INDIAN MUSLIMS IN THE INDEPENDENCE STRUGGLE

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Though late, the veracity of Indian history written by colonial historians and the nationalist- racist historians following colonial foot-steps, has been questioned by secularist and scientific historians. History of India has been often termed by Modern scholars like D.D.Kosambi as a heap of myths and class – color prejudices. The studies of modern scholars from D.D.Kosambi to Bipan Chandra rightly assert that Indian History does not often do justice to the historical facts. The combined efforts of the colonialists and communalists had buried the contribution of the minorities and *Dalit*s towards the independence of the country and India's Muslim population became the most neglected. Even Mr. R.C.Majumdar, who led the documentation of Indian history had often taken care not to bring to light the contribution of the Muslim rule in India and its manifold effects in the integration of the country and the subsequent involvement of Muslims in the Freedom struggle. The fact of being the first community to start the freedom struggle to oust the British has been shelved and even the Independent Indian governments followed the same attitude in writing Indian History.

Subhash Chandra Bose points out to this ultimate truth when he observed that the British propaganda brought a consciousness that spread clearly that Muslims are against independence movement. But the fact remains that there were a number of Muslims in the nationalist movement.[1] Santhimony Rai underlines the same fact while making a remark about First War of Independence- The traditional historians mention the names of Nana Saheb, Tantia Thopi, Rani Lakshmi Bhai of Jhansi and Kanvar Singh as courageous leaders. Surely, they cannot be forgotten. But the pity is that there are only a few who remember Moulavi Abulla Shah of Faizabad who played a pivotal role in organizing the mutiny against British rule in 1857. The revolutionary forces behind him inflicted heavy losses to the British. That was why an amount of Rs. 50,000 was declared as prize to the person who might capture Shah dead or alive.[2]

The Muslims were first to act against the British colonialism and started a popular movement for the purpose. There were reasons for this. The British established their rule by defeating the Mughuls. Naturally this developed anger among large sections of Muslims, but for Hindus it was just a change of rulers. The Hindus who found satisfaction under the Mogul empire expected the same from the British rule as well. Moreover, because of their natural attitude of accepting all cultures, hatred did not develop among them who had shared the Muslim administration by studying Persian had now to study English to continue their job. The British hegemony brought a heavy blow to the Muslims. They experienced backlashes in the economic, social and cultural spheres. The disappearance of the Mughul empire was unbearable to them since it was the symbol of their cultural status. Their positions in the administration were taken away and the favors hitherto availed by them being blocked and this was not at all pardonable. The British tried to appease the high caste Hindus reducing the influence of Muslims due to their enmity with Mughuls and Islam.

Muslim existence was questioned by Lord Cornwallis by bringing the permanent land tax and encroaching the wealth gifted to the religious institutions by the Mughuls for their maintenance. Muslims were the most distressed when the British replaced Persian with English as official language and reducing the status of *Shariath* laws hitherto followed by the Mughuls. Muslims had no place anywhere in the

British administrative system. When *Shari'at* courts were stopped, the Muslim scholars lost the only Government jobs they had enjoyed. When the *waqf* (endowment) properties were taken by the British government, many religious institutions had to be wound up. This also made the life of the religious leadership miserable. Moreover, when the British imported their own textile products on large scales, misery became manifold for the Muslims who were in the forefront of textile industry. Arrival of Christian missionaries worsened their plight. In 1813, the Company government entrusted the responsibility of the 'cultural development' of the people of India to the Christian Missionaries by enacting a law. Government supported the activities of the missionaries directly and indirectly. In 1853, Sir Herbert Edwards, the messenger of Governor General, even declared that God gave India to the British to Christianize it and they were duty bound to implement that great mission.[3]

These were main reasons for the increasing hatred of Muslims against the British. Hindus had no such problems in the beginning. The British began to interfere with the beliefs, rituals and economic monopoly of Hindus much later. The Hindu upper class leaders became restless when Lord Bentinck brought the prohibition of *Sati*, an obnoxious practice, the wife dying in the funeral pyre of her husband, Child marriage and some other reforms brought about by Lord Dalhousie. That was why in the 1857 the Hindu upper class extended their full support to restore Mughul rule in India. The lines from the letter written by the Governor General, Lord Ellenburough to the Duke of Wellington clarifies that the main enmity of the British was with the Muslims: We cannot keep a blind eye to the fact that Muslims are fundamentally inimical to us. Hence our real policy is to cooperate with Hindus.[4]

