

The Akhund of Swat and Ambela Expedition: An Analysis of Competing Accounts

Ishtiaq Ahmad

Department of History, Government Postgraduate Jahanzeb College, Saidu Sharif Swat, Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, Pakistan

***Corresponding author's e-mail: Ishtiaqahmadjc@gmail.com**

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Abstract

The Ambela expedition 1863, unlike the previous expeditions of the colonial troops was not aimed at the Pukhtun tribe(s) of the Indian North-West Frontier, but directed against the Hindustani Mujahidin. The other distinctive mark of the Ambela expedition was the Akhund of Swat participation in it. It was the Akhund of Swat participation that turned the Ambela expedition into a holy war and this sparked a common rising of the people of Buner, Swat, Dir and other areas against the colonial British. It is because of the Akhund's involvement that the local people still remember this expedition. Moreover, different sources and especially the Pashto folklore furnishes varied and often competing accounts of the extent, reasons and impact of the Akhund's participation in this expedition. This paper, therefore, evaluates the role of the Akhund of Swat in the Ambela expedition in the light of the colonial and local sources both sympathetic and malignant.

Keywords: The Akhund of Swat, Ambela expedition, Hindustani Mujahidin, Colonial troops, Indian North-West frontier

Introduction

The Ambela expedition has a distinctive place in the history of the Indian North-West Frontier (Khyber Pukhtunkhwa) for two reasons. First, in this expedition, the colonial troops faced severe resistance from different Pukhtun tribes, and second, the Akhund of Swat [henceforward the Akhund] participation in it. The Ambela expedition, without the Akhund's participation, would have had a different history and it is possible, that like the other Frontier expeditions, very few indigenous people would know about it.

Abdul Ghaffur (also called Akhund of Swat, Saidu Baba, Swat Babaji, Swat Saib) was the son of Abdul Wahid Khan, born about 1794 CE, in the village of "Jabrai (in Shimizai), a small shepherd's hamlet in Bar (Upper) Swat" of poor and obscure parents (Sultan-i-Rome, n.d.). *The leisure hour* (1879) observed:

What do the wild tribes of Bajour [Bajawar], Bonair [Buner], and Kunar know of "Darwin's Theory," or of the "Glasgow Bank failure"? But there is not a man, woman, or child who has not some vital interest in the opinions of the Akhund

of Swat; not a village in which his influence was not visibly felt, and not a mosque in which his opinions on theology and law are not still discussed. Many an intelligent Moulvie, or village priest, has been removed from his position because the “Akhund Sahib” had pronounced him a heretic (The Akhund of Swat, 1879, p. 43).

Edward E. Oliver stated about the early life of the Akhund that he, “like other famous Eastern heroes, passed his early boyhood tending his father’s sheep. And, just like the good little boys and early saints of the story books, his childhood is credited with a precocious development of those gifts and graces said to find such certain divine acceptance. He would not drink the milk of the cattle that trespassed on unlawful grounds” (Oliver, 1890, p. 280). The origin of the Akhund is somewhat controversial. According to some writers, he was a Safi Mohmand while some claim that he belonged to a Gujar family.¹ The Akhund died at the age of 83 years on 3 January 1877 (Afghani, n.d., p. 901).

We can find different versions of the Akhund’s role in the Ambela expedition, like, the archival, colonial, local, that of his partisans and opponents, religious, and the most important folklore. This paper is an attempt to evaluate the role of the Akhund of Swat in the light of the above-competing accounts. Besides, this paper also gives answers to the following questions.

1. Did the Akhund join the Ambela expedition by his own will or compelled by the circumstances?
2. Did his joining support the Hindustani Mujahidin?
3. How the Akhund was portrayed in different writings?

Being historical research, analytical and descriptive techniques are used in this paper. This paper is started with an introduction followed by a background of the Ambela expedition, a chronological description of the Akhund’s role, concluding analysis and at the last references are given. Throughout this paper, local terms are given in such a manner to conform to the local Pukhtu/Pashto rendering and pronunciation.

Ambela expedition: A brief background

The Ambela expedition/campaign (also called Ambela Jihad/Ghaza by local Pukhtuns) was launched by the colonial British against the Hindustani Mujahidin [henceforward Mujahidin], companions of Sayyid Ahmad (1786-1831) popularly known as Sayyid Ahmad Shaheed, who came to North-West Frontier (Khyber Pukhtunkhwa) from Rayi Baraili for waging *jihad* against the Sikhs. After the death of Sayyid Ahmad in 1831, in the battle of Balakot, the remaining Mujahidin settled down in Sitanah under the protection of Sayyid Akbar Shah.² The Mujahidin, after the annexation of Punjab by the Britons in 1849, first came

¹For the claim of Safi Mohmand see (Gohar, 1982, p. 57; Caroe, 2014, p. 362) and for the claim of Gujar family see (Oliver, 1890, 280; Field, n.d., 60; Bellew 1864, p. 102). Similarly, Sultan-i-Rome also discuss and analyse this point in detail. See (Sultan-i-Rome, n.d.).

