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Diplomatic Strategies Adopted by the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him)

Abstract:

This article analyzes various diplomatic strategies adopted by The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to connect with the world around him. With these strategies, He dealt with His non-Muslim subjects, with non-Muslims within Arabian peninsula and sent the message across Arabian peninsula. The Prophet executed peace treaties, and personally visited places to spread the message across. He also wrote letters and sent emissaries to the other heads of the states.

Key words: Prophet Muhammad, Diplomacy, Islam

The Prophet was a successful and expedient diplomat whose state policy was an epitome of peace, coexistence and conflict resolution.¹ His can be divided into three phases. First phase is the passive aggression by the people of Makah; when the Muslims were in minority. The initial years of this period were of covert preaching. Followed by the violent phase of overt preaching which started non-resistance to the physical torture lashed out by the Quresh. The Holy Prophet at that time, was not only in relations with non-Muslims in Makah, but had ongoing diplomatic relations with the non-Muslims outside Makah, he also communicated with the regional powers and communities such as Negus (Habsha), Taif and Yathrab.²

Secondly, the post migration strategies in the nascent city state of Medina, and the Prophet's relations with the Jews, the Makahns and with the neighboring tribes where the Prophet sent the message of Islam. These were the years of constant war.

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¹ Qureshi, Muhammad Siddique. Foreign Policy of Hadrat Muhammad (SAW) (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1989); Javaid, Dr. Faisal & Shahabuddin, Dr. (2018). Distinguish Features of Foreign Policy of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) with Special Reference to South and Central Asian States. 37-42.

² Martin Forward, *Muhammad: A Short Biography*. (Oxford: One world, 1998), 27-28.

Thirdly, the post-Hudabia period, when the Prophet sent letters to the notable powers of the contemporary e.g. Persia and Rome, followed by the triumphing victory in Makah after which Islam dominated entire Arabia.³

Strategies Adopted by the Prophet during the Makkan Period

1. Non-Resistance

In the 4th Nabvi, the Prophet declared the massage of Allah overtly. This message was a threat to the existing social, economic and religious set up of Makah. To counter this challenge, the *mushrakeen* tried to suppress the Prophet and to minimize the credibility of his message in the eyes of the common people;

- i) By ridiculing the massage of Allah.
- ii) By raising doubts regarding the message.
- iii) By making comparisons between the massage and the ancient folk tales such as Rustam and Sohrab.⁴

iv) Lastly, by offering compromises and enticements to the Prophet But all of these tactics remained unsuccessful.⁵ The Quresh wanted to avoid any violent action against the Prophet, since tribal affinity in the city state of Makkah, had created a very delicate balance of power in the city, any acute action against the Prophet would have raised the clamor of revenge form the tribe of the Prophet, and there could have been a civil war in Makkah. Therefore, the *mushrakeen* of Makah meditated for a few months before they took any action against the Prophet. Twenty five clan-elders of Quresh, headed by Abu-Lahab, took the decision of torturing the Prophet and his companions.⁶ This torture aimed to force the Muslims to abandon their faith.

Thus, started the violent phase of overt preaching and this violence crossed the barriers of human endurance. This violence cost some believers their lives as; a believer, Yasir ibn Amir ibn Malik al-Ansiy and his wife Sumayyah bint Khabbat (c. 550 -615) were tortured till death by the *mushrakeen* etc.⁷ Consequently, in the 5th Nabvi the migration to the Christian

⁴ For details on these medieval Persian super heroes created by famous poet Firdosi see http://www.iranchamber.com/literature/shahnameh/08rostam_sohrab.php

⁵ Safi Mubarakpuri, *A1 Raheeq-al-Mukhtoom* (Lahore, 2001), 118-22.

³ Irfan Shahid, "Arabic literature to the end of the Umayyad period", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol 106, No. 3, p.531: Haykal, Muhammad Husayn, *The Life of Muhammad*. (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications. 1993). see the chapter on Delegates.

⁶ Ibid., 122.

⁷ Ibid., 129. Muhammad ibn Saad "*Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*", in Translated by Bewley, A. (ed.), *The Women of Madina*, 8 (London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 1995), pp. 185–186.

