studies*, vol. 17, Leiden, 1982, pp. 62–63.

³⁰ Caroe, *op. cit.*, p. 301.

³¹ A. S. Bazmi Ansari, "Sayyid Ahmad Shahid in the Light of His Letters", *Islamic Studies*, 1976, pp. 232–233.

³² In 1827 Metcalf, the British resident, reported: "During the period of their recent attack on Ranjit's territories, the most fervent anxiety for their success pervaded the mind of the population of Delhi. Numbers quitted their homes and marched to join them including some who resigned their employment in the Company's service", cited in Mahmud Husayn, *op. cit.*, p. 579.

From this point of view, of primary importance was the impetus that these polemicist gave to the development of Urdu prose³³. The influence of the movement is also discernible in some of the poetic writings of the period. In the Mujāhidīn army itself there were poets such as Xurram ‘Alī Balhori³⁴ who did much to propagandize the movement; however, the poet who reflects most faithfully not only the enthusiasm of the movement, but also the overall climate of the period, is certainly Mo‘min Xān Mo‘min.

Mo‘min Xān Mo‘min was born in Delhi in 1801³⁵ in a Pathan family which during the reign of Šāh ‘Ālam had moved from Kashmir to Delhi where it attained a position of prestige in Mughal society. Notwithstanding the changes brought about by British ascendancy in the first half of the nineteenth century this household was able to maintain its status. The economic security derived from a pension and the income of the medical profession assured its members the leisure necessary to follow their traditional interests in the cultural and social life of the community. Mo‘min’s father, a well known Delhi *ṭātib*, was profoundly interested in the religious issues of his day and became a follower and a close friend of Šāh ‘Abdu’l ‘Azīz. This relationship was to affect Mo‘min from his very birth. In fact it was the Šāh who came to whisper the *Azān* in the ear of the newborn babe, and the very name Mo‘min (Mu‘min-believer), notwithstanding the objection of the family members, was chosen to fulfill a wish of the same Šāh ‘Abdu’l ‘Azīz. This relationship and influence was strengthened in later years when Mo‘min joined the Delhi madrasah headed by the famous Maulvī. Here under the tutelage of the same ‘Abdu’l ‘Azīz and his brother ‘Abdu’l Qādir³⁶, he was able to complete a curriculum that included Arabic, Persian, Ḥadīth and Manṭiq. His religious feelings were stirred also by these reformers’ heated Friday sermons which he would often memorize. Religion thus became an integral part of his intellectual outlook, and to honor Šāh ‘Abdu’l ‘Azīz in later years, he wrote the following *Tārīx*:

Maulvi ‘Abdu’l ‘Azīz focal point of religion;
Unequaled and unrivaled, peerless and matchless.

³³ For a brief analysis see A. Schimmel, *Classical Urdu Literature from the Beginning to Iqbal*, Wiesbaden 1975, pp. 205–207.

³⁴ On Balhori and other minor poets associated with the movement see: Mu‘īnu’l dīn ‘Aqil, *Tahrīk-ē āzād meṅ urdū kā ḥissā*, Karāčī 1976, pp. 229–235.

³⁵ Information regarding Mo‘min’s life, unless otherwise indicated, is from ‘Ibādat Barelvī, *Mo‘min aur muṭāla ye mo‘min*, Karāčī 1961.

³⁶ Šāh ‘Abdu’l Qādir (1753–1827) is known primarily for his excellent translation of the Qur’ān in Urdu. For a study of this translation see ‘Abdu’l Ḥaqq, “Puranī Urdū meṅ Qua’ān-ē muḥīd ke tarjme aur tafsīrēh”, in ‘Abdu’l Ḥaqq, *Qadīm Urdū*, Karāčī 1961, pp. 118–159.

Why did he depart for the world of oblivion?
 Is it that man's faith had been shaken?
 O harsh heaven! Whom have you carried away?
 O death! What misery have you brought to the helpless.
 As the corpse was lifted, havoc fell upon the world,
 While in the heavens every angel was sprawling in the dust.
 As his body was lowered, nobles and plebians were afflicted,
 While friends and foes sprinkled their heads with dust.
 I too was among this company of mourners.
 Where, Mo'min, sang this unique cronogram.
 The unjust hand of death removed hand and foot³⁷:
 Poverty and religion, learning and art, kindness and generosity, knowledge
 and action³⁸.

