

CONTRIBUTION OF HURRS IN FREEDOM MOVEMENT

By
 Allah Dino Soomro
 &
 Muhammad Qasim Soomro

Hurrs, the militant followers of the Pir Pagaro, since 1830s were continuously struggling against the British and the Sikhs in the Indian Sub-continent. They have, throughout their existence, carried on their struggle for freedom in close contact with other anti-British Muslim movements.

'Hurr' an Arabic word, means 'Free'. And it is because of their spirit of freedom that the followers of Pagaro Pirs are called Hurrs. Mirza Qaleech Baig in his book *Qadeem Sindh* contends that Syed Sibghatullah Shah I had given the title of 'Hurr' to his disciples keeping in view the example of Hurr's sacrifice of life for Hadhrat Imam Hussain in the battle of Karbala.¹ Although Hurrs are found in all parts of Pakistan, yet their habitations are mostly centred on the left bank of the river Indus and beyond the borders of Pakistan in Jaiselmir and other parts of Rajisthan. 2 Hurrs being based in Sindh have never confined their activities to this region alone. They have always tried to safeguard the interests of the Muslims of India at large. Unfortunately no objective assessment of Hurr activities has so far been made. The present study is hoped not only to remove the prejudices created by the biased propaganda against Hurrs, but will also prove to be a guidance for future studies on this segment of Muslim freedom movement.

Hurrs being orthodox Muslims spend their lives strictly in accordance with the tenets of the Shari'ah. It is obligatory on them to practise *Zikr-i-Jali* () after every prayer but specially after Isha prayers. Honesty, sincerity, tolerance, truthfulness and other such Islamic values are incumbent on them. 3 Fazal Haq M. Kazi shedding light on their characteristics says:

*Although they possess the common characteristics of a typical Sindhi in moods, manners, morals and living, these barrel-chested, well built, sturdy and strong men are extremely sensitive about their sense of proportion and individual honour, they sport beards and twirling moustaches. They attire themselves normally in *Palhan* (long shirt down below the knees*) and a wide and a loose *Shalwar* (baggy trousers*) and

the head crowned with *Patka* (the head gear*), variations of which indicate the social status of the wearer and is considered as the symbol of self-respect.⁴ Hurrs are mostly settled in desert areas "have acquired uncanny ability to trace and track the footprints of men and animals who have traversed the desert and after deciphering the footprints, they are able to give information relating to the stores, numerical strength of the caravans and the direction of their traction which seldom transpires to be incorrect".⁵

On their arrival in Sindh, the forefathers of Pir Pagaro settled down at village Kingri (Later named Pir-Jo-Goth) where their piety of character attracted a large number of common people, who swore allegiance at their hands. As these *mureeds* (disciples) were spread over a large area their organization was felt necessary. For this purpose the Pir divided them into twelve geographical units throughout the province under separate *Khalifas*, nominated from every unit. The Pir maintained liaison with his *mureeds* through these *khalifas*. Once a year the Pir used to visit these units in order to personally guide his *mureeds* in religious as well as secular matters. It was on account of this organization that the Hurrs emerged as a united group quite distinct from the followers of other such orders.

The nature of relationship between the Hurrs and their Pir was quite in accordance with the Quranic verse:

'Obey Allah, and obey messenger and those of you who are in authority.'⁶

True to this divine commandment they obeyed only those orders of their Amir which were not against the teachings of Islam.

As the Hurr movement was organised by the Pir Pagaro and was carried through by their devoted disciples, it seems necessary to describe the history of the origin of the Pagaro Pirs as well.⁷ The ancestors of Pagaro Pirs came to Sindh with Muhammad bin Qasim in 712 A.D. and settled at Kingri (later this place was known as Pir-Jo-Goth).⁸

Syed Ali Makki who had accompanied Ibn Qasim to Sindh settled in Lakki, District Dadu, which got famous as Lakkiari. This Syed family, one of the most important in Sindh produced many renowned personalities in the field of *Tasawwuf* (Mysticism) and poetry. Their contributions have enriched the cultural heritage of Islam in Sindh. Syed Muhammad Rashid is the first after Syed Ali Makki in the line of Pagaro

ancestors known to history. He had two sons, Syed Sibghatullah Shah and Syed Muhammad Yasin. After the death of their father the former inherited his *Pag* (Turban) and was called Pir Pagaro while the latter got *Jhando* (Flag) and became famous as Pir Jhando. The first to be called Pir Pagaro was Syed Sibghatullah-I.