Kingdom of Aksum also known as Negus or Abbasinya took place.⁸ The Prophet asked the believers to endure the torture, and not to confront force with force. The reason behind this policy of non-resistance was that Muslims were not in a position to answer the force of the Quresh adequately, and any move to counter violence with violence would have resulted in further brutality form Quresh. Since the aim of the Prophet in this era was to spread the message of Allah, preservation and rigorous training of His followers, the Muslims avoided any extreme confrontation with the *mushrakeen*. Thus, the Muslims opted for passive-non-resistance.

2. Kifalah (Support/Protection)

In a system, where tribal affinity was of supreme significance, the Prophet was supported by His uncle Abu Talib and wife Khudeja; their social status provided the Prophet fortification which facilitated the Prophet in His mission. This support is termed, as kifalah. Due to which, the Quresh could not take any extreme action against the Prophet. They demanded Abu Talib several times to surrender his support for the Prophet, but he refused. At the death of Abu Talib, in the 10th Nabvi the Prophet went to Taif, the abode of his maternal relatives at a distance of 60 miles, with an intention to seek kifalah, he stayed there for 10 days, but his attempts remained unfruitful.⁹. This unsuccessful venture brought the Prophet back to Makah. The Prophet Himself, requested for kifalah to three persons Akhnas bin Shariq, Sohail bin Amar of bani Amir and Mutim bin Adi. The earlier two persons declined. Nevertheless, the Prophet entered Makah after attaining kifalah from Motim bin Adi, as it meant the security of His life.¹⁰ Later, while preaching, the Prophet used to ask the delegates of pilgrims visiting Makah to take him along with them.¹¹ This was the manifestation of His willingness to acquire *kifalah* from non-Makahns tribes. Consequently, He accepted the offer for security of life made by the people of Medina and migrated to Medina.¹² According to Dr. Montgomery Watt, the Prophet decided to move to Medina after several meetings with people of Medina. *Kifalah* proved to be a strategy that helped the Prophet in the accomplishment of His mission towards Allah. In the form of *hijrat*, it proved to be the landmark in the life of the Prophet.

⁸ Muhammad Pir Karam Shah, Zia-un-Nabi, Vol. III (Lahore: Zia-ul-Quran Publications, 1994), 335-6; E. A. Wallis Budge. A History of Ethiopia: Volume I: Nubia and Abyssinia. (Routledge, 2014). pp. vii.

⁹ Muhammad Rafique Dogar, Al-Amin (SAAV, Vol. I (Lahore: Deed shaneed Publishers, 1999), 435.

¹⁰ Mubarakpuri, A1 Raheeq-al-Mukhtoom, 135.

¹¹ Mohammad Hamidullah, Ahed-i-Nabvi main Nizam-e-Hukumrani (Karachi: Urdu Acadamy, 198 I), 268.

¹² Watt, M Montgomery, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press. 1974), p. 84.

Strategies adopted by the Prophet (PBUH) during Medina Period

1. Display of Power

During the ten years of Medina the Prophet adopted an outright aggressive policy to display power. There were twenty-seven *ghazwat* and sixty-six *sariya*¹³ and it was only twice; at the time of Uhad and Ahzab that the Muslims were at defensive. On this stage, the overall policy adopted for the military affairs was of pre-emption.

This policy of display of power can only be appreciated if the spirit of the age, of the times of the Prophet is understood. Display of power, was the most important instrument for successful statecraft at that era. This policy was by no means in contradiction with the humanitarian ethos, preached by the Prophet, as even during these years of war; the human blood was esteemed highly. During the last ten years of the Prophet's life in Medina, ten-lac square miles territory was conquered, which makes an average of 274 miles per month. During this entire era the average ratio of enemy causalities is merely two, per-month. The seventy causalities in the battle of Badar are maximum number of deaths in any *ghazwa*.¹⁴ Thus, despite of the fact that this policy was aggressive, it was not inhuman.

For the Muslims, manifestation of power was necessary for two reasons;

First, to engage the Makahans into constant warfare. Due to its religious significance, conquest of Makah was the ultimate aim of the Prophet, since Makah was considered *haram* by the entire Arabia and it was not diplomatically just to attack it. This act could invite the hostility from all Arabia, towards the nascent Muslim state. Thus, the Quresh were pressured to come into direct confrontation with the Muslims, by constant monitoring of their caravans and with the display of hostility by the Muslims themselves. Secondly, to display the power of the newly emerging state, in order to win allies and neutralize the enemies. At the battle of Mautah 8th *hijrah*; the Muslim encountered the Romans.¹⁵ The Muslim army was comprised of three thousand soldiers and the Roman Army numbered two hundred thousand. Though, the battle remained undecided but its implications were benefiting for the Muslims. This encounter added into Muslim reputation in Arabia, as they challenged the superpower: the Rome. Many rival tribes living on border were

¹³ Abdul Hamid Siddiqui, *The Life of Muhammad* (Lahore: Islamic Publications Limited, 198 I), 120.

¹⁴ Hamidullah, Ahed-i-Nabvi mein Nizam-e-Hukumrani, 244.

¹⁵ Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad. A. Guillaume* (trans.). Oxford University Press, USA 2004), 532, 536.

subdued, such as Banu-Sulaim, Ishjah, Azfan, Zabyan and Fazirah.¹⁶ This battle was the prelude to conquest of Roman territories at the time of *khulfa-e-rashadeen*.¹⁷ Later, within a year, in the battle of Tabuk, the Muslim power reached thirty thousand. This battle became the prelude to the conquest of Makah as entire Arabia due to the Muslim confrontation with the Romans turned towards Medina for alliances. Therefore, the year of 9th *hijrah* is called the year of embassies.¹⁸

2.Neutralization of the Enemy

The Prophet while surrounded by the enemies from all sides; did not open all the fronts simultaneously. He opted a policy of Neutralization of the Enemy. If the Prophet intended to take an offensive on one front, He secured the other fronts by reaching mutual agreements with the other powers. This policy is visible in pact of Medina when the Prophet made agreements with the Jews,¹⁹ as He had to confront the Makans, militarily.

Second example of this strategy is the truce of Hudabia. The diplomacy and political expediency reflected in Hudabia had implications on; the future of Islam and on the future of entire Arabia.²⁰ In the post-Ahzab period, the Muslims had three major enemies. There was Makkah in the south and Khyber in the north, both of which could not be dealt simultaneously. Their growing amity was also a source of concern for the Muslims. The intriguing Jews were a strategic threat for the Muslims in Khyber. And the hostile *mushrakeen* in Makah, were to lose no chance of uprooting the Muslim state. There was every possibility of Medina being attacked by any of the enemies; if the Muslims concentrated on one front.²¹

Thus with the background of financial pressure, the Quresh were neutralized with truce of Hudabia and within months the Jews were eliminated entirely in the battle of Khyber. Furthermore, the implications of this policy were far-reaching. The financial prosperity of the Quresh was to be the final deathblow on the Jewish monopolization on the Arab trade.²²

Therefore, the truce of Hudabia in the 6th *hijrah* is a manifestation of the successful diplomacy of the Prophet. It was in Hudabia that the Quresh accepted the Muslims as an equivalent power. Earlier the Quresh ranked the

¹⁶ HussainHaykul, *Hayat-e-Muhammad*, trans. Abu Yahya Imam (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1993), 267.

¹⁷ Mubarakpuri, A1 Raheeq-al-Mukhtoom, 526.

¹⁸ Ibid., 590.

¹⁹ Lewis, Bernard, *The Jews of Islam*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press., 1984), p. 44.

²⁰ Watt. al-Hudaybiya; Encyclopedia of Islam

²¹ Hamidullah, Ahed-i-Nabvi mein Nizam-e-Hukumrani, 249.

²² Ibid., 250.

Prophet as a dissenter of their system. Secondly, Islam was accepted as a separate religion. As the Muslims, like the people of other religions were given a right to have a pilgrimage to *Kaba* next year. Thirdly, no war for the next ten years meant for the Quresh, rebuilding and mitigation of economic loss due to the blockade of trade routes by the Muslims. For the Muslims, this truce paved the way for systematic elimination of the remaining two wings of Ahzab i.e., the Jews and the Bedouin in the battles of Khyber in 6th *hijrah* and *A1 Arquaa* in 7th hijrah.²³ Henceforth, the Muslims started introducing massage of Allah to the neighboring powers such as Rome and Persia.

