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FORGOTTEN PAGES OF HISTORY: CONTRIBUTIONS OF ULAMA IN THE FREEDOM OF INDIA

The Indian National Congress was formed in 1885, with a view to unite Hindu and Muslims to participate in the struggle for freedom. More than 300 Ulama issued a decree (Fatwa) favouring Hindu-Muslim union for freedom struggle which was repeatedly published in the newspaper called 'Nusratul-Abrar'.

By M. Burhanuddin Qasmi

August 2016, the 70th anniversary of India's freedom, we undivided Indians will celebrate it with proud and all possible glitter. That's alright! But remember, what our history is telling about freedom struggle is not all—there are pages deliberately forgotten, dusted with prejudiced and narrowness or completely removed from our history books. A part of this argument was carried by Eastern Crescent (May issue), '150 years: The first war of India's independence' which discussed some pages of untold history from 1757 to 1857. And concluded with establishment of Darul Uloom Deoband in 1866 after defeat, heavy loss of lives of freedom fighters in the 1857's united war of independence, and then later during the course of the freedom struggle. The discussion below is continuation of the same argument in chronology.

In 1877, Shaikhul Hind Maulana Mahmoodul Hasan, the first student of Darul Uloom Deoband, set up an Organisation called 'Samratut Tarbiyat' (result of the training). (Tahreek-e Shaikul Hind 61) The aim of the organization was to prepare for armed insurrection against the British. The movement continued for at least 30 years. With Maulana Mohammad Qasmi Nanotwi's demise in 1880 and the lacunas in organizational set up, appeared to be an obstacle for the desired goal, the movement was abandoned. (Aseeran-e Malta 23) In 1909, Shaikhul Hind Maulana Mahmoodul Hasan re-organized his Fidayeen(devotees) under a new



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banner 'Jamiatul Ansaar'. Maulana Obaidullah Sindhi had been called to Deoband to take charge of secretariat of this new organization (personal Diary of Obaidullah Sindhi 20).

The first introduction of the Jamiatul Ansar was made at the annual function of Darul Uloom Deoband in 1911. Before 30 thousand distinguished Ulama from around undivided India and out- side, the Jamiat declared its aims and objectives and the reason as to why it was necessary to struggle for the freedom of the country. Buoyed by the successful launching and the support that it elicited from the masses, Jamiatul Ansaar organized its first rally at Moradabad town in April 1911. Participants from Aligarh, Nadwatul Ulama Lucknow and Deoband gathered in large numbers. In 1912 and 1913 the Jamiat organized mass gathering and successful public agitation in which thousands of people from Meerut and Shimla took active part. The huge mass support exhibited by Jamiat unnerved the government and they began planning to root out the main source— Darul Uloom Deoband, from where such a powerful organization had sprung. The leading members were asked by Shaikhul Hind to give up their membership of Jamiat in order to save the educational institution from irreparable losses that it might have suffered at the hands of colonial rulers. (Ulama-e Haque 1/131, Yad-e Baiza 107, Moqam-e Mahmood 203-204 and Naqash-e Hayat 2/144)

A New Establishment Springs Up in Delhi

Soon after the ban of Jamiatul Ansar in 1913, the freedom seekers appeared in Delhi with a new name'Nazzaaratul Ma'arif'. Maulana Obaidullah Sindhi and Shaikhul Hind were the leading figures behind this new setup. The zeal, spirit and purpose of the new set up was none the less freedom.