Notwithstanding this early close association with Šāh 'Abdu'l 'Azīz, Mo'min never thought of becoming a religious leader. He was a man of wide interests and was attracted by other facets of that Indo-Muslim culture destined soon after to disappear. Tutored by his father and other family members, Mo'min soon became an accomplished *ṭabīb* himself. The medical profession, however, was not congenial to his temperament, and his intellectual curiosity led him to master *nujūm* (astrology) and *raml* (geomancy), sciences whose terminology is responsible for making some of his poems "overlaid with scholarship and full of out-of-the-way allusion that one must have something of the scholarship of the poet himself to understand them"³⁹. He became also an expert in music and a renowned chess player. Mo'min's secure economic position granted him the leisure not only to satisfy his intellectual curiosity, but also, until the ascetic last years prior to his death in 1851, permitted him to lead a life of pleasure reflecting the style and taste of the Muslim upper classes.

Mo'min however was basically a poet. In the throbbing literary climate of the period his refusal to participate in *Mušā'iras* and in the literary activity promoted by the Mughal court and other petty nobles was certainly unusual⁴⁰; however, he never considered poetry a mere diversion, but

³⁷ The verse gives the information necessary to arrive at the Šāh's date of death.

³⁸ Mo'min Xan Mo'min, *Kulliyāt-ē mo'min*, ed. Sayyid Imtīyaz 'Alī Taj, vol. II, Lāhawr 1964, pp. 106-107.

³⁹ M. Sadiq, *A History of Urdu Literature*, London 1964, p. 174.

⁴⁰ Niyāz Faṭḥpūrī is of the opinion that Mo'min was to a great extent an exception to the prevailing political aloofness characterizing other poets, and observes that Mo'min "never composed any qasida for the emperor or other nobles, and although this was primarily due to his pride, another important reason was that he was aware of the fact that praising the emperor at that time was like rubbing salt on the wound". Niyāz Faṭḥpūrī, *Kalām-ē Mo'min par ek tā'irana nigāh, Niḡār-ē Pākistān, Mo'min nambar*, Karāčī 1958, p. 6. The same works can be found in Niyāz Faṭḥpūrī, *Intiqādīyāt*, Karāčī 1958, pp. 122-146.

rather an exact science-like art requiring intellectual training and hard work. Regarding his approach to poetry in one of his letters he observed:

As literary critics point out without the necessary peace of mind one is unable to grasp its finer points and without deep meditation even superficial meaning is unattainable. In a complaisant state one cannot produce formal poetry while mental confusion is an obstacle to profound thought. Unless the poet is gripped by a deep bewilderment and is ready to sacrifice his self he will not obtain any deep meaning but produce only words⁴¹.

This cerebral approach complemented by a conceited pride in his wide knowledge gave rise to a complexity of style that contrasts sharply with the more effective simplicity and directness of other parts of his work⁴². Notwithstanding these stylistic contradictions, Mo'min was able to assert himself as one of the more talented poets of the period and his poetry, published in 1846⁴³, had an influence on the literary taste of the period. To complement this direct literary influence was the deep effect that his refusal to comply with the accepted custom among poets of seeking employment with petty nobles had on the literary scene. To be sure this decision was not the product of a radical transformation of the reading public, nevertheless it was a severe indictment of that tyranny of the patrons that often led to the humiliation of the poets. In this decision Mo'min was helped not only by his financial autonomy and rebellious nature but also by his understanding of poetry, notwithstanding the self-awareness of his style, as the intimate reflection of the poet's passions and ideas.

⁴¹ Mo'min Xan Mo'min, *Inša-ye mo'min*, ed. Zāhi Aḥmad Ṣadiq, Na'ī Dihlī, 1977, pp. 42-43 (Persian), pp. 231-232 (Urdu). Mo'min's ideas on formal poetry contrast sharply with the outlook of his contemporary Zauq, who in a verse observes: "O Zauq! Verily formalism causeth discomfort; Happy is who does not practice formalism" (cf. M. Sadiq, *op. cit.*, p. 169).