3.Causing Disintegration among the Enemy Lines

On several occasions, the Muslims were frail and solitary power against the combine forces of the non-believers. Therefore, while confronting the enemy it was not feasible to tackle the united enemy lines. Thus, the strategy to disintegrate the enemy lines was adopted. This strategy was successfully executed on two levels. First, by breaking the unity between the enemy and its alliances e.g. battle of Ahzab. In this battle, the tribe of Ghatfan was broken form the axis of the Quresh and was asked to quit the blockade and leave the battleground. This plan could not be materialized by the Muslims, since the conditions of the agreement though acceptable to the Prophet were not acceptable to His officers. The other example is again battle of Ahzab, where the alliance of the Jews and *Mushrakeen* was broken by creating mutual distrust. Thus the Quresh quitted the blockade and went back to Makah.

On the second level; winning a class of sympathizers among the enemy, was a variation of the same strategy. In Makah, a class of Muslim supporters was created through financial aid e.g., before truce of Hudabia, the grain market of the Quresh which was in Yarnama was clogged by the Muslims. It was an arid year; there was a drought in Makah. The absence of grain put the Makkans into financial pressure. When they realized the power of the Muslim the ban was lifted and a class of Makkans became sympathizers of the Muslims.²⁴ The formation of this class aimed to lessen the hostility of the Makkans, and to develop difference of opinion among them.

4.Geographical and Diplomatic Alienation of the Enemy

The successful war diplomacy and economic prosperity of the Muslims won them many allies. As a result, Makkans were alienated geographically and diplomatically. Consequently, during post-Hudabia period, the Prophet alienated the Quresh geographically by winning their allies e.g.

²³ Haykul, Hayat-e-Muhammad, 251.

²⁴ Ibid., 150.

Aslam and Khaazaa tribes, which geographically enclosed Makah.²⁵ This strategy added to the financial miseries of the Quresh.

The Prophet won the tribes that came to seek the diplomatic support of the Makkans e.g. Bait-i-Uqba was a secret agreement of coalition between the Muslims and delegation from Medina people who came to Makah to seek diplomatic support. Secondly, the Bedouin tribes that resided on the trade routes of the Quresh had their economy based on the caravans of *Quresh*. Before Hudabia, when the Quresh were economically blockaded these tribes turned towards the Prophet and became His allies.²⁶ Thus, with this constant but gradual geographical and political alienation of the enemy, its will was broken.

5.Economic Blockade

The Quresh were traders by profession. During winters they traded southwards, to Syria, Palestine, Egypt and Iraq. The northern route was between Madina and and Yanboo.²⁷ The Prophet took the advantage of the geo-strategic position of Madina and blocked the Qureshi caravans. Their resistance was suppressed by force. Thus, the Quresh had to abandon the coastal route and adopt another alternative dessert route of Iraq. But soon the influence of the Prophet penetrated into Najad and they had to abandon this route as well. The Quresh used to get grains through Yamana and Bahrain, but due to Muslim influence the supply was stopped. This economic pressure became the most effective policy in subduing the Quresh.²⁸ As this policy became the prelude to the truce of Hudabia.

6.Policy of Confidentiality

Since the Prophet had to deal with different tribes and clans, He used a policy of complete confidentiality. On several occasions, he kept his decisions completely to himself. He did not entrust his important decisions, but only to the nearest few. The policy of confidentiality has two dimensions.

1. Complete secrecy about the important decisions.²⁹

2. Exile-To stamp out distrustflu1 elements from the center of the state.³⁰

²⁵ Ibid., 151.

²⁶ Hamidullah, Ahed-i-Nabvi mein Nizam-e-Hukumrani, 248-9.

²⁷ Ibid.,240.

²⁸ Ibid., 248.

²⁹ Mohammad Hamidullah, *The Emergence of Islam*, trans. Afzal Iqbal (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1999), 191.

³⁰ Hamidullah, Ahed-i-Nabvi mein Nizam-e-Hukumrani, 280.

Before the conquest of Makah; the Prophet blockaded the gateways to Medina and posted armed men to ensure that no one entered or left the city: for there was a danger of leakage of news about the preparations of war. He told people about an important impending expedition without giving any details and asked them to prepare for it. The nature of secrecy can be judged from the fact that even Abu Bakar was unaware of the destination of forthcoming expedition. He asked his daughter, one of the wives of the Holy Prophet, but even she did not know the time and date of departure of the expedition nor was she aware of the destination. When the Prophet came home, this conversation between the daughter and the father was taking place. He confided to Abu Bakar that He was preparing to proceed to Makah and asked him to keep the secret to himself. He then adopted a measure the importance and implications of which, can be analyzed by military experts alone. Even the allied tribes were not informed about the direction of the expedition. According to Hudhayfah ibn al Yaman quoted in shahih of Bukhari as saying that the Prophet, instead of proceeding south towards Makah took to the north creating the impression that a war with Byzantine was imminent. He then proceeded northeast and turned southeast traveling in a zigzag manner with the result that nobody knew about his plans. The companion states, that until the expedition approached the hills of Makah, the last halt, he did not know exactly where they were going. A force of ten thousand men was an impressive number by contemporary standards and it could not have remained hidden from the public eye. But the Muslim attack came as a complete surprise to the people of Makah.³¹

Policy of Exile is another manifestation of the policy of confidentiality adopted by the Prophet. There are many examples of imposing exile to the defeated opponents in the life of the Prophet. The Prophet ordered the Jewish tribes of Banu Quynuqa and Banu Nuzair to evacuate Madina, due to their constant intrigues. Majority of the Jews settled in Khyber; the status of which was of a free city state. In the 7th *hijrah* when Khyber was annexed with the Islamic state the Jews were again ordered to evacuate the place.³²

7.Policy of Appeasement ³³ (Moallafat ul Quloob)

The policy of *moallafat ul quloob* means to appease the targeted people by financial and ethical means.³⁴ This strategy was for both; the Muslims and

³¹Hamidullah, *The Emergence of Islam*, 191.

³² Hamidullah, Ahed-i-Nabvi mein Nizam-e-Hukumrani, 281.

³³ Ibid., 254.

³⁴ Ibid.

the non- Muslims.³⁵ Financial *moallafat ul quloob* was offered to four types of people;

First, in order to form alliances with the non-Muslims.³⁶ Secondly, to neutralize the adversary elements.³⁷ e.g., before Hudabia the economic condition of the Quresh had worsened due to economic blockade by the Muslims. Abu-Sufyan was a trader of dates. The Prophet sent dates and bartered leather of Taif in return. The stock of which was decaying due to the blockade of Syrian trade route. Thus, with helping him financially, a corporate relationship was formed with Abu-Sufyan.³⁸ Thirdly, it was given as an incentive for embracing slam.³⁹ Before the conquest in the 8th Hijrah, there was a severe drought in Makkah. The Prophet sent five hundred gold coins to Abu-Sufyan to aid the poor people of Makkah. At this state of affairs, Abu Sufyan remarked helplessly, that by doing so Mohammad would bring our youth and poor people of Makkah against us.⁴⁰ Fourthly, to aid the new-Muslims in order to strengthen their lovalty, and then to make them a role model for their family and clans.⁴¹ Moreover, to give the idea that Islam is not only spiritual religion but it also respects temporal needs of the people. The leaders of Makah were given heavy share in booty of ghazwa-e-Hunain⁴²

The Prophet respected the honorable people among the non-Muslims and it was also a source of appeasement for such people. The Prophet said that the good deeds at the time of *kufar* would be included after embracing Islam. Amar bin Al 'aas was made the leader of *Assabaqoon al awaloon* and was sent to military expeditions.⁴³ When Adi bin Hatim came to Medina the Prophet offered him a *masnad*. There are many examples like these. Such regard for virtuous non-Muslims won their hearts and brought them close to Islam.⁴⁴

8. Policy of Concession

This policy is a sub-dimension of *moallafat ul quloob*.⁴⁵ It refers to relaxation of the certain religious duties to bring the non-Muslims into sphere of Islam.

³⁵ Ibid., 660.