²After the death of Sayyid Ahmad his remaining Mujahidin, 300 out of 1600 settled in Sitanah. The village then belonged to Sayyid Akbar Shah, “a man who was held in great veneration by the Utmanzais, Gaduns, and neighbouring tribes, and who was a declared enemy

into collision with them in 1853, during the First Black Mountain expedition³ (Nevill, 2003, p. 26). In the progression of the famous uprising of 1857, the East India Company also faced some troubles in the Indian North-West Frontier region. In Nowshera, some companies of the 55th Native Infantry showed signs of disgruntlement and some of them fled to Mardan fort and from there to the nearby hills. They were followed, one hundred and twenty of them were killed, three to four hundred were wounded and one hundred and fifty were captured (Scott, 1906, pp. 105-106).

During these troubles, Mubariz Khan of Chinglai invited the Mujahidin to his village. Due to the hostilities of the Mujahidin with the Britons, Sheikh Jana and Naranji were destroyed by Major Vaughan's troops in July 1857. Following a break of few months, Lieutenant Horne, the Assistant Commissioner of Yusufzi, was attacked by the Mujahidin and the people of Chinglai, Khudu Khel, Sheikh Jana, and Naranji. In this attack, he escaped with his life but five men of his party were killed (Roberts, 1901, p. 281; Yusufi, 1960, pp. 512-513). On 22 April 1858, another expedition was directed against the Mujahidin, which, as per colonial practice, destroyed Panjtar, Chinglai, Mangal Thana, and Sitanah (The Umbeyla Campaign, 1864, p. 183). Due to the hostilities of the Mujahidin and the Sayyids of Sitanah with the British, the colonial authorities, in May 1858, extracted an agreement from both the Gadun and Utmanzi tribes not to allow the Mujahidin and the Sayyids to reoccupy Sitanah (Frontier and Overseas Expeditions, 1907, pp. 226-227).

After the above expedition, the Mujahidin settled in Malka and in 1861, came down to Seri, just over Sitanah, and, according to the colonial record, commenced disturbances on the colonial British border. The Gadun and Utmanzi tribes were accordingly placed under blockade, and in October 1861, both sections, under another agreement, agreed to expel the Sayyids and the Mujahidin, but this was not materialized till 1862 (Roberts, 1901, p. 103). In July 1863, it was reported, that the Sayyids and the Mujahidin had reoccupied Sitanah. As the Mujahidin sent threatening messages to the chief of Amb, a British ally, a blockade against the Utmanzi and Gadun tribes was again imposed and the militia was posted for the defence of Amb. On the night of 3 September 1863, Mujahidin attacked the Guides camp at Topai, and about the middle of September, the Hasanzai tribe attacked the advance outpost of the Amb territory. Shortly afterward, the Hasanzai made another attack on the Amb levies on the Black Mountain border. It was alleged that Hasanzai were prompted by Mawlvi Abdullah, the leader of the Mujahidin (Paget and Mason, 1884, p. 104).

The colonial authorities had already made their mind up and thus sent an expedition, known as the Ambela expedition, against the Mujahidin under the command of Brigadier-General Nevill B. Chamberlain. On 18 October, General Chamberlain ordered movement of the troops through Surkawi or Ambela pass (HCPP, 1864, p. 132).

On the other hand, the Mujahidin settlement at Malka provided them an opportunity to propagate⁴ that the British intended annexation of Buner. They succeeded in it and this

of the Sikhs." He himself served as treasurer and counsellor of Sayyad Ahmad (Paget and Mason, 1884, p. 84).

³For a detail study of the Black Mountain expeditions see, Ahmad, 2019, pp. 103-136.

⁴The chief of the Mujahidin distributed the following proclamation before the British troops had received their final orders. "In the name of the Lord. A large force of the infidels has arrived

propaganda spread like a wildfire in Buner (Muhammad, 2016, p. 33). On 30 October 1863, the Akhund and the tribes in a combined attack captured Crag picquet, the most important post for the colonial troops, which after severe fighting was retaken by the colonial troops. Due to the complexity of the situation, Sir Hugh Rose, the Commander-in-Chief of India, arrived at Lahore on 14 November 1863, and directed the expedition himself (Adye, 1895, p. 193). On 20 November 1863, for the third and last time, Crag picquet was taken and retaken by the tribes and colonial troops respectively. In this contest, General Chamberlain, commander of the colonial troops, was wounded and became unable to lead his force (Stewart, 1911, p. 57).

Along with fighting, political efforts were also continued. On 10 December 1863, the Buner *jargah*⁵ arrived, and on 14 December, in their final reply rejected the colonial British terms. On the following day, the village of Lalu was captured followed by the capture and burning of Ambela village on 16 December 1863 (HCPP, 1864, pp. 97-98). Both on 15 and 16 December, Bunerwals and other tribes did not take part in the fighting, only the Mujahidin fought against the colonial troops. G.B. Scott stated:

It was soon evident that the enemy was thoroughly disheartened. Ambela was deserted, and the sacred banner of the Akhund was seen hurrying along towards the hills. One party alone proved game to the last. Some two to three hundred Hindustanis [Hindustani Mujahidin] suddenly burst out from a ravine and charged straight on to a Pioneer regiment, killed and wounded four or five officers and for a brief space drove the regiment backwards (Scott, 1906, pp. 136-137).

On 17 December 1863, the Buner *jargah* again arrived, accepted the terms, and returned after leaving their greater portion in the camp. The British party escorted by the tribal *jargah* advanced from Ambela on 19 December, and returned after the destruction of Malka on 23rd December (Masson, 1895, p. 11). The expedition originally planned as a three weeks expedition took about three months with considerably high casualties on both sides: British casualties were 238 killed and 670 wounded while the total losses of the tribes were 3000 killed and wounded (Masson, 1895, p. 141).

at Salim Khana with the object of plundering this country. It is therefore incumbent on you immediately on receipt of this letter to proceed to Chamla and bring with you all your allies and retainers. Lose not a moment in carrying out these orders, else the infidels will plunder and devastate the whole of Chamla and Boner and Swat and annex them; thus we shall lose at once our religion and property. Be true, therefore, to Islam, and be not careless. The Kafirs are, above all, treacherous and deceitful, they will enter your hills on any pretext, they will declare their quarrel is only with the Hindustanis, that they will in no wise harm a hair of your heads, but will return to their own lands once they have destroyed the Hindustani heretics. But believe them not, for assuredly they will take away your *izat*, and your herds and flocks, and will open your purdah and annex your lands and take away your religion, then will it be too late to regret-so take warning in time." (Scott, 1906, p. 121).

⁵It means consultative assembly; forum; council; council of the tribal chiefs. It has other meanings, composition, functions and uses in different contexts.

The Akhund and the Ambela Expedition

As stated earlier that the Ambela expedition is still called the Ambela Jihad/Ghaza by the local people and kept alive in the Pashto folklore mainly due to the Akhund's participation in it. Different accounts of the Akhund participation in the Ambela expedition, from the start to the end are found in the writing of different writers. The abundance of these varied accounts attest to the importance local people give to the Akhund's participation in the Ambela expedition and it is to further illustrate the said point that these accounts are narrated below in chronological order.

Some local writers like Pir Gohar, Mawlvi Inayatullah, and Abdul Halim Asar Afghani have stated that in September 1863, some British soldiers ostensibly stationed at Surkawi for hunting. When the people of Buner knew this, they proclaimed *jihad* against the colonial British and also invited the Akhund, who, on 14 October, left alone for Ambela. By seeing the Akhund, the people of Swat joined him, and on 26 October, the Akhund along with 4000 men on foot and 120 on horses with hundred standards reached Ambela (Gohar, 1982, p. 56; Inayatullah, 1982, p. 58; Afghani, n.d., p. 901). In this regard, Faqir Muhammad Abbas and Muhammad Shafi Sabir have slightly differing accounts. According to them, in September 1863, some colonial soldiers came to Buner on the pretext of hunting. The Akhund, who knew the intentions of the colonial British, immediately announced *jihad* and in a Friday sermon, warned the people that if the British annexed Buner and Swat he will leave Swat (Qadriya, 1977, p. 36; Sabir, 1986, p. 621).

Another local writer, Muhammad Amir Shah Qadri, presented a completely different depiction of this episode. According to him, in 1857, after the death of Sayyid Akbar Shah, the king of Swat, a civil war started in Swat and Buner. Taking advantage of this situation, the colonial British moved towards Swat and the Akhund issued a *fatwa*⁶ of *jihad* against them and himself with all of his followers commenced *jihad*, which is called the Ambela Jihad (Qadri, n.d., p. 154).

As opposed to the statements of the above authors, Haidar Ali and other local writers stated that Mawlvi Abdullah, leader of the Mujahidin, himself visited Saidu and requested the Akhund to back them (Akhund Khel, 2008, p. 98). Further, Shaheen on the authority of Mawlvi Abdul Haq stated that when Mawlvi Abdullah reached Saidu, the village of the Akhund, he clarified the Akhund about his beliefs as some differences were prevailing among them. The Akhund, after the meeting, not only assured him of his support but also proclaimed him his son. When the colonial British got acquainted with the information that the Akhund has assured Mawlvi Abdullah of his support, the Commissioner Peshawar, through a letter, tried to stop the Akhund from joining the Mujahidin (Shaheen, 1982, pp. 38-39).

According to Mehr, the Mujahidin proclaimed *jihad* against the colonial British and sent dispatches to different *khans* and the Akhund for their support (Mehr, 1956, pp. 324-325). Muhammad Shafi Sabir stated that Mawlvi Abdullah sent Mujahidin to every village to inform the tribes about the intentions of the colonial British and also to exhort them to wage *jihad*

⁶*Fatwa* a ruling on a point of Islamic law given by a recognized authority.

against them (Sabir, 1986, p. 614). The joining of the Akhund has been described by a Pashto *tapah*⁷ in the following words:

فېرنګه تښته که خلا صبوي
صاحب سورېي اکوزي ورپسي خينه⁸

Meaning:

O English! If you want to escape, you have to run away; as the Akhund is mounting on his horse followed by the Akuzi

The Akhund, notwithstanding the different versions about his participation, arrived at Ambela on 26 October 1863. The colonial authorities knew very well of his importance. As Colonel Taylor, Commissioner Peshawar, before the arrival of the Akhund, informed the colonial authorities that a rumour is in the air that the Mujahidin made overtures to the Akhund and in his opinion, if they succeeded in it, it will increase problems for the colonial troops (HCPP, 1864, pp. 42-43). General Nevill Chamberlain, commander of the Colonial troops at Ambela, too in his letter, dated 25 October 1863, informed Adjutant-General about the intentions of the Buner tribes to call the Akhund for help (HCPP, 1864, p. 67). When the Akhund joined the Buner tribes, General Chamberlain in a telegram informed the colonial authorities that:

The Akhoond [Akhund] of Swat having joined, coalition is serious, because his influence extends as far as Kohat, and other tribes may take up the fanatical cry. I recommend your sending trans-Indus as many troops as can be spared from below. Any backwardness now may cause great inconvenience; whereas, if the tribes hear of the arrival of troops, those tribes not committed are likely to keep quiet (HCPP, 1864, p. 132).

In his letter of 31 October 1863, General Chamberlain again informed Adjutant-General that the Akhund has joined the Buner tribes and brought with him 100 standards, each representing “probably, from 30 to 40 footmen, and, it is said 120 horsemen.” The Akhund has also invited the people of Bajawar and the chief of Dir, Ghazan Khan. He further stated that the local people and the Akhund had ceased their hostilities and made a common front against the colonial British. General Chamberlain described the changing situation in the following words:

We [British colonial troops] are engaged in a contest in which not only are the Hidoostanees [Hindustani] and the Madabun [Mahaban] tribes (including even some Jadoons [Jadons] and Khodakhails [Khudu Khel] accessories, but also the Swatees [Swatis], the Bajourees [Bajawaris], the Indus tribes north of the Burrendo [Barandu], with a large sprinkling of the discontented and restless spirits from within our own border (HCPP, 1864, p. 75).

⁷An old and most popular genre of the Pashto poetry and reflects all human feelings and aspirations elegantly.

⁸(Sultan-i-Rome, 2018, p. 263).

After the arrival of the Akhund at Ambela, severe fighting ensued and the Crag picquet was taken and retaken three times by the tribes and the colonial troops respectively. From 20 November 1863, on the one hand, the tribes had made no serious attack on the colonial troops and on the other hand, political steering was also in progress. Finally, the Buner *jargah* arrived at the British camp on the afternoon of 10 December 1863, and remained there for the night. Almost all of the Buner influential chiefs who were present agreed to the colonial government terms. On 11 December, the *jargah* left the camp for consultation with the Akhund and other allies. The Akhund did not agree to the agreement and meanwhile, a fresh contingent also joined the tribes. The Commissioner reported that “the jirgah [*jargah*] was overruled by Ghuzan [Ghazan] Khan and other newcomers, and was unable to come in” (HCPP, 1864, pp. 176-177). Major James, Commissioner Peshawar, in his memorandum dated 14 December 1863, stated that the Buner *jargah* informed him:

The pressure of the Bajouries [Bajawaris] and Ghuzan [Ghazan] Khan is so great upon the Akhoond [Akhund] that he is unable to counsel peace. At the same time they [Buner *jargah*] warn me [Major James] that the Akhoond [Akhund] is summoning those men of Bonair [Buner] who returned to their homes, and that many of them will obey the call. From the whole tone of the message, I [Major James] gather that they [Buner *jargah*] wish me [Major James] to understand that, however much they [Buner *jargah*] desire peace, they [Buner *jargah*] cannot accomplish it till we [British colonial troops] render it possible for them [Buner *jargah*] to act independently of their allies (HCPP, 1864, p. 177).

After their final answer, received on the afternoon of 14 December 1863, the officer commanding ordered to enter Buner territory on the succeeding day. On 15 December, the village of Lalu was captured followed by the village of Ambela on the following day (Masson, 1895, p. 11). The advancement of the colonial troops on 15 and 16 December, as stated earlier, was only opposed by the Mujahidin, G.B. Scott has stated:

The Bonerwal chiefs informed him [Major James] that they [Buner chiefs] were willing to treat, but that the Akhund’s party, which but for diplomacy would now have been holding the passes into Swat, still held out, and intended attacking the British position on the 16th. They advised that our [British colonial] troops should now take the initiative and attack Ambela, in which case the Bonerwals would stand aloof (Scott, 1906, pp. 135-136).

Lord Roberts, who served in this expedition has also stated:

James, the Commissioner, had been working to detach the Bonerwals from the combination against us [the colonial British], and on the afternoon of our arrival a deputation of their headmen arrived in camp, and before their departure the next morning they promised to accompany a force proceeding to destroy Malka, and to expel the Hindustani fanatics from the Buner country. Later, however, a messenger came in to say they could not fulfil their promise, being unable to resist the pressure brought to bear upon them by their co-religionists. The man further reported that large numbers of fresh tribesmen had appeared on the scene,

and that it was intended to attack us on the 16th. He advised the Commissioner [Major James] to take the initiative, and gave him to understand that if we [colonial troops] advanced the Bunerwals would stand aloof (Roberts, 1901, pp. 287-288).

Lord Roberts has further stated that “we [the Colonial troops] bivouacked for the night near the village of Umbeyla, and the next morning [17 December] the Bunerwals, who, true to their word, had taken no part in the fighting on the 15th or 16th, came in and made their submission” (Roberts, 1901, p. 290).

Major James, Commissioner Peshawar, stated that the success of the troops on 15 and 16 December not only submitted the Bonerwals but also broke the confederacy of the tribes. He stated that Ghazan Khan of Dir, Faiz Talab Khan of Bajawar, Sohbat Khan and Sher Dil Khan of Swat with other minor *khans* “fled with their followers as soon as this force was in possession of Umbeyla, leaving the Akhoond, in whose cause they had ostensibly come, to make the best of his way home by himself” (HCPP, 1864, p. 110). Lord Roberts has also stated that “for the present the combination had broken up, and most of the tribesmen were dispersing to their homes, the Akhund of Swat and his followers were still hovering about in the neighbourhood, and inaction on our part would in all probability have led to a fresh gathering and renewed hostilities” (Roberts, 1901, pp. 290-291).

Contrary to the colonial description, some local writers presented a different view of the fighting at Lalu and Ambela villages on 15 and 16 December 1863 respectively. In this regard, Muhammad Parwiash Shaheen claimed that on 15 December, 15000 men under the Akhund attacked the colonial troops, in which their losses were 168 killed and 67 wounded while the tribes lost their 100 men besides numerous wounded (Shaheen, 1982, p. 41). Though the following verses of the Pashto *charbetah*⁹ presented a somewhat exaggerated account of the Ambela expedition but depicted the Akhund’s upper hand:

شپږ میاشتے فېرنسکی په سرکاوی اوکول جنکونه
دیر شو پکښه خراب
اوچت د ګټ په سر ورته صاحب وئیل بانکونه
د دوئ د سر قصاب¹⁰

Meaning:

At Surkawi (Ambela) the colonial English fought for six months, which damaged them to the utmost extent

At the top of the boulder, the Akhund called public prayers, who was a butcher of them

⁹An old genre of the Pashto poetry.

¹⁰(Pukhtu, 1982, p. 143).

The same situation is narrated in Pashto *tapah*:

د خدائے رحمت په بابا جی شه
چې فیرنکے ئے په کلکتہ اوکاونه¹¹

Meaning:

May Allah bless the Babaji (Akhund) for he compelled the colonial English to retreat to Calcutta

Besides narrating different episodes of the Akhund's participation in the Ambela expedition, the writers also narrated about some superstitious powers of the Akhund in which some are similar with a minor alteration. For example, Pir Gohar stated that when the fighting at Ambela prolonged, the colonial troops decided that without arresting the Akhund, they cannot conclude the expedition. Interestingly, when the British commander through his binocular tried to locate the exact position of the Akhund, he saw about 60,000 men on the hills. The commander immediately withdraw his troops and requested the Akhund for peace (Gohar, 1982, p. 56).

Similarly, Ajab Din Khattak stated that when the Akhund joined the tribes at Ambela, the hornets attacked the colonial troops and caused them so much damage that they requested for concord. The colonial troops soon violated the accord and again attacked Ambela. One of their spies informed the colonial authorities that the Akhund was alone at Saidu.¹² The troops started towards Saidu and at a distance of one mile when they through binocular viewed Saidu, the trees, and shrubs, etc., seemed like men. By seeing this huge crowd the troops returned without arresting the Akhund (Khattak, 1982, p. 64).¹³

In this respect, Mahi-ud-Din, Masal Shah Ghulam, and Abdul Halim Asar stated that during the Ambela expedition, when the colonial troops attacked Ambela and reached the Akhund's post, hornets attacked the troops and killed many of them (Swati, 1982, p. 74; Ghulam, 1982, p. 97; Afghani, n.d., p. 918).¹⁴

Charles E. Stewart, who was with the colonial troops in the Ambela expedition also stated that the tribes before an attack on the colonial troops visited the Akhund for blessing,

¹¹(Pukhtu, 1982, p. 160).

¹²We have found no record in any source that during or after Ambela expedition the colonial force made any attempt for the arrest of the Akhund.

¹³In the same manner, Muhammad Mahi-ud-Din on the authority of *Tarikh-i-Swat* and Gohar Ali Gohar claimed that on 23 December 1863, the colonial troops under the guidance of the Buner people moving towards Malka. The *lakhkar* in a very disparate situation gathered around the Akhund. The colonial troops besieged the Akhund and the *lakhkar* and advancing towards the Akhund for his arrest. The Akhund ordered his *lakhkar* to hurl stones on the colonial troops (as they have no ammunition) and took shelter in the plants. As the colonial troops were about to the position of the Akhund, the commander through his binocular tried to locate the Akhund. With the divine help, the plants and stones etc. in binocular seems to be men and the commander considered their number some 60000. The commander thought it a tactic of the Akhund and ordered retreatment. (Swati, 1982, p. 75).

¹⁴Similarly, Faqir Muhammad Abbas narrated a somehow similar story that when the colonial troops became near to the Akhund, he said some verses on the sand and tossed it towards the colonial troops upon which hornets attack them (Qadriya, 1977, p. 133).

who said, “as long as you [the tribes] continue to advance, I [the Akhund] by miraculous power, will not allow any bullet to strike you, nor any sword to cut you; you may proceed to the very muzzle of the cannon, and I will close their mouths.” He added that not only the tribes but some of the colonial soldiers also believed this (Stewart, 1911, p. 63). The local poetry also contains some verses regarding the paranormal powers of the Akhund, as the following Pashto *tapah* shows the supernatural powers of the Akhund:

په امبله توره تپاره شوہ
باجاجی پورته کړه امسا چه رنډا شېنه¹⁵

Meaning:

Total darkness overtook the Ambela, O Babaji (the Akhund!) Raise the stick so that the light comeback

According to Allah Bakhsh Yusufi, in the last phase of the Ambela expedition, the colonial troops concluded secret terms with some of the Buner chiefs for the destruction of Malka. On the other side, the position of the Akhund *lakhkar* was weakened as a lot of people had returned to their homes. The colonial troops asked the Akhund to surrender but to no avail. As the colonial troops failed to arrest him they finally asked the Akhund for the truce. The Akhund knew that the Buner chiefs had already made terms with them added that few British officers will visit Malka and burn only one house outside Malka. The colonial British accepted this term and acted accordingly (Yusufi, 1960, pp. 387-388). Pir Gohar stated that the British officers requested the Akhund to allow them to go to Malka as a face-saving act. The Akhund accepted their request and allowed a few of them to visit Malka and set only one house on fire (Gohar, 1982, p. 56).

According to Nasar, after 16 December, except the Swati *lakhkar*¹⁶, the rest of the tribes started going back to their homes. The Akhund tried to stop them and later in a *jargah*, it was decided that those who left the field, the *lakhkar* would burn their houses. When the colonial authorities came to know about this, they offered a large amount of money to Zaidullah Khan and attacked the Akhund’s *lakhkar*, which was repulsed. After this incident, the Akhund consulted Ghazan Khan along with and other *khans* and agreed to the settlement (Nasar, 1964 pp. 50-52).

Sadiq Hussain claimed that Ajab Khan, Zaidullah Khan, Habib Khan, Asim Khan Amazi, Ahmad Khan Nasuzi, Khan of Baghra, Malak Mulla Khan, Abdullah and Firoz Khan of Kogha and Sarha respectively met with the Commissioner Peshawar and took bags full of gold coins. He further stated that the colonial British with the help of the above *khans* contacted the Akhund and he too left the field after getting bags full of coins (Hussain, 2010, pp. 560-561). Similarly, Haidar Ali quoted Olaf Caroe that the Akhund was in favour of the burning of Malka as this act would enhance his prestige and decrease that of the Sayyids of Sitanah (Akhund Khel, 2008, p. 100).

¹⁵(Khan, 2004, p. 26).

¹⁶The tribal force taking the field under the tribal banner at the time of need without any payment, at own cost, arms and ammunition.

Concluding analysis

As we see that in the literature on the Ambela expedition, no other person or group occupies more space than the Akhund. Therefore it is necessary to evaluate his role at every stage of this expedition. This section not only critically evaluates his role but also gives answers to the questions mentioned in the introduction. In this regard, the claim of the writers, such as Pir Gohar, Mawlvi Inayatullah, Abdul Halim Asar, Faqir Muhammad Abbas, and Muhammad Shafi Sabir, that the Akhund proclaimed *jihad* against the colonial troops before the commencement of the expedition, seems fallacious. Because before the entry of the colonial troops into the Ambela pass, neither the Buner people nor the Akhund had any knowledge about the expedition. The Buner chiefs in a reply to the colonial British proclamation, which they issued before entering the Ambela pass, complained only about the choosing of the Ambela pass, not over their expedition against the Mujahidin. The Buner chiefs declared that “we [colonial troops] were at liberty to follow our own enemies, and they [Buner chiefs] would only be prepared to defend their own territory should we [colonial troops] turn upon it” (HCPP, 1864, p. 153). It was after the successful propaganda of the Mujahidin—that the colonial troops intended to annex Buner and Swat—the local people, as well as the Mujahidin, requested the Akhund and at their request, he joined them on 26 October, seven days after the colonial troops attacked the Ambela pass. If the Akhund had proclaimed *jihad* before the entering of the colonial troops into Ambela pass as stated by some writers, then he should have reached Buner before 26 October.

Contrary to the claims of the above writers, the colonial writers present a different picture of the Akhund’s participation in the Ambela expedition. Colonel Taylor, Commissioner Peshawar, and the native chiefs, present at the British camp at the time of the expedition have expressed:

The Akhoond [Akhund] moved in fear, that if he [the Akhund] did not show sympathy with the Bonair [Buner] on the occasion [during Ambela expedition] he [the Akhund] might loss influence with the tribe, who were his natural constituents; and, possibly, to this was added an anxiety lest Mobarik [Mubarak] Shah, who is an aspirant to his fathers’ position of king of Swat, might by having joined the war with his Hindostanees [Hindustani Mujahidin], gain some of the influence which he, the Akhoond [Akhund], would lose (HCPP, 1864, p. 174).

McMahon and Ramsay have stated that “the Akhund probably had no very great desire to be drawn into direct opposition to us [colonial British], but, owing to circumstances beyond his control, he was involved in the business” (McMahon and Ramsay, 1916, p. 35). Claud Field, has stated that “during the campaign of Umbeyla [Ambela], however, the Akhund of Swat was borne along by the tide of popular fanaticism against the English, and was obliged to proclaim the “Jihad” or holy war against them” (Field, n.d., p. 61). According to the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, “the Akhund was no longer able to stem the tide and joined the enemy’s camp” (Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1908, p. 21). Edward E. Oliver has also stated that “there is really no need to go far for a reason; the pressure brought to bear upon him was practically irresistible. The Buneyr [Buner] and other tribal chiefs and people, the mullahs and the priestly classes,

who for the moment had put aside their sectarian disputes, and even the women made passionate appeals to him to take up their cause" (Oliver, 1890, p. 283).

If we study the interaction of the Akhund with the colonial British, we would find that the Akhund tried his utmost to avoid confrontation with them. In this regard, Edward E. Oliver has stated that "in 1847, he [the Akhund] had used his best influence to prevent the people of Swât from assisting the rebellious Bazai villages punished by our [colonial British] troops." Similarly in 1849, the Akhund again "endeavoured to persuade the Palli [Palai] people to discharge their gangs of highwaymen, and refrain from raiding" (Oliver, 1890, p. 283). Likewise, Sultan-i-Rome has stated that "as regards the payment of the fine (1852) of Rs. 5000/- the leaders were divided in opinion; the Akhund urged the payment thereof, but Sayed Akbar [Shah, king of Swat] opposed him and urged the people of Sam Ranizai to refuse" (Sultan-i-Rome, n.d.). During the famous uprising of 1857, McMahon and Ramsay have stated that "fortunately for us [colonial British] the Akhund, so far from taking active steps against us [colonial British], drove out the mutineers of the 55th and Mubarak Shah as well" (McMahon and Ramsay, 1916, p. 35). Again quoting Oliver who has stated that "among his last acts, he condemned the Jawâki raiders¹⁷ who appealed to him, as thieves and rascals for plundering their co-religionists in Kohat, and excommunicated the authors of the Swat Canal outrage at Abazai" (Oliver, 1890, pp. 283-284).

The Akhund probably had no information of the intended attack of the colonial troops, for if he knew he certainly would have advised his followers not to confront the colonial troops as he had done in 1847, 1849, 1855, and later in 1877. Regarding his joining the expedition, we can say that the popular enthusiasm of the local tribes, after the successful propaganda of the Mujahidin and choosing of Ambela pass as the main route for the expedition, it was almost impossible for the Akhund to remain aloof from it.

Haidar Ali, Nasarullah Khan Nasar, Muhammad Parwiash Shaheen, and Farhan Shida have claimed that Mawlwi Abdullah, the leader of the Mujahidin, himself visited Saidu and invited the Akhund. As stated earlier, Shaheen has further claimed that the Akhund proclaimed Mawlwi Abdullah his son and the commissioner warned him to remain aloof. Here too, the claim of these writers seems mistaken. A subsequent study of the Ambela expedition shows that Mawlwi Abdullah visited Saidu not in 1863, but in 1868, when the Akhund ordered the expulsion of the Hindustani colony from the Buner as a result of the differences of the Akhund with the Mujahidin (Masson, 1895, p. 13). Besides, we have also found no reference to the commissioner's letter to the Akhund. If the commissioner wrote a letter to the Akhund then as stated earlier the Commissioner Peshawar, did not report that a rumour was in the air that the Mujahidin made overtures to the Akhund and if they succeeded in it, this will increase problems for the colonial troops. In this regard, the claim of Mehr and other local writers seems authentic that it were the Mujahidin and local tribes who invited the Akhund.

Notwithstanding the motives of the Akhund, he came and joined the tribes at Ambela. After his joining, the situation at Ambela dramatically changed and the tribes made attacks on the colonial troops most daringly. As stated earlier, from 20 October 1863, the tribes made no serious attack on the colonial troops and when after 16 December, the colonial troops for the

¹⁷For the detail study of Jowaki expeditions see (Ahmad, 2017, pp. 19-56).

first time got the upper hand and were about to conclude the expedition, again, some partisans, presented the Akhund differently. In this regard, Shaheen stated that on 15 December 1863, the Akhund along with 15000 men attacked the colonial troops and caused them considerable casualties. Like the previous statements of Shaheen, this statement also seems incredulous because neither the Akhund nor the Buner tribes participated in the fighting on the said days but only the Mujahidin took to the field. Besides Shaheen, Nasarullah Khan Nasar also stated that when the colonial authorities knew that the Akhund was not only firm himself but also called on the other tribes to stand firm, they, through Zaidullah Khan attacked the Akhund. Again we could not find any mention of such an attack, either by the colonial troops or the local tribes, on the Akhund.

As opposed to the supporters of the Akhund, Sadiq Hussain stated that the Akhund, along with other chiefs, took bags full of money and left the field. In this regard, we are told by G.B. Scott, that, "Major James now made special proposals to the chiefs of each tribe in turn. Doubtless he had a large command also of 'Secret Service money'" (Scott, 1906, p. 134). Scott further argued that Major James kept his arrangements secret from military authorities. Sir Hugh Rose, Commander-in-Chief of India, determined to shift the strength of the tribes from Ambela to Swat by sending a force towards Swat. But Major James had already assured the Swat chiefs that their country will not be invaded, and the troops detailed for Swat turned towards Buner and joined the rest of the force at Ambela (Scott, 1906, pp. 134-135). Doubtless, in the Ambela expedition, the colonial authorities distributed money between different chiefs but we have found no evidence that the Akhund was included in this group. Here Major James, Commissioner Peshawar, would be quoted, who has stated:

I [Major James] succeeded in drawing off Ahmad Khan, with the greater portion of the Ashezai [Ashezi] and Salarzi sections of the Bonair [Buner] tribe; the Ranizai [Ranizi] were also induced to return to their homes, to the number of 2,000; Sohbut [Sohbat] Khan of Swat also sent home his immediate followers; minor personages acted in a similar manner; and, amongst those who remained, a mutual mistrust prevailed. These desertions were becoming so numerous that the Akhoond [Akhund] issued denunciation against all who should leave the field, and the Moulvie [Mawlvi] redoubled his efforts to bring back the wavering (HCPP, 1864, pp. 173-174).

Major James, who after his arrival, change the whole scenario at Ambela was in a real sense a person who concluded the expedition as obvious from the above quote. He mentioned all those with whom he was in contact but about the Akhund neither he nor any other colonial person/file stated what Sadiq Hussain has stated.

Just like in the earlier stages of the Ambela expedition, we also have different accounts about the last stage, which is the burning of Malka. Haider Ali and Olaf Caroe stated that the Akhund was in favour of the burning of Malka as he wanted to decrease the prestige of the Mujahidin and the Sayyids of Sitanah. According to Haidar Ali, when the people of Buner knew that Malka was destroyed by the instigation of the Akhund and Zaidullah Khan, they killed the latter. If we accept the claims of Olaf Caroe, Haidar Ali, and others that the Akhund wanted to decrease the prestige of the Sayyids and the Mujahidin, we cannot accept that

Zaidullah Khan was murdered due to the destruction of Malka. A detailed study of the events after the Ambela expedition shows that Azim Khan and Zaidullah Khan were in league with the Mujahidin against the Akhund. And in the progression of these differences in 1868, Zaidullah Khan was murdered by the partisans of the Akhund on his order (Hindustani Fanatics, 2009).

Allah Bakhsh Yusufi, Pir Gohar, and Fauz-ur-Rahman, etc. have stated that it was the Akhund who permitted or compelled the colonial troops to burn only one house in Malka. As mentioned before, Yusufi has stated that, at the last stage of the Ambela expedition, the position of the Akhund's *lakhkar* deteriorated and most of the tribes had left for their homes. The Akhund also knew that the Buner chiefs had made a secret alliance with the colonial troops. On the other hand, according to Major James, the Buner chiefs had already decided to conclude the war and on 10 December 1863, agreed on the destruction of Malka and other colonial terms. When on 14 December, the Akhund and other tribes rejected the proposals of the colonial troops, the Buner deputation not only informed Major James about the intended attack of the tribes on 16 December, but also assured him of their non-participation (Roberts, 1901, pp. 287-288; Scott, 1906, pp. 135-136). And in the words of Lord Roberts, the Buner people were true to their word. Major James proposed that if Buner *jargah* did not agree on the destruction of Malka by themselves then the troops by force should do this. He has stated:

It is my firm belief that, by driving the enemy out of Laloo [Lalu], or rather from their bivouac in its vicinity, and advancing on Umbeylah [Ambela village], we should force the jirgah [*jargah*] to come in, and could then continue the operations as above detailed (HCPP, 1864, p. 175).

The colonial troops captured the villages of Lalu and Ambela and as planned and predicted by Major James, the Buner *jargah* arrived for "not even talking of terms, but simply asking for orders" (HCPP, 1864, p. 179). In this situation, we cannot assume that the Akhund was powerful enough to alter the agreement.

The Akhund's participation in the Ambela expedition at the age of about seventy years is not an ordinary event. He accepted the request of the tribes and the Mujahidin and joined them in the Ambela. Irrespective of the motives behind his joining and the benefits he got after that, credit must be given to him. But we must treat him as a human being and not a supernatural being. Despite all controversies, different accounts about his role, and superstitions about him, the Akhund got the most prominent place not only in the historiography of this expedition but among all those who participated in it. It is only and only due to his role in the Ambela expedition that we can find local sources and Pashto folklore on the Ambela expedition, more than any other colonial expedition against the Pukhtuns in the nineteenth century.

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