⁴² On this aspect of Mo'min's style Sayyid 'Abdu'llāh observes: "The question of the presence in Mo'min's work of the hyperboles and fantastic metaphors underlined by linguists has caused an unwarranted controversy among literary critics. One of the more effective characteristics of Mo'min's style which cannot be censured is that he presents his ideas in such a manner as to create somewhat of a challenge to the reader's intellect. Having hidden the matter he proceeds to unveil it by..., ambiguity or opposition; sometimes he works with contradictions while in other occasions uses allusions, innuendos and metaphors. In short the technique of composition is not to be rejected even though it fosters some ambiguity. In other cases his use of complex Persian constructions brings about an aura of awe and strangeness. Another general characteristic is his cutting of some expressions which the reader, on his first approach, will find somewhat strange; however, those with adequate poetical tools after some reflection will have complete access to the poem's meaning". Sayyid 'Abdu'llāh, "Muqaddima", in *Kulliyāt-ē Mo'min*, pp. 31-32.

⁴³ Mo'min's Urdu poems were collected by his famous disciple Muṣṭafā Xān Šefta and published by Karimu'd dīn in 1846 in Delhi. Another edition of his Urdu divān

Were I to write a book it wouldn't be writing,
For I write only which is inscribed on the heart⁴⁴.

Mo'mins poetry closely reflects his complex and contradictory personality. Self-centered and withdrawn he was marked by a "passionate nature and a gaudy disposition whose pleasing appearance was complemented by a refined way of dressing. Rather tall and with a light complexion, he had long curly hair which he would comb with his fingers. He would usually wear a long muslin tunic with very loose bottoms and a red belt"⁴⁵. A dominant trait of his character was his sentimental disposition which drew him in repeated love affairs whose details are to be found in his *maṣnavīs*, while his *gāzals*, free from any mystical connotation, offer a more detached and languid analysis of such experiences.

Passionate love is in effect the dominant theme of Mo'min's poetry. Many have tried to explain the apparent conflict between this and the poet's religious outlook as a product of the social life of nineteenth-century Delhi⁴⁶. However, notwithstanding the fact that Mo'min himself lived this conflict as a strident personal contradiction⁴⁷, this duality ap-

was published in 1873 by the well known publishing house Nal Keṣor of Lucknow, while in 1943 Ziya 'Aḥmad Badāyūnī, prepared a two-volume edition of his work. Mo'min's Persian *divān* and a collection of his persian letters (*Inšā ye Mo'min*) were published posthumously in 1271 H.

⁴⁴ Kulliyāt, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p.

⁴⁵ Muḥammad Ḥ. Āzād, *Āb-ē Ḥayyat*, Lāhawr 1970, p. 338. Āzād's decision to omit Mo'min from the first edition of his famous book produced a vehement reaction. His explanation attributing the omission to Mo'min's eccentric personality (cf. Āzād, *op. cit.*, p. 335) was not accepted, and admirers of the poet began to accuse him of prejudices (cf. A. Farruxī, *Muḥammad Ḥusayn Āzād*, II, Karāčī 1960, pp. 11-14). Notwithstanding the fact that Āzād, on Ḥālī's insistence, (Ḥālī, *Kulliyāt-ē naṣr-ē ḥālī*, I, ed. Muhammad Isma'il Panipātī, Lāhawr, 1967, pp. 313-328), included a review of Mo'min's poetry in the second edition of his work, controversy over the original exclusion have not abated and some tend to attribute it to Āzād's resentment for Mo'min's relation with one of Āzād's female relative. On the question see Farmān Fathḥpūrī, "Mo'min kī ḥayyat-ē mu'āšiqā", in *Nigār-e Pākistān-Momin Nambar*, 1958, pp. 94-104.

⁴⁶ Baralvī, with strong apologetic overtones, often repeats this point. Aḥmad Fārūqī observes: "These were not Mo'min's but the contradictions of the times. Religion and debauchery went together often". Xwāfah Aḥmad Fārūqī, "Mo'min dīlhavi", in *Zauq-o-Justajū*, Lakhna'ū, 1967, p. 84.

⁴⁷ This is a recurring motif especially in his *rubā'iyāt*. Here are a few examples:

For your love he has accused me,
Making my pleasure torment.
Restless days, sleepless nights.
O heart! what have you done to me!