³⁶ Ibid., 259.

³⁷Ibid., 256.

³⁸ Ibid., 258. ³⁹ Ibid., 156.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 257.

⁴¹ Ibid., 256.

⁴²Mubarakpuri, Al Raheeq-al-Mukhtoom, 459.

⁴³ Hamidullah, Ahed-i-Nabvi mein Nizam-e-Hukumrani, 253.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 259.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 660.

A deputation of people of Taif visited the Prophet in Medina and expressed their willingness to embrace Islam on following conditions.

(a) They would be spared from the prayers.

(b) Adultery will be permitted.

(c) Taif will be declared *Haram;* a place where hunting and tree cutting will be prohibited.

(d) They will neither be a part of *jihad* nor will they have any conscription.

(e) They will not pay zakat.

The Prophet refused first two conditions and accepted rest. When the companions of the Prophet objected on the matter the Prophet made it clear that *zakat*, and *jihad* were a compulsory part of the religion. The concession was given temporarily to the people of Tiaf. The expediency behind this tactic was that; when with the passage of time Islam would penetrate in the hearts of the people they would submit to these compulsions themselves. This strategy was successful as after sometime people of Taif started paying *zakat* and participated in *jihad*. Another concession given to the people of Taif was that they were not forced to break the pantheon of Tiaf themselves. A government officer of Medina was sent for this purpose.⁴⁶ The expediency behind this strategy was to conciliate with the vanquished and to minimize their malice for the victors.

9. Matrimonial Alliance

In the tribal culture of Arabia, the blood and family relationships were of eminent significance. The association formed with matrimonial alliance, was used by the Prophet as, a strategy of neutralizing and winning enemies. The Prophet married Hazrat Safia of Banu Kanana whose father and husband were killed in war of Khyber. The marriage helped in minimizing the abhorrence for the Muslims and restoration of relations with the Jews.⁴⁷ The Prophet married Hazrat Ume Habiba, the daughter of Abu Sufyan after Hudabia for the same reason.⁴⁸

To conclude with, the diplomatic strategies and expedience of the Prophet were significantly responsible for momentous political and military accomplishments of the Muslims in such short span of time. The diplomatic strategies of the Prophet were based on realism and pragmatism. There were different strategies adopted for different powers. These strategies dealt;

⁴⁶ Ibid., 661.

⁴⁷ Mubarakpuri, Al Raheeq-al-Mukhtoom, 234-7.

⁴⁸ Hamidullah, Ahed-i-Nabvi mein Nizam-e-Hukumrani, 258.

I. With the *mushrakeen* of Makah, policies of passive-none-resistance, hostility, economic blockade and neutralization were used.

2. With Non-Arabs in Arabia (Jews) policy of neutralization and later hostility were used.

3. With Taif, a policy of concession was adopted

4. With the Bedouins, ⁴⁹ the policy of Display of Power was adopted.

5. With the external aggressors, such as Byzantines, the policy of use of preemptive force was adopted. 50

6. The neighboring powers of Arabia; e.g. Negus, Persia, Rome, Yaman were sent emissaries and Islam was introduced in the higher power echelons of these regions.⁵¹

The diplomatic strategies of the Prophet can be divided into two parts; the permanent strategies and temporary strategies.⁵² A permanent policy of display of power was adopted; since, the military supremacy was the only means of achieving compliance with the other nations. The policies, such as the policy of concession was by all means a temporary policy. It aimed to win the hearts of the people in order to acquire complete loyalty from them. Thus, the Prophet with his sagacious and expedient diplomacy was able to establish, a huge Muslim empire that defeated the contemporary superpowers of Byzantine and Persia within twenty-seven years.

⁴⁹ Pietruschka, Ute (2006). "Bedouin". In McAuliffe, Jane Dammen (ed.). Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān. Brill.

⁵⁰ For a detailed account of Prophet and Byzantine ruler's correspondence see, Nadia Maria El-Cheikh, "Muhammad and Heraclius: A Study in Legitimacy" *Studia Islamica*, No. 89. (1999), pp. 5–21.

^{51 51} Hamidullah, Ahed-i-Nabvi mein Nizam-e-Hukumrani, 234

⁵² Ibid.