Mujahideen (freedom fighters) used the organization as a corridor to reach Delhi. It was also used as a public relation and financial resource base. Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar, Maulana Abul Kalaam Azaad, Maulana Sindhi and Shaikhul Hind used to meet here secretly. (Aseeran-e Malta 27 and Ulama-e Haque 1/136) When the First World War (1914) began between Germany and Britain, the freedom fighters once again changed their action plan. They decreased domestic activities and fully concentrated on supporting Germany. (Naqash-e Hayaat 2/210)

Shaikhul Hind Visits Hijaz

Fidayeen-e Freedom saw the war as a golden opportunity to strike at the roots of the British interest. Armed insurrections were planned against the British forces. Haji Saheb Tarang Zaie and Maulana Saifur Rahman Kabulie from Shaikhul Hind's Volunteer Group were selected as field commodores with operational base at Zaigi in 'Bajore, the capital of tribal autonomous Yaghistan. (Al-Jamiat, Sunday edition January 6, 1985).Shaikhul Hind Maulana Mahmoodul Hasan dispatched his deputy, Maulana Obaidullah Sindhi, to Kabul and he himself left for Saudi Arabia. The purpose of the visit was to solicit support from the Muslim countries because without weaponry and their active support it was quite impossible to achieve the goal.

Shaikhul Hind reached Makkah on October 9, 1915 and met the Turk Governor, Ghalib Pasha. On his request the powerful Governor of the Usmani Caliphate (Turk) agreed to extend support against the British government. In order to publicize his support among Muslims of the sub-continent, he wrote a long letter exhorting the general public to continue with their struggle, assuring them of his government's open support in the future.

It was before the United States took side of any of the warring parties in World War l. Later when the US government sided with the allied forces— Russia, France and Britain— the



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whole war scenario changed. The Turk and German— Central alliance was defeated. As a consequence of the defeat at the hands of allied forces with full connivance of the United States of America, the Usmani Caliphate was destroyed. The dream of Shaikhul Hind and his lieutenants to drive away the colonialists, by waging war against the British forces on Indian soil, never materialized. (Aseeran-e Malta 34, Naqash-e Hayaat 2/212, 186-87 and Tahreek-e Shaikhul Hind 72)

The First Government of India in Exile

As mentioned earlier, Maulana Obaidullah Sindhi was sent to Kabul for a special mission. He established a Government in Exile there, with Maulana Barkatullah Bhopali and himself as Ministers and Maharaja Pratap Singh as the President. Formation of 'Lashkar-e- Najat Dehinda' (Liberation Army) with headquarters in Madinah and Shaikhul Hind Maulana Mahmoodul Hasan as Chief was declared.

Meanwhile, an international set up by the name of 'Junoodur Rabbaniyah' (Army of God) was formed. The purpose of this group was to represent the movement around the world in order to garner international support against the colonial rule. Shaikhul Hind was named Al-Qayed (the Leader) of this group too.(Tahreek-e Shaikhul Hind 281, 282 & 271).

Maulana Obaidullah Sindhi wrote a letter to Maulana Mahmoodul Hasan, in Saudi Arabia, with details of his activities in Kabul and the future plan. The letter was written on a silk piece of cloth. Maulana Mohammad Mian Mansoor Ansari also enclosed a long letter detailing office bearers' names of the Government in Exile and a blueprint for Junoodur Rabbaniyah. These letters were dispatched to Madinah through Shaikh Abdur Raheem Sindhi. However, on the way these letters reached in the hands of a neo-Muslim named 'Rab Nawaz'. The same was passed to the British Commissioner in Multan. The date inscribed on the Silk letter was 8/9 Ramdhanul Mubarak 1334 A.H., corresponding to 9/10 July 1916, which reached at the hand of Commissioner in the first week of August 1916. How such a grievous blunder occurred, no one could explain it later! (Naqash-e Hayaat 2/213, Thareek-e Shaikhul Hind 268-269)