(*Kulliyāt*, II, 280)

pears to find solution at the poetic level. Mo'min sings the praises of passionate earthly love, but his sensuality, unlike that of the Lucknow poets, does not foster a divorce from the realities of life, but promotes the creation of a vitalistic awareness that complements well the action-oriented nature of his religious beliefs. In a quatrain Mo'min writes:

Mo'min has no hope in sincere abstinence or in some šayx's intercession;
When he lacks the love of a sweetheart he places his faith in God's sublime
love ⁴⁸.

Earthy and religious love, though distinct, are for Mo'min the only tangible answers to the stagnation of his society and to his personal anguish. In some of his poems these two aspects blend perfectly.

Neither suffering nor anguish, helplessness is my life's torment;
To the silent voice and the tearless eye don't ask heart's sorrow.
Not in heaven or earth, in turbulent spring or rushing clouds, traces of repentance.
O glorious face don't look at the enemy's evil glance, for victory is a flowing torrent of blood,
Why wonder at the bewildered tears of my anguish, for the mirage is in the river and the river the mirage.
Wine and beloved the future holds dear, for youth fears old age and old age death,
Come out and the sun will shine, it will be a reunion with the moon at night.
Earth sank in overflowing tears and in the restless water distressed became Māhī ⁴⁹.
The unveiling of complaints my burden and the night of love turned into the night of suffering.
Hurry o day of Judgement and set the world aright, though this won't be, there is hope only in revolution,
The cruelty of oppression is not ebbing and neither my sincerity for when the head is in the saddle the future in the stirrups.
I have made sport of my lover's cruelty and of heaven's oppression though from infancy tumultuous religion and love:

O Mo'min! The mansion-like heart has bursted like a bubble,
Only sorrow and suffering the rewards for having given it away;
Those hearts of stone have ruined that mansion that had been God's above.
Alas! what have I done! O wretched love.

(*Kulliyāt*, II, 276)

O Mo'min! till when this passion for sinfulness
O malicious spirit! till when this wickedness.
Accept your God. Repent for love of God.
O enemy of religion! Till when this intimacy with idols.

(*Kulliyāt*, II, 274)

⁴⁸ *Kulliyāt*, II, p. 279.

⁴⁹ Mythological fish on which the eart is supposed to rest.

O Mo'min! This world is a sweetheart's pleasure and in the world's utter evil find delight ⁵⁰.

To be sure Mo'min's style and the peculiar nature of the *gāzal* don't permit him in these poems a detailed exposition of his moral and social preoccupations; however, the prevailing emotional intensity is an indication of the poet's deep awareness of these questions.

Mo'min was in fact acutely conscious of the surrounding malaise and his work, and to a great extent his "bohemian" way of life, can be seen as a rejection and an indictment of the prevailing values of his society and of the new order which with "The fall of this desolate part of the country (Delhi) into the hands of ignorant and worthless infidels has made nobility and glory rare merchandise" ⁵¹. He thought often of leaving Delhi, but he could not separate himself from his beloved city and the grief of his poetry became an outlet for his anguish and his protest.

For these are times of constant abuses:
O I remember those ancient graces.
O God then such refinements now such vulgarity;
In this world people also change thus? ⁵²

And again:

People are bewildered, these are bad times;
There won't be any new dawn, these are new times.
The heavenly spheres are in motion and you are ill-famed;
O destiny! What times are these? ⁵³

In the *Qaṣīda* to the Amīr of Toṅk, Mo'min outpours his vehement complaints thus:

O the memory of those days of enjoyment and mirth. Life is not the same
and neither are we.
Why go bewildered to the desert when the desolation of one's house is not
less:
What was the Sky's envy has become dust: How sublime was the palace.
The injustice of heaven's movement; of dusty Aries, of swift Saturn.
Without doors what need of a gate-keeper, who would come to this deserted
place?
To the sages I would like to ask: is this a city or a desert?
What has become of those tall walls, of those columns?
In the garden stones instead of roses, straw instead of fragrant basil.

⁵⁰ *Kulliyāt*, I pp. 168-169.

⁵¹ *Inṣā-ye Mo'min*, p. 101 (Persian), p. 312 (Urdu).

⁵² *Kulliyāt*, II, p. 288.