Syed Sibghatullah Shah (Pir Pagaro-I) succeeded his father at his death on 1st Sha'ban 1233 A.H. June 4, 1818 A.D. Among his brothers he was an outstanding theologian and a mystic. It was his piety of character and sympathetic attitude towards the common Muslim that he became popular in Sindh. Ijaz-al-Haq Qudoosi has stated, on the authority of Syed Hamiduddin, that there was no other spiritual guide more popular than him (Syed Sibghatullah Shah-I) whom the people of Sindh loved and followed.⁹

Pir Pagaro-I besides being a popular spiritual guide, was a keen observer of contemporary religio-politico-social conditions of the Sub-continent. The British and Sikh onslaughts on Muslims after the decline of Mughal Rule in India disturbed the Pir Pagaro-I to a great extent. Instead of acting like a passive mystic who would submit himself to fate, he was determined not to live the life of a slave under the rule of infidels. And declared that it had been the tradition of his forefathers to lay down their lives for the preservation of Muslim Freedom. And being a true Muslim kept the Quranic dictate: "Sanction is given unto those who fight because they have been wronged",¹⁰ before him. He alongwith Syed Ahmed Shaheed reviewed the decline of Muslim rule over the subcontinent. In full accord with the latter he decided on initiating a programme to prepare the Muslims of India for *Jihad* against the British and Sikh tyrants, who had already occupied Northern India and the Punjab and were sharpening their teeth to eschew Sindh as well. In order to prepare his disciples for Jihad, he organised a body by his devoted followers into a regular force.

The Hurr movement can be divided into three distinct phases according to their chronological appearances. The first phase of the Hurr movement (1829-31) started when they participated in the Jihad of Syed Ahmed Shaheed. The plan of Syed Ahmed Shaheed was to reach North-West Frontier Province via Rajasthan, Sindh and Baluchistan. He had decided to make that area his headquarter for in his view the Frontier Muslims were true, simple, energetic and militant Muslims

who had always strongly resisted the infidels. His plan was to first mould the lives of these Muslims in accordance with the Quranic teachings and then prepare them for Jihad against the British and Sikhs. On his way he first entered Sindh taking it to be a safe place for a sojourn. The sympathetic attitude of the native population encouraged him to start preparations for *Jihad* during his stay in Sindh.¹¹

Before Mujahideen could reach Mirpur Khas, Syed Churran Shah, who belonged to the Sadat family of that area, reached there a little earlier and introduced Syed Ahmed's mission¹² to Mir Ali Murad Khan.¹³ He further told him that considering Sindh Dar al-Islam these Ghazis had come to receive their help in every possible way. Despite these assurances, the Mirs were much hesitant in accepting the credentials of Syed Ahmed and his companions.

After three days stay in Mirpur Khas the Mujahideen left for Tando Allahyar. The Mirs sent two emissaries to Syed Ahmed to know more about him and it was on their report that the Mirs welcomed him and provided the Mujahideen with every possible facility and assistance. Syed Ahmed, satisfied with the treatment meted out to his group, left Tando Allahyar for Hyderabad. Mir Karam Ali Khan, the ruler of Hyderabad sent his special emissary Syed Sibghatullah to welcome Syed Ahmed on his territory. The Mirs looked after the Mujahids for three days and helped them with money as well as weapons. But Syed Ahmed stayed at Hyderabad for thirteen days. Syed Ahmed sent some of his stores by the river Indus and himself accompanied the Mujahids by road on their way to Pir-Jo-Goth in Khairpur. Syed Nasir Ali Shah entertained them at Hingorija and Salhe Shah Baghdadi Jilani looked after the whole party of Mujahids at Ranipur.

When this caravan reached Pir-Jo-Goth on June 24, 1826 A.D. Syed Sibghatullah Shah, Pir Pagaro-I, who had somehow reached the destination earlier, accorded warm welcome to the Mujahideen. He not only assisted Syed Ahmed Shaheed financially but also put at his disposal a contingent of five hundred Hurr Mujahideen. After the departure of Syed Ahmed Shaheed for the North-West Frontier Province, Pir Pagaro-I stayed back to popularize the Jihad Movement in Sindh and to supervise the arrangements of sending reinforcements to Syed Ahmed.

Syed Sibghatullah Shah-I, soon after saying good-bye to Syed

Ahmed Shaheed and his Mujahideen, passed away on 5 Ramzan 1246 A.H./February 8, 1831 A.D. at Pir-Jo-Goth.¹⁴ The reinforcements promised to Syed Ahmed Shaheed discontinued. Thus, despite fighting, the Hurr contingent that had already been sent to fight shoulder to shoulder along with the Mujahideen, failed due to the shortage of manpower and military resources, and met a tragic end on May 6, 1831 A.D.¹⁵ Although they failed to gain victory over the enemy, they succeeded in lighting the flames of freedom in the heart of common Muslims who followed their footsteps in the years to come. Thus ended the first phase of the Hurr Movement.

The failure of *Jihad* Movement in 1831 made Sikhs the sole master of Punjab, Kashmir and substantial part of the North-West Frontier Province. This growing power of the Sikhs made the Talpur Mirs of Sindh apprehensive of Sikhs future designs. The British also sensed Sikh power to be a threat to the expansion of British imperialism in India. Incidentally both were not strong enough to resist these lurking dangers. The Mirs neither prepared themselves to militarily face their opponents nor did they allow the Hurrs to combat the British with the result that their movement was inactivated for the time being. This policy created a power vacuum thereby facilitating the British occupation of Sindh without much resistance in 1843.¹⁷

Syed Hizbullah Shah (1847-1890), following the footsteps of his great ancestor Pir Pagaro-1, did not reconcile with the British rule in Sindh and played a major role in creating general resentment against the infidel rulers. This movement began the 'Second phase of the Hurr movement'. The British in retaliation resorted to a vindictive campaign of suppressing the Hurr movement. All able-bodied and spirited young men were put in concentration camps under strict police watch and influential leaders of the Hurr Movement were deported in exile to Vasanpur in district Ahmad Nagar.

At the outbreak of World War-I the Britishers adopted a placatory policy towards Pir Pagaro and abated their policy of Hurr persecution.¹⁸ And released the Hurr leaders from the concentration camps.

The British rulers in view of this truce sought the support of a Hurr detachment to bolster their war effort. The Hurr leaders conceded their demands and a batch of five hundred Hurrs joined the British forces in Mesopotamia. However, these Hurrs refused to obey the orders of their

commander to shoot the Muslims (Turks) and desecrate the Muslim shrines for which they were court-martialled and put to death. On the signing of the peace treaty in 1919 the remaining Hurrs came back home.

The third phase of the Hurr Movement commenced when Syed Sibghatullah Shah-II, Pir Pagaro-VI, formed an organization called The Ghazis in 1921, at Pir-Jo-Goth. He gave the Ghazi organization an unprecedented impetus by giving them proper training for any eventuality against the British.

Fearing his popularity the British arrested and sentenced Pir Pagaro to eight years imprisonment on August 26, 1930.²⁰ Despite the Hurr agitation started in 1931²¹ to press the Government to release Pir Pagaro the Government did not release him until 1936 at the expiry of his term of imprisonment. On his release Pir Pagaro organized his followers against the British. Despite the British declaration of Hurrs as Criminal Tribe,²² Pir Pagaro continued enrolling the Ghazis in large number.

Pir Pagaro was invited by Sir Hugh Dow, the then Governor of Sindh for talks at Karachi on the pretext to discuss matters of mutual interest but on his arrival at the Governor's House he was arrested. His whereabouts were kept secret.²³ Hurrs rose in rebellion and derailed the Lahore mail, blew up a mail train²⁴, and attacked police stations and outposts at various places. All this created such a panic that pro-government elements dared not remain outside their houses after the sunset.

To bring the situation under control the Government sent in more armed police in this area. Hurrs laid their heavy hands on heads of all those local elements who aided and abated the alien rulers in their efforts against them. Hurrs retaliated all atrocities perpetrated on them by adopting hard hitting guerrilla tactics from their hide-outs in Mukhi Bela and other places as elusive enemy of the British. On June 1, 1942 Martial Law was proclaimed²⁵ in the Eastern districts of Sindh - Sukkar, Khairpur, Nawabshah and Sanghar covering an area of thirty thousand square miles. It was crime to be out of doors at night, to possess an axe, to have knowledge of the Hurrs' whereabouts and not to reveal it and many other similar offences for which the minimum penalty was death. Night trains were suspended. An area of ten miles' radius on both

sides of the railway tracks throughout Sindh was declared prohibited area.

Major General R. Richardson, G.O.C., was appointed as the Chief Administrator for the Upper Sindh.²⁶ He started an indiscriminate drive to round up each and every Hurr who was to stand trial before the Military Court. Thus many Hurr leaders were executed. They in return resorted to sabotage and guerrilla warfare. Despite heavy punishments and death sentences they went to the gallows one after another, cheerfully singing the praises of Pir Pagaro.²⁷

The Hurrs proved their acceptance of the Government's challenges, by breaching the irrigation canals around Sanghar, cutting the telephone wires and burning the oil stores.²⁸

To check these saboteurs, the military lorries carrying soldiers arrived in Sanghar. They sent parties to six villages of Hurr concentration and set them on fire. Finished with these villages General Richardson ordered all law-abiding people to leave the areas eastward of Nara within a week. The British even dropped bombs from the air-craft. This made the Hurrs more resolved than before and did not give up, retaliated the attacks and air raids by firing from their hideouts. The British not being content with bombing went to the extent of setting small hamlets on fire.

The British set in motion their cavalry contingents and artillery regiments to put down the uprising against them. They used their Air Force and made air attacks on Pir-Jo-Goth, which was completely destroyed and all the Hurr settlements were levelled to the ground by bombing.²⁹

These atrocities could not put away spirit of freedom out of Hurrs. They were still keeping a vigilant eye on the activities of the British. Pir Pagaro Syed Sibghatullah Shah-II was brought to face trial before a specially constituted tribunal in the central jail for 'Rebellion against the Crown'. The case against him opened on 29 January 1943,³⁰ and within few weeks in March the Pir was put to death.

As is evident from the struggle of Pagaro Pirs and their Hurr followers against Sikhs and later the British, that Hurr Movement was a religio-political movement started with the object of overthrowing the infidel rule and reviving Muslim power in South Asia. The Movement was, in the beginning, a part of the Jihad movement of Syed Ahmad

Shaheed and the Hurrs fought against Sikhs shoulder to shoulder with Syed Ahmad and his Mujahideen in the North Western areas of the Subcontinent. However, the Jihad movement failed, due to various reasons, to achieve its objectives. And most of the Mujahideen including their leaders Syed Ahmad and Shah Ismail Shaheed, fell martyrs and the movement met a sad end.

Apparently the Jihad Movement came to an end in 1831 but in reality it continued in one way or the other in later years under the leadership of the Ulema in cooperation with the political parties like All India National Congress, All India Muslim League, Khilafat Movement, Jamiat-al-Ulema-e Hind, Majlis-i-Islam and Khaksar Movement. It might be of some interest to note here that the Hurr Movement had a different position as compared to such other movements specially the *Jihad* movement of Syed Ahmad Shaheed. The major difference was that this movement was started by the Pagaro Pirs and the force mainly consisted of the Hurrs.

The sole purpose of the Hurr Movement being the freedom of their country from the British, the Hurrs never reconciled themselves with the British rule and turned their activities into Guerrilla Warfare against the imperialists. The British had until early 1940s held full control of the subcontinent and tried to crush the movement with the help of military force.

The British resorting to pressure tactics not only arrested and executed Pagaro Pirs and their Hurr followers but also bombed and set on fire the Hurr settlements. They proclaimed Martial Law and enacted Hurr Act in order to crush their movement but all in vain as the Hurrs did not fear death for the cause of freedom and they continued their movement against the British until the emergence of political parties on the scene. Retaining their religious identity, they cooperated with the national as well as provincial political parties and thus the struggle for independence assumed national character. Turned into a National Movement they contributed a lot pressing the British to grant freedom to the Subcontinent in 1947.

Hurr under the guidance of the Pagaro Pirs have throughout Pakistan's history cooperated with the Governments of Pakistan, whenever the authorities could use them to safeguard national interests. During the wars of 1948, and 1965 they fought shoulder to shoulder with

the Pakistan Army against the Indian Forces and proved their character and spirit of freedom.

References

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2. Fazal Haq M.Kazi, "Hurrs the Freedom Fighters", Journal of the Institute of Sindhology (Sindh Number), Hyderabad, 1970, p.40.
3. Choudhri Tabassum, *Tazkirah Peeran-i-Pagara*, Hyderabad, 1957, p.130.
4. Ibid., p.40.
5. Ibid.
6. Holy Quran, S.IV,V.59, (tr) Marmaduke Pickthall, Karachi, n.d., p.59.
7. The geneology of the Pagaro Pirs as recorded by the author of *Tazkirah Peeran-i-Pagara* is as under:-

Hazrat Ali

Hazrat Imam Hussain

Hazrat Imam Zain al-Abdin

Hazrat Imam Baqir

Hazrat Imam Jafar Sadiq

Hazrat Imam Musa Kazim

Hazrat Imam Ali Raza

Shah Hussain

Shah Abdullah

Shah Haroon

Shah Hamza

Shah Umar

Shah Asadullah

Shah Zaid

Shah Abbas

Shah Ali Makki Lakkiari (came to Sindh)

Shah Chakan

Shah Hussain
Shah Muhammad
Shah Mahmud
Shah Bahauddin
Shah Shahabuddin
Shah Fazlullah
Shah Abbas
Shah Nasiruddin
Shah Mir Ali
Shah Hussain
Shah Bolan
Shah Sangar
Shah Khatan
Shah Usman
Shah Shakrullah
Shah Fatah Mohammad
Shah Muhammad Imam Shah
Shah Muhammad Baqa Shaheed
Syed Muhammad Rashid
Syed Sibghatullah Shah I (alias Pir Pagaro-I)
Syed Ali Gohar Shah I (alias Pir Pagaro II)
Syed Hizbullah Shah (alias Pir Pagaro-III)
Syed Ali Gohar Shah II (alias Pir Pagaro-IV)
Syed Shah Mardan Shah-I (alias Pir Pagaro-V)
Syed Sibghatullah Shah II (alias Pir Pagaro VI)
Syed Sikander Ali Shah Alias Shah Mardan Shah-II (alias Pir Pagaro VII) (Present)

Tabassum Choudhry, *Tazkirah Pecran-i-Pagara*, Hyderabad, 1975, p.63.

8. Fazal Haq M. Kazi, *op.cit.*, p.40.
9. Tabssum Choudhry, *op.cit.*, p.111.
10. Holy Quran, S.XXII, V.39 (tr) Marmaduke Pickthall, Karachi, n.d., p.457.
11. Ishtiaq Hussain Qureshi, *Ulema in Politics*, Karachi, 1972, p.158.
12. Syed-Abu-al-Hussan Ali Nadvi, *Seerat Sayed Ahmad Shaheed*.

Vol.I, Karachi, 1975, p.362.

13. Ibid., p.361.
 14. Tabssum Choudhry, op.cit., p.135.
 15. See Mumtaz Mirza, "Sindh Je Ahd Raftah ji Almia Dastan" monthly *Nair Zindagi*, Karachi, July 1962, p.16.
- Sachchidananda Bhatta Charya, *A Dictionary of Indian History*, says about these Amirs (Mirs): They belonged to the Talpur tribe of Baluchistan who established themselves as rulers of Sindh in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. They were soon divided into three important branches with their headquarters at Hyderabad, Khairpur and Mirpur and were theoretically under the rule of Afghanistan*, New York, 1967, pp.4142.
17. Soomro Muhammad Qasim, *Muslim Politics in Sindh 1938-47*, Jamshoro, 1989, p.1.
 18. Fazal Haq M. Kazi, op.cit., p.41.
 19. Pir Sahib prepared a Jama'at of Civic Guards and gave them the title of *Ghazir*, fighters in the cause of Allah and Islam, as quoted by Peter Mayne, *Saints of Sindh*, London, 1956, p.122.
 20. Lambrick, H.T., *The Terrorist*, London, 1972, p.31. The reasons assigned were rebellion against the Government, possession of illegal ammunition, abduction of his servant and threatening of his mother with death. Though some of the charges were baseless even then the British authorities arrested him.
 21. Fazal Haq M. Kazi, op.cit., p.42.
 22. Pervez, Ikramul Haq, *The Contribution of Sindh Muslims in Pakistan Movement*, Jamshoro, 1976, p.93.
 23. Lambrick, H.T., op.cit., pp. 52-62.
 24. Pirzada Haji Shah Nawaz, *Adai Ayob Ji Aazmaish*, Nawab Shah, 1945, p.22.

25. Khan, Khudadad Khan, *Lub-i-Tarikh-i-Sindh*, Hyderabad, 1959, p.259.
26. Lambrick, H.T., *op.cit.*, p.120.
27. Aslam Aftab, *Rehber Digest* (Annual Number) 1973, p.293.
28. Lambrick, H.T., *op. cit.*, p.121.
29. Kazi, Fazal Haq, *op.cit.*, p.44.
30. *Ibid.*, p.43.
31. According to the Hurr Act, the Act enforcing authorities were authorized to arrest any body without convicting him for any crime, and also to keep him in confinement for whatever period the officer described. For details, see Dunwar, Ghulam Shabbir, *Tahrik-i-Azadi jo Azim Shahsawar*, in *Imam-Inqalab*, Pir-jo-Goth, n.d., p.35.

**Translation of the Sindhi words into English by the authors.*