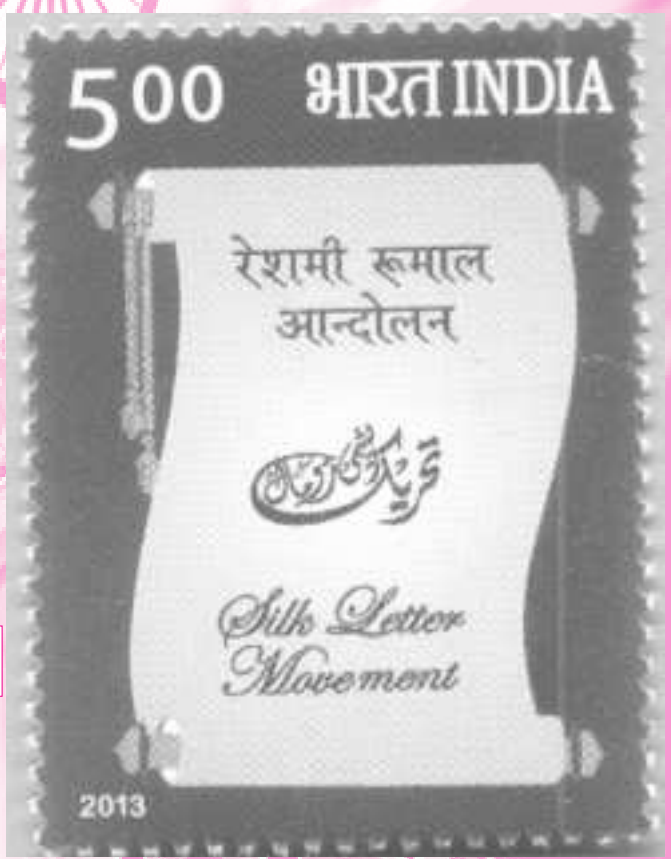
Tahreek-e Reshmi Rumaal

As a consequence of the disclosure of 'Silk Letter Conspiracy', as in the British record, or 'Tahreek-e Reshmi Rumaal' of 1916 against the British Empire, 222 pioneering Ulama from all over the country were arrested on this charge.



(Muqaam-e Mahmood 297-298)

Shaikhul Hind and his comrades Maulana Waheed Ahamad Faizabadi, Maulana Azeez Gul, Hakim Syed Nusrat Hussain and Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madni were arrested in Hijaz (Makkah) on 23 Safar, 1335 A.H. They were sent to Malta via Cairo by a ship on 29 Rabius Sani 1335 A.H. corresponding to



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21 February 1917 and clamped in prison for 3 years and 4 months. They were released and reached Bombay on June 8, 1920. However, Maulana Obaidullah Sindhi and Maulana Mohd. Mian Mansoor Ansari had to remain in exile for several years. (Abstract: Safar Nama-e Malta 118-127, Aseeran-e Malta 51 and Naqash-e Hayaat 2/135)\

Jamiat Ulama-e Hind

The Indian National Congress was formed in 1885, with a view to unite Hindu and Muslims to participate in the struggle for freedom. More than 300 Ulama issued a decree (Fatwa) favouring Hindu-Muslim union for freedom struggle which was repeatedly published in the newspaper called 'Nusratul-Abrar'. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad launched the weekly 'Al-Hilal', a herald of freedom struggle and campaigned for the same mission. The same Ulama, in March 1919, set up 'Jamiat Ulama-e Hind'. Mufti Kifayatullah was elected the first President. By the end of the First World War most of the freedom fighters in India eschewed the path of armed struggle. They preferred non-violence as a means to achieve freedom.

The Khilafat Conference, presided by Maulana Fazle Haq in Delhi resolved to boycott the 'Victory Celebration' of the British Government in Nov. 13, 1919. The resolution had the support of Seth Chutani and Mahatma Gandhi. Subsequently Mufti Kifayatullah issued a Fatwa, signed and endorsed by 20 Ulama, declaring participation in the victory celebration of the British government as impermissible for Muslims— as long as the settlement with the rulers of defeated Ottoman Empire was not in accordance with the Islamic law and the popular sentiments of the Muslims. (A historical View on Jamiat Ulama 59)

Non-Cooperation Movement

The first conference, December 28, 1919, of the new Jamiat was held at Amritsar under the presidentship of Maulana Abdul Bari of Firangi Mahal. The Conference expressed anxiety and protested over the non-release of Shaikhul Hind and Maulana Azad. (Jamiat Ulama Keya Hain 2/5-16)

At the Khilafat Conference in Allahabad, June 9, 1920 the decision to launch 'Non-cooperation Movement' was taken (Tahreek-e Khilafat 155-156). On July 19, 1920, Shaikhul Hind issued a statement supporting the non-cooperation movement. The movement was formally launched on August 31, 1920. (Aseeran-e Malta 53). Later, on October 29, 1920, a detailed edict was issued again and the Al-Jamiat, with signatures of 500 Ulama, published it (Jamiat Ulama Keya Hain 2/30). Armed with Fatwa, the leaders and volunteers of the 'Khilafat Committee' and the 'Indian National Congress' went into open agitation and started their struggle against imperialism. A special Conference of Jamiat Ulama-e Hind was held in Calcutta on September 6, 1920, presided by Maulana Taj Mahammad Sindhi. Maulana Azad moved the non-cooperation resolution in the conference and the same was passed. The resolution had declared that any kind of cooperation or association with the British Government was Haraam (Prohibited by the Shariah) (Jamait Ulama par Tarikhi Tabsara 58)

Movement to Boycott Foreign Goods

The British government on 8 August, 1921 declared the non-cooperation Fatwa of the Khilafat Committee as illegal. On 18 September, Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madni, Maulana Muhammad Ali Jawhar, Maulana Shawkat Ali, Maulana Nisar Ahmad Kanpuri, Peer Ghulam Mujaddid and Dr. Saifuddin Lachko were arrested on the charges of illegal publication and the distribution of the Fatwa. (Shaikhul Islam, A Political Analysis 99) In the third Jamiat conference in Lahore, 18-20 Nov. 1921, a resolution to 'Boycott Foreign Goods' was passed. On charges of inciting boycott, 30 thousand people were put into the prison— most of them Ulama and Muslim freedom fighters. On February 5, 1922 Mahatma Gandhi announced the end of boycott due to the 'Chauri Chaura' incident, where three freedom fighters were killed by the British troops and in retaliation the local public killed 23 British police personnel. Since the killing of the British police personnel was in violation of the non-violence policy of the freedom struggle, Mahatama Gandhi called off the non-cooperation and civil disobedience movement. (Tahreeke Khilafat 243-244)

Shudhi Karan Movement—Seed of Divide and Rule

The call to non-cooperation and civil disobedience was given jointly by Hindu as well as Muslim leaders. The unity of the two communities and the successful response to the call of civil disobedience received from the common masses once again proved an unexpected challenge to the British Government after the war of 1857. In order to break this unity, the British government started propagating 'Shudhi Karan', by their Hindu agents. The 'Shudhi Karan' tactics by the British through aided Hindu extremist groups resulted in a

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severe set back for Jamiat Ulama, Indian National Congress and the freedom movement. Since thousands of poor Muslims were lured to Hinduism in the name of Shudhi Karan, Jamiat Ulama couldn't cope with its real mission of freedom struggle. Jamiat took the challenge seriously and succeeded in calling back these poor Muslims to their original religion - Islam (What Jamiat Ulama Is?). But this already sowed seeds of differences and mistrust among some common Hindus and Muslims— the Britishers had their goal achieved which ultimately resulted in to partition of our great country and the bitterness is still prevalent.

The Demand for Total Freedom

The fourth conference of Jamiat, held in December 1922 under the presidentship of Maulana Habeebur Rahman Usmani, adopted a resolution to 'Boycott the Assemblies'. The fifth conference was held at Kakinada in January 1924. In his presidential address, Maulana Syed Hussain Ahmad Madni raised the demand for complete independence. (Muslim Ulama Ka Kirdaar 33). At the seventh conference of Jamiat in Calcutta, held on March 11-14, 1926, presided by of Maulana Syed Sulaiman Nadwi, a resolution for complete freedom of India was passed for the first time. (For resolution detail see, What Jamiat Ulama is? 2/119-121) In the eighth general meeting of Jamiat, held in Peshawar, December 2-5, 1926 under the presidency of Allamah Anwar Shah Kashmiri, a resolution to oppose 'Simon Commission' was passed by full strength. This very sentence of the resolution: "freedom is not given on platter, you got to snatch it", sums up the mood of those freedom fighters (What Jamiat Ulama is 2/145).

After Jamiat had passed the resolution against Simon Commission, the Indian National Congress realized its importance. In its 'Madras' convention, held on December 26, 1927, the Congress adopted a resolution demanding the British government to recall Simon Commission. Simon returned back to Britain unsuccessful in his mission on March 31, 1928 (Maulana Azad, A Political Dairy 213-214)

Difference between Congress and Jamiat

Jamiat was a key member in the 'All Party Conference', held at Lucknow in 1928. The conference criticized the 'Nehru Report' that sought autonomy under the British rule. The Congress policy of autonomy under the British rule was against Jamiat's policy of complete freedom. Consequently, Jamiat had to suspend its support to the Congress as long as it did not abandon the Motilal Nehru Report. In its Lahore Meeting, held on December 31, 1929, the Indian National Congress voted in favour of Jamiat demand for complete freedom of India, after 5 years.

In relation to Gandhiji's Dandi March, in 1929, several leaders of the Jamiat including Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Maulana Hifzur Rahman Seoharvi, Maulana Fakhruddin, Maulana Syed Mohammad Mian and Maulana Bashir Ahmad Bhatia were arrested. At the ninth conference at Amroha, held on May 3-5, 1930 under the presidency of Maulana Moinuddin Ajmeri, a fresh resolution was adopted for an alliance and full cooperation with the Congress. (Tahreek Azadi-e Hind Mey Muslim Ulama aur Awam Ka Kirdaar 99)

Civil Disobedience Movement

During the 'Civil Disobedience Movement' of 1930, the President of Jamiat, Mufti Kifayatullah, and the General Secretary Maulana Ahmad Saeed Dehlavi, were arrested. At the time of the 'Second Civil Disobedience Movement' in 1932, the Jamiat like the Congress appointed an organizational arbitrator.'Idara Harabia' (center for struggle) was set up for which the responsibility was entrusted to Maulana Abul Mahasin Sajjad. Mufti Kifayatullah Dehlavi was appointed the first arbitrator of Jamiat. He led the procession of more than 100,000 strong men on March 11, 1932 and courted arrest at Azad Park of Delhi. He remained in jail for 18 months. (Al-Jamiat: Special Issue Mufti-e Azam 44-45) The second arbitrator, Maulana Husain Ahmad Madni was arrested while on his way to Delhi from Deoband. Thereafter, one after the other arbitrators i.e. Maulana Ahmad Saeed Dehlavi, Maulana Hifzur Rahman Seohari, Maulana Syed Mohammad Mian Deobandi, Maulana Habeebur



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Rahman Ludhianvi and so on were arrested. Most of them were put in jail for 1 to 2 years. Approximately 90 thousand people were arrested, 44.5 thousand among them were Ulama and Muslims. (Karwan-e Ahrar 1/106)

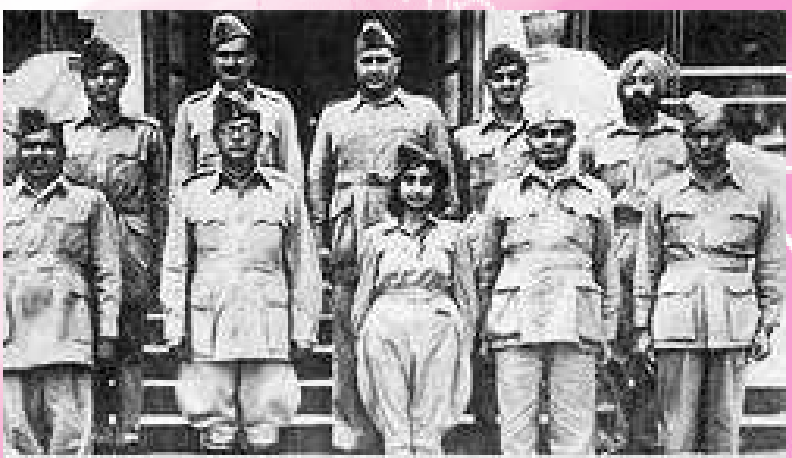
The Roots of Communalism

The freedom movement was gaining ground every day. A weakened British Empire, even though they had won the war against powerful Ottoman Empire and Germany, was not able to cope with the situation. In the face of resolute and nationwide agitation and civil disobedience of the freedom fighters, the imperialist ruler had no way out but to sow the seeds of communalism that would divide the two communities (Hindu & Muslim) whose activists together were standing like a rock against the British interest.

To implement the nefarious and infamous 'divide & rule' policy in 1935, the British government announced assembly election on the basis of proportional representation on religious basis. A Hindu was allowed to vote for a Hindu candidate and Muslim to a Muslim only. (Tahreek Azadi-e Hind Mey Muslim Ulama aur Awam Ka Kirdaar 100) It was, perhaps, this poisonous seed that later grew into strong tree-trunk and began producing bitter fruits in abundance. Hindu and Muslim freedom fighters who fought together for the liberation of this great country began suspicious of each other's motives. This not only resulted in the bloodshed, communal politics but also became the main cause for the partition of India.

Muslim League Avails Opportunity

Muslim League as a political entity came into existence in the year 1906. It, however, couldn't attract public attention before the India Act 1935 was announced – least to say of garnering public support and respectability in the Muslim eyes. Since the election was to be conducted on religion— communal basis, Jamiat leadership was not sure what role it should play in such a peculiar political situation. And for sure it didn't want to participate in this undesired election directly.



Subhash Chandra with Azad Hind Fauj

Jamiat decided to put the Muslim League as a front organization with its full backing. This was, to me, a historic blunder committed by the Jamiat because an organization of such a strong mass base seldom brings another organization in the front that could steal the show. Due to lack of proper vision of the future on the part of Jamait and the extremist posture adopted by some Muslim League and Congress members, the gulf between the two major political parties went on increasing. The situation turned from bad to worse because both were either ruling or in opposition in the provinces— under a two party (Hindu – Muslim) theory. The communal harmony and amity that existed between the two communities were shattered. Both the parties left no stone unturned to defame each other and ferociously used religion to attack political rivals. As a consequence the British agents provocateur had a field day. Certain religious discord or sentimental issues were intelligently coloured by the British to turn the schism into hatred which made an irreparable damage to the national unity and integrity of great India.

Gradually the two communities took sides of the political parties they had voted for. In such a charged political atmosphere Jamiat Ulama's call for communal amity, political unity and struggle for a total freedom fell on deaf years— it was already too late for Maulana Madni, Maulana Azad and Mahatma Gandhi. Having no way out, the Jamiat had to break the alliance with the Muslim League. Thereafter, the Jamiat decided against having any truck with the Muslim League. But the League had already achieved as much mass support as required to impress upon the British government that it was the true representative of the Muslim community. (History of Jamiat Ulama-e Hind 94) The British, on the other hand, were regaling over the fruits of their harvest, 'Divide and Rule Policy', that had stupendous success in dividing the two communities. The Congress and the League were like the proverbial saying:

"The fighting crows do not sense that its prey is being eaten by the smart fox."

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World War II & Ulama's Opposition to the Conscription

Jamiat Ulma-e Hind strongly opposed conscription during the World War II (1939-45). They declared complete non-cooperation in the British war effort. The book 'Ulama-e Hind ka Shandar Maazi', written by Maulana Mohammad Mian, was banned and the author arrested. The Jamiat Working Committee, on July 13-14, 1940, termed the ban and arrest as a tyrannous step. The leaders of Jamiat including Maulana Hifzur Rahman Seoharvi, Maulana Ahmad Ali Lahori, Maulana Mohd. Qasim Shahjahanpuri, Maulana Abul Wafa Shahjahanpuri, Maulana Shahid Mian Fakhri Allahabadi, Maulana Mohammad Ismail Sambhali, Maulana Syed Akhtarul Islam with others were arrested for their opposition to conscription and the British war effort.(History of Jamiat Ulama 103)

Quit India Movement

In a Jamiat conclave, held at Bachhraon, April 23-25, 1940, Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madni raised the question of India's total independence once again. As a consequence he was arrested on June 24 on his way to Punjab to participate in the 'unity conference'. He was sentenced to six months imprisonment.

The imprisonment term was about to finish that he was served another notice on January 4, 1943 under the Defense of India Rules and kept in Naini jail until August 22, 1944. Thereafter, he was released unconditionally. The Jamiat Working Committee on 5th August 1942, adopted a resolution calling upon the British to 'Quit India'. The signatory of the resolution were Mufti Kifayatullah, Maulana Ahmad Saeed, Maulana Hifzur Rahman and Maulana Abdul Haleem Siddiqui. It was after Jamiat that the Bombay Session of the Congress on August 9 passed the famous 'Quit India' resolution that led to the arrest and incarceration of the Congress and the Jamiat leaders.

Freedom or Partition of Great India

The partition of India was a partition that led to the creation on 14 August 1947 and 15 August 1947, respectively, of the sovereign states of Dominion of Pakistan (later Islamic Republic of Pakistan) and Union of India (later Republic of India) upon the granting of independence to British India from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In particular, it refers to the partition of the Bengal province of British India into the Pakistani state of East Bengal (later East Pakistan, now Bangladesh) and the Indian state of West Bengal, as well as the similar partition of the Punjab region of British India into the Punjab province of West Pakistan and the Indian state of Punjab. (Wikipedia web site)

Mr. A.G. Noorani rightly observes: The partition of India ranks, beyond a doubt, as one of the 10 greatest tragedies in human history. It was not inevitable. India's independence was inevitable; but preservation of its unity was a prize that, in our plural society, required high statesmanship. That was in short supply. A mix of other reasons deprived us of that prize - personal hubris, miscalculation, and narrowness of outlook.

While Mohammed Ali Jinnah and the Muslim League bear heavy responsibility - since they demanded and pressed for Pakistan - the Congress (Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Jawaharlal Nehru) cannot escape blame. Least of all the hypocritical Sangh Parivar.

Its chief mentor V.D. Savarkar formulated the two-nation theory in his essay Hindutva, published in 1923, 16 years before Jinnah came up with it. The Hindu Mahasabha leader Lala Lajpat Rai wrote in The Tribune of December 14, 1924: "Under my scheme the Muslims will have four Muslim States: (1) The Pathan Province or the North-West Frontier; (2) Western Punjab (3) Sindh and (4) Eastern Bengal. If there are compact Muslim communities in any other part of India, sufficiently large to form a province, they should be similarly constituted. But it should be distinctly understood that this is not a united India. It means a clear partition of India into a Muslim India and a non-Muslim India." This was 16 years before the League adopted the Pakistan Resolution in Lahore, on March 23, 1940 (Frontline: Dec. 22, 2001 - Jan. 04, 2002

Though Jamiat Ulama-e Hind resolutely opposed the idea of Pakistan, its leaders, especially Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madni and Maulana Azad were victims of Muslim League violence but by the year 1945 the League gained tremendous political ground in the Muslim masses against Congress. (Ulama-e Haque vol.2).After the Jamait had publicly alienated itself from the Muslim League and sided with Congress, Jamait itself got divided and the section that sided with Congress was severely harassed as Congress agents throughout India.

The Britain, thus, legitimately found a ground to deal with All India Muslim League as Muslim's representative body in support of Pakistan and on June 3, 1947 Lord Mountbatten announced the plan for partition of India. We were first partitioned on religion to India and Pakistan in the night between 14 and 15 August then freed and later on language when in 1971 East Pakistan became Bangladesh.

Will some of us ponder over those facts while celebrating our freedom!