⁵³ *Ibid*; p. 298.

Reservoirs and canals dry, except the eyes not a drop of water;
 Though I have treaded all the dust not a trace of running water.
 Where are those golden-colored ceilings, only sky and bright stars.
 The lacerating noise of crows pierces the ears, where is the nightingale and the
 sweet ġazal.

Those paintings are gone, why shouldn't Mani⁵⁴ be thunderstruck?
 Rags for beggars those curtains that adorned the imperial palace,
 The Kāšān carpets have become dust, how beautiful they were!
 From those vessels and table cloths I could have claimed the imperial rank,
 No more fine albums with which to renew the Sassanid tradition.
 Those pearl-decorated couches come to the mind, why ask then the reason
 for my tears

The cushions have turned to stone, o sleep! To live is the heart's heavy burden
 Such our state and still desire ruby wine: O God make me drink blood⁵⁵.

His nostalgic feelings led Mo'min to a refusal of his society; however, unsatisfied with the small world that he had carved for himself, Mo'min gripped on to his religious outlook as an answer to his cultural and social pessimism. Religion was in his view the only force able to harness the energies of the community and foster a regeneration of Muslim culture. His personal vitalism complemented by this ideological dynamism led him to adhere whole heartedly to the Mujāhidin cause. Mo'min's religious convictions, although characterized by uncommon spirit of tolerance attested by his friendship with such traditionalist as Ṣadru'd dīn Āzurdah and Fażl-ē haqq Xayrābādī⁵⁶, were completely in tune with ideological orientation of the reformers. His criticism of the Ahl-ē Taqlīd is often uncompromising:

Some sustain that the Sunnat is distinct from the ʿarīq-ē tawhīd, but surely
 the goal is the same.

The truth of the matter is that these Ahl-ē Taqlīd are simply animals⁵⁷.

⁵⁴ Mani is often associated with the development of the art of painting. As D. Barrett points out: "Mani has always been revered by the Persians as their first and greatest painter and, certainly, elaborately illuminated and illustrated books were used in the service of his creed". D. Barrett, "The Islamic Art of Persia", in A. J. Arberry ed., *The Legacy of Persia*, Oxford, 1953, p. 134.

⁵⁵ *Kulliyāt*, II, pp. 69-71.

⁵⁶ Ṣadru'd dīn Āzurdah (1789-1869) who in 1827 became Delhi's Ṣadru's šūdūr, is known primarily for a refutation of Ibn Taimīya in which Azurdah upholds the traditionalists' view on the legitimacy of paying homage to saints' shrines. His letters are very important for a study of the period. Fażl-ē Ḥaqq Xayrābādī (1797-1861) was the traraditionalists' spokesman in the famous controversies with Isma'īl Šahīd. On the question of Imkan-ē Naẓīr the mauvi tried to enlist the support of Ghalib and other intellectuals and poets. After the Mutiny, to which he gave legal sanctions, he was exiled in the Andaman islands.

⁵⁷ *Kulliyāt*, cit., I, p. 279.

In another quatrain he states:

Notwithstanding qiyās and repentance my disease lingered on,
The intoxicating remedies of the muftī merely reasserted Abū Ḥanifa's taqlīd⁵⁸.

And again:

My religion is Islam and I am a true Muḥammadī, were I to forsake these
views
I would either be a Ši'ah or remain the grip of taqlīd, why abandon then the
exalted Imām⁵⁹

Mo'min's religious enthusiasm, notwithstanding his long association with the reformers and his close relationship with Šāh Isma'īl was to a great extent a product of the magnetic personality of Sayyid Aḥmad of whom he became an ardent admirer and disciple. Sayyid Aḥmad's dynamic vision pricked Mo'min's imagination, and although he himself was not a man of action, the movement's action-oriented answer to the subtle ideological diatribes kindled his passionate nature. To honour Sayyid's martyrdom, Mo'min wrote the following *Tārīxs*:

If Sayyid Aḥmad Imām of the age and of the believers
Resolves to bring war to the irreligious infidels,
Why not write on the pages of the universe the year of battle,
The setting forth of the infidel-destroying Mahdī, with a musketlike pen⁶⁰.

And again:

I rinse the essence of reflection with pure rose water
For I praise the progeny of the dispenser of heavenly water,
Who is he? Aḥmad Imām of the world and of the people;
Follower of the *Sunnat* of the Prophet only.
Why ought not the earth challenge the sun's brightness,
Once his banner of glory casts its shadow here.
Such the grandeur of the keystone of the glorious castle
That a thousand times inferior appear the heights of the universe.
Since he has no occupation other the jihād,
Whosoever opposes him is an infidel.
From his era the sun draws constant glory
For justice makes night and day equal.
That king, star of religion, has angels for soldiers
And the dust of his army is the light of the sun and the moon.
That fiery nature, destroyer of infidels, uprooter of idolaters
Whose footprint is similar to the sun on the day of judgement.
Like thunderbolt he strikes at sinners and polytheists,
Producing fiery spikes and sparkling grains.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

⁶⁰ *Kulliyāt, cit.*, II, p. 107.

A cavalier riding a celestial steed, surrounded by stars;
 Halo-like the sky his slave, the sun his servant.
 The year of exit of the sovereign of the kingdom of the faithful:
 The true Imām, the sign of Mahdī, the light of 'Alī⁶¹.

The Sayyid's declination of *jihād* had indeed a deep influence on Mo'min's ideas and imagination and, although his peculiar personality barred an active participation in the struggle, he did become involved in the controversies regarding the religious lawfulness of *jihād*:

Several evil and vicious hypocrites, slaves of heresy,
 Call the true Imam innovator as if *jihād* were against the Sunnat⁶².

However, Mo'min's dedication to the Mujāhidin's cause is best exemplified by his ma navī on *jihād*:

O Sāqī pass the purifying wine for intoxicating sinfulness is tearing me apart.
 A sip from the cup of religious fervor, that I may become inebriated with Islam.
 O give me a wine like fermenting faith, oblivious to the world and to self,
 That hidden evils I may expose, infidels kill with the scimitar's breath.
 To quench this insatiable thirst, I would quaff politheist's blood goblet after goblet.

This decision I have taken; may I crush the upstarts

May I pour every effort, even sacrifice my life, to uphold the Prophet's Šarī'ah;
 May I put an end to idolatry, eradicating its very name.

Why be uneasy in this mission, near is the manifestation of the Imām of the age;

Of he who leads to the Prophet's path, whose followers are themselves guides.
 Shadow of God, Essence of light whose very shadow belittles sun and moon.
 Blessed be Sayyid Aḥmad, God's favorite, leader of the followers of God's prophet.

Don't question the nobleness of his precious forefathers, for he is the progeny
 of 'Alī, Ḥusayn and Ḥasan.

May his pious essence live on in eternity, he whose life is death to the infidels.
 God made him a mujāhid, to hunt kāfirs his duty.

From his arm and hand life bestows death, the death-giving kisses of his scimitar's lips.

May victory lead his bridle and run along with his stirrups.

How to describe the lofty banner of the Imāmat whose army reaches the stages
 of sainthood.

Know o valiant ones that blessings are now continuously falling;

The soldiers of Islam have gathered; if you can, it is time to act.

It is a must of join such company for it will please God almighty;

Whosoever of these holy warriors sacrifices his life on God's path

Shall endear himself to Muḥammad and please God.

Become a companion of the Imām of the age, to God devote your life

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁶² *Kulliyāt, cit.*, I, p. 277.

Strive to understand and don't withhold life from its bestower;
 To none is given to know the hour of death, it may come even in the tranquillity of the home.
 Who has the power to prevent its coming, or stop life from leaving a weary body;
 Better than to give a purpose to life and find peace in the grave,
 And on the day of judgement rise content with Muḥammad on your lips and joy in the heart.
 What wonderful time to act! Death now is eternal bliss,
 Survive and you will be a *gāzī*, you will walk tall,
 This world will be yours, heavenly rewards will be yours.
 To join is to gain exalted fortune for such is the Imām, such his army;
 Blessed be who would sacrifice his life and may he fulfill his destiny here and in the hereafter.
 O God grant me martyrdom, that I may perfect my devotion,
 And though I am a sinner I am hopeful of your mercy.
 May your bounty bestow the grace of participation and martyrdom,
 Have mercy on my state and bring me to join the Imām of the age.
 Accept this prayer and may my life be devoted to your glory,
 And may I find happiness in the martyr's cemetery and join these holy warriors⁶³.

These poems like flamboyant pamphlets aimed toward promoting political and religious enthusiasm. The effect, although more detached, was accomplished also with the opening *gāzal* of his *divān*.

Why not begin with praising God's glorious unity,
 For within my grasp a luminous verse, a faith proclaiming symbol⁶⁴.
 How to end the afflictions of my wanderings,
 When heaven above has stirred tormenting tumults, o God,
 Scattered diamonds the tears of the reality of despair,
 Anguish tears away at the withered heart.
 This is not the hand of insanity nor the frenzy of a religious soul,
 Which eyelash-like removes from the eye the surmahshaded veil of amazement.
 Why ought not the cutting tongue complain of the loss of hue;
 When the forces of shame attack the lines of wisdom.
 I dread your wrath and long for your pleasure,
 Though neither of hell I'm tired nor paradise desire.
 On the neck of the pen heart's intoxicating hue,
 But I must sing the story of the seal of prophethood.
 Why ask of the intensity of the desire to praise,
 The humble hand has become the glowing candle of the intellect,

⁶³ *Kulliyāt, cit.*, II, pp. 433–436.

⁶⁴ The *alif* of the *radif* (KĀ) symbolizes the index finger used in the canonical prayer as attestation of the Unity of God. This hanafi practise was a source of sectarian conflicts and 'Abdu'l-Aziz upheld its legitimacy on the basis of valid *ḥadīths*. On this latter point see B. D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860–1900*, Princeton 1982, p. 48.

Turbulent thoughts added salt to the sweetness of my recitation,
 While desire made lancet the blood of the hand of sorrow.
 O God how can I lift the hands to fulfill my aim,
 For in the hands in prayer is a limb of the shirt of existence.
 Grant me a heart which will be the focal point of the tumultuous resurrection
 of sorrow,
 Whose every breath will be music in the noise of the Day of Judgement.
 Grant me a troubled soul whose every wound be
 A salt mine of violent love, granting pleasure to the beholder.
 May the luminous manifestation of the unity produce such sparks
 To set on fire the heap of those that uphold evil.
 May the purity and glory of the prophet make me a pearl,
 My bewildered heart a reflection of the Sunnat.
 Make me the essence of a sword so that from my name my pour out blood,
 May the heart of the innovators and of the hypocrites be cut into a hundred
 of pieces.
 O God allow me to join the forces of Islam,
 For the soul has reached the lips and restless blood yearns for martyrdom.
 My I not be barred from the glorious path of the Imām of the Sunnat,
 For to refuse his Imāmat is to be a kāfir.
 I'm a follower of the Amīr of the Islamic army,
 Because I want to be a leader of an army of angels.
 O Mo'min the times of the promised Mahdī await you,
 Thus, first of all, bring your greetings to your Lord ⁶⁵.

The places Mo'min has in Urdu literature is certainly not based on the foregoing poems; however such writings are indicative of a budding tendency that was to become dominant in the post-Mutiny period. Muhammad Sadiq observes that "Mo'min despite his bohemianism was a poet of the older order", although the observation, especially with reference to the poet's world-view, is substantially true, Mo'min's poetry does present certain innovative tendencies. The poet's strong emphasis on the community's moral and social problems seems to anticipate, within a different context, the work of Ḥālī and other poets. To be sure social criticism had been a constant characteristic of Urdu poetry; however in Mo'min this is no longer mere nostalgic yearning but a vigorous cry that finds in a particular religious movement the key to social regeneration. However, more than Mo'min's peculiar beliefs what is in effect innovative is the accent, be it in love or in religion, that the poet places on individual strife. This central theme leads the poet to project a dynamic view of the individual that foreshadows future developments.

This part of Mo'min's poetry can be thus seen as a pregnant example of the cultural influence of this early attempt of Indian Muslim society

⁶⁵ *Kulliyāt*, I, pp. 3-4.

to cope with the new reality by a revivification of its faith. In these poems there is a strong awareness of identity and purpose which contrasts with the later elaboration of Western-oriented modernists. They thus mirror that religious self-confidence which has proven to be the necessary basis for any revitalization of Muslim culture.