Mujahideen Movement

In the colonial times spiritual and political leadership of Muslims were in the hands of Sufis and *ulama*. They directed the Muslims in their spiritual as well as temporal life. After the defeat of the Mughuls when their cultural dominance was threatened, most Muslims consoled themselves leaving it to their fate. Religion was getting transformed in to an instrument of exploitation at the hands of some land lords and *Mullas* who supported them. The considerate and selfless scholars and Sufis strived to resurrect Islam from this worst fall. Shah Waliyullahi appeared as the reformer who awakened all classes of Muslims by starting a campaign to restore India from the internal and external enemies and thus restoring it to the Mughuls. After his death his eldest son Shah Abdul Aziz Dahlavi, rose to the position of the Leader of India (Imam al Hind). He started a movement against the British declaring India as a 'House of war'.(*Dhar al Hurb*) and *jihad* was made incumbent on every Musalman to fight away the British. For the Muslims who were already hot with fury against the British, the *fatwa* (edict) was a sanction for starting a 'Holy War'. From then onwards Sayyid Ahmad Barelvi who was consolidating Muslim forces against the Sikhs included the British also in the enemy list. The Movement came to be called as *Mujahideen* Movement. Though Sayyid Ahammed died during his movement against Sikhs, his followers turned completely against the British afterwards. The foremost among them were Vilayath Ali and Inayath Ali. Vilayat Ali exhorted the Musalmans to unite against the British. Those who cannot do so should run away from the country. Others may themselves declare that they are the slaves of emotions. This announcement resulted in the murder of many British people.[5] The revolutionaries assassinated Mr.Norman, the Chief Justice of Bengal and Lord Mayo, the Viceroy of India. In Bengal the *Faraisi* movement led by Moulavi Shariathulla and his son Dadu Miyan was a 'Holy War' against the British and the land lords. Such wars organized against the British – Landlord alliance had its root cause in the

agrarian discontent of the peasants. Nasir Ali (Tittumeer) who led the struggle in East Bengal targeted the landlords first. A number of landlords and British officials became the objects of attacks by Faraisis.

1857 Rebellion

In the 1857 struggle also Muslims played the main role. It was a combined surge made by the scholars and Sufis of India along with the Mughul ruler. The Hindu rulers and their subjects who had lost faith in the 'British justice' also joined them. Everybody worked hard for the restoration of the Mughul empire. The declaration made by Mughul Emperor Bahadur Shah in connection with the mutiny is significant here: The British are the enemies of both Hindus and Muslims. So I request through this printed declaration to all Hindus and Muslims to unite to protect religions by fighting the common enemy. Everyone is bound to protect religions and should take the responsibility of killing the British.[6]

The *fatwa* declarations by Moulavi Ahmadullah Shah and Delhi Muslim scholar Fazlul Haque Khairabadi led the Muslim *Sepoys* and the public in to the war. Ahamadulla reached Lucknow as a sufi teacher from the Deccan and became a fighter against the British. He organized a large army including Hindus and Muslims and defeated the British at many places. The British exerted all their might to capture Moulavi. At last they trapped Moulavi with the help of a local Hindu chieftain. He chopped the head of *Moulavi* and gifted it to the British Magistrate. He got Rs 50000 as prize. Sir James Outram said, "The mutiny was started by Mohammedans. Mohammedans were inciting the Hindu *Sepoys* to join the mutiny by holding the green flag aloft and telling them that the British had decided to Christianize India." [7] Sir John Laurence who was the Commissioner of Punjab also had recorded that it was Mohammedan soldiers and people who had fostered hostility against the British than the Hindus.[8] Moulana Fazlul Haque Khairabadi was foremost in spreading the message of *Jihad* among the *Sepoys*. The mutiny was inflamed by his f*atwa*. Many scholars met in Delhi under his leadership and gave a combined f*atwa* (*Fatwai Muttafiq*) to all Muslims to take weapons against the British. L.J.Trotter recorded that after this f*atwa* the rebels were just jumping against the guns and bayonets of the British shouting '*Deen, Deen, Bismailla'*. [9]

Moulana Imadulla, Abdul Jaleel, Liqayath Ali, Peer Ali and Ghulam Hussain were among those who gave leadership to the mutiny of 1857. Though the British suppressed mutiny with much difficulty it did not destroy the urge of Muslims for independence. At the same Sir Sayyed Ahmad Khan a loyalist Muslim, who later founded the Aligarh institutions came against the Congress, asking the Muslims to keep away from the Congress claiming that the was working against the interests of the community. It was not on account of loyalty to the British, as interpreted by some writers, Sir Sayyid came against the Congress, because at that time the Congress party has been a loyalist organization. Sir Sayyid, who differed with the policies of the Congress, believed that the Congress would not do any good to Muslims. Loyalty to the British and the reforms of religion advocated by Sir Sayyid did not, however, find acceptance with *ulama* and the Muslim population at large. Even the most reputed scholar Jamaludheen Afghani considered him as a naturist. While all Muslims tried to safeguard *Khilafat*, Sir Sayyid insisted that the Turkish Sultan is not a proper claimant to the *Khilafat*. As soon as Sir Sayyid's request to Muslims to keep away from Congress was circulated, Rasheed Ahamed Gangohi, the prominent traditional scholar of the Deoband school, promulgated a counter appeal asking Muslims to join the Congress. In addition another *fatwa* signed by 100 scholars including Gangohi, Mahmood Hasan and the scholars of other schools also came up with the *fatwa* that, it was not Islamic to join the Patriot Association, created by Sir Sayyid against the Congress. These pro Congress *fatwas* promulgated by scholars were due to the

hostility towards the religious ideas of Sir Sayyid and not due to any favour with the Congress Party. None of these early scholars joined Congress or appeared in any functions organized by it. The *ulama* did not form any preconception about the majority nationalism propounded by the Congress, either. However they couldn't accept certain programmes of the congress like their tirade against Urdu. The Muslim leadership failed to understand the merit in Sir Sayyid's political views because of the ardent support given by him to the British rule and his so called 'heretic' pronouncements on Islam. Through his loyalty he was trying to bring a rapprochement of the community with the British and hence emancipating them at par with Hindus.

Khilafat Movement

After the first war of independence the Muslim leadership which indulged in educational and cultural activities once again concentrated in the affairs of *khilafat* – Non cooperation movement which was the biggest mass movement for independence happened in the 20th Century. It was the time when Hindu – Muslim amity attained its peak. The *Khilafat* movement led by Ali brothers, Moulana Abdul Bari and Moulana Mahmood Hasan was changing itself in to a national upsurge after the arrival o*f* Ghandhiji. *Jam'iyyathul Ansar* organized by Mahmood Hasan along with his follower Ubaidulla Sindhi and *Anjuman Khuddam e Ka'ba* organized by Maulana Abdul Bari, Moulana Inayathulla, Dr.M.A.Ansari *and* Ali brothers were the first to come to the forefront of *Khilafat* movement. Moulana Sindhi took the main role in the formation of a national government for India in Afghan. In 1919, in order to strengthen the support of the *ulama* , Jam'iyyathul Ulema e Hind was formed by the combined effort of the *ulama* of Deoband and Firangi Mahal schools. The Jam'iyyat actively indulged in politics for strengthening the *Khilafat* and Non Cooperation Movements. It looked like the roots of British rule in India is going to be end and the national journals, particularly the urdu press vehemently attacked the British. *Zamindar* of Moulana Safar Ali Khan, *Hamdard* of Mohammedali and *Hilal* of Azad invigorated the struggle. The fire spitting lines from *Comrade*, the English paper published by Ali embarrassed the British.

In the beginning stage of *khilafat* Movement itself many Muslim scholars and leaders received jail terms. Many among them were exiled. Ali brothers were sent to jail. It was at the same time Ghandhiji and Congress brought the idea of Non Co-operation movement. Ghandhiji had just taken up the leadership of Congress. His aim was to seek the support of the *khilafat* leaders in the fight against British. Ghandhiji was attracted to Mohammed Ali for his fierce words against the British and becoming the passion of Muslim youths. Mahathmaji wrote to Ali who was in jail: My interest in getting you freed from jail is quite selfishness. We both have a common target. I wish to utilize your services to the maximum to attain that goal.[10] Ghandhiji met the spiritual leader of *khilafat*, Moulana Abdul Bari also. In the Congress working committee meeting Maulana Hasrat Mohani, proposed the name Non Co-operation (*Tark e Muwalat*) for the movement. He, with the consent of Gandhiji, promulgated a joint (*Muttafiq*) *fatwa* telling that the cooperation with British was forbidden (*Haram)*. Twenty scholars including Abdul Bari and Moulana Azad had signed this *fatwa*. Copies of this *fatwa* were distributed in the Muslim centers. Muslims were persuaded to participate in the Non Co-operation movement.

For the first time it was the *khilafat M*ovement which demanded complete independence for India. Gandhiji and Congress were of the opinion that dominion status was sufficient for India. Muslim leaders persuaded the congress leaders to accept complete autonomy as the objective of Congress since Congress and *khilafat* were working in cooperation. Moulana Hazrath Mohani introduced a resolution in

this regard at the Ahmadabad conference. Subhash Chandra Bose wrote: An interesting thing happened in the Ahmadabad conference. Moulana Hazrath Mohani of U.P introduced a resolution in order to make a clarification in the Congress constitution that its target is the establishment of a complete republic. His skill in oratory made positive response in the audience. The stage arrived for the smooth passage of the bill with a large majority. But Mahatmaji opposed the resolution. Hence the resolution was rejected.[11] The demand by Muslims towards complete autonomy made the high caste - religious fanatic lobby very anxious. The Hindu extremists resorted to cunningness and trickery. They spread falsehoods to alienate Gandhiji and Mohammadali. They obtained cooperation from the British also in this misadventure. Everybody like Malavya, Lajpathray, Aurobindo and Bipin Chandra turned against Gandhiji. Even Gandhiji failed to stop the thrust of the high caste lobby in the Congress. In 1928 in conformity with the interest of the Hindu Maha Sabha, the Hindu organization, Congress prepared the 'Nehru report'. This report not only discarded the complete autonomy demand but also abandoned all chances ensuring protection of minority rights. Even the amendment requested by Muhammedali Jinna for Muslims was also not allowed. With that almost all the Muslim leaders in Congress including Moulana Mohammed Ali left the party. Moulana Azad and some other leaders numbering below ten alone remained in the Congress as Muslim representatives.

Muhammed Ali told his Muslim brethren: Believe in human nature. Believe in yourself. Believe in God. Do not tolerate slavery for even a minute. That may make the body and soul bonded. If you show disagreement everything will be lost. Do not make any conditions for the future. Ask for autonomy without any conditions. Just demand that. Fight for freedom. Suffer anything for that. Die for that.[12] When the anti Muslim activities of the upper caste lobby became severe Muslim leaders like Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan, Prof. Sayyid Safrul Hasan and Hasan Qadiri demanded that Muslims needed an autonomous state. It was Allama Iqbal, the poet, who later brought up this demand to the deliberations of Muslim League. In 1940 the Lahore Conference of Muslim League put forward this demand through a resolution. The suggestion was to consider the Hindu majority provinces as Hindu state and the Muslim dominated areas as Muslim state. Choudhary Rahmath Al*i* who was a Cambridge student then named the Muslim state as 'Pakistan' and demanded that Pakistan should be a separate country. Majority Muslims stood behind Pakistan. The Muslims who pledged their lives for the total independence of India now longed for Pakistan, as a rescue simultaneously from British autocracy and Indian upper caste - fanatic aristocracy.

In the issue of Pakistan the *ulama* Conference could not reach a unified stand. A section from *Jam'iIyyathul Ulama e Hind* approved the Congress policies. That resulted in a vertical spilt in the organization. Leaders like Ashraf Ali Thanavi and Sayyid Sulaiman Nadvi did not show any concurrence with the Congress stand. Those who supported Pakistan formed *Jam'iIyyathul Ulama e Isalm* under the leadership of Maulana Shabeer Ahmad Usmani. Maulana Azad, an active memberos ulama and leader of the Congress, payed an active role in bringing the majority of the u*lama* in to the Congress camp. It cannot be said that the scholars who stood behind Congress neglected the Pakistan demand as was done by Congress. They had no disagreement with the formation of an Islamic state governed by the principles of *Shari'a,* but they had no hope for the formation of such a state under the Muslim League which was dominated by 'western styled' leaders. In 1940 Maulana Husain Ahmed Madani told his apprehension during the presidential speech at the Jaunpur Conference of *Jam'iyyatul Ