

Wahhabi Movement – UPSC Notes

What is Wahhabi Movement?

Wahhabi movement was a revivalist movement initiated against Westernization's increasing influence on Islam's true spirit by eliminating the un-Islamic customs hampering their Muslim culture. He aims to bring back the real kind of Islamic civilization that existed during the Prophet's time in Arabia.

Saiyid Ahmad of Rai Bareilly started the Movement in India. He was highly influenced by the preachings of Shah Waliullah (1702-62), who was a Delhi saint, and his son Abdul Aziz. Sayyid was also influenced by the teachings of Abdul Wahab of Arabia (1703-87).

Wahhabi Movement Overview

Here are key highlights of the Wahhabi Movement-

Highlights	Details
Wahhabi Movement started in	Early 1820
Wahhabi Movement was started by	Saiyid Ahmad
Wahabi Revolt ended in	In 1870

Objectives of the Wahhabi Movement

Wahhabi Movement was a rebellious movement against the influence of modernization over Islam by bringing back the simplicity of the Islamic religion. The Movement revolves around the Islamic legacy of the Quran and Hadis.

Syed Ahmed started the Movement with these two ideals-

- He aimed to bring back the past harmony among the 4 schools of Muslim jurisprudence responsible for dividing the Indian Muslims.
- Every individual must know their role in the religion. This means that individuals should make Islam their understanding rather than imposing the religion over them mindlessly and blindly.

Wahabi Revolt - Anti-Sikh and Anti-British Movement

The Wahhabi Movement started to direct a socio-religious movement against the Sikhs in Punjab. To support the Movement, Sayyid Ahmad launched the practice of Jihad against the Punjabi Sikhs. He boosted the fire of the Wahabi Revolt by publishing an anti-Sikh booklet named Targhiz-ul-Jihad. Because of the hate resulting from the Movement, Ranjit Singh, the ruler of Punjab, was overthrown.

After removing the Sikh ruler in Punjab, the Movement headed toward the East India Company's dominion. However, the British suppressed the Movement after the Revolt of 1857.

Political view of the Wahhabi Movement

Shah Abdul Aziz and Syed Ahmed Bareilvi turned the Wahhabi Movement and gave it a political perspective.

These were the major highlights supporting the Wahhabi Movement's political view in India-

- Before the Movement, India was considered a land of Kafirs (known as Dar-ul-Harb). According to the major objective of the Movement, there was a need to convert India into an Islamic land (dar-ul-Islam).
- Syed Ahmed Bareilvi aimed to bring back the purity of Islamic culture that existed during the Prophet's time in Arabia.
- It worked to eliminate the un-Islamic or westernized practices that hinder the originality of Islam.

Suppression of Wahhabi Movement

The Wahhabi Movement became one of the major reasons that ignited the revolt of 1857 among Muslims. The Movement was responsible for spreading anti-British sentiments that became a symbol of potential danger for the British Rulers of India. As a result of this danger, the British Government launched a multi-pronged attack on the Movement in the 1860s. They started Military Operations. Along with these, certain court cases were filed against the supporters of the Wahhabi Revolt (known as Wahabis) in India.

From 1863 to 1865, there were several episodes where Wahhabis were arrested for supporting the Movement, important being the Ambala trial in 1864 and the Patna trial in 1864. However, because of many close encounters and strict actions, the Movement completely lost its vitality after the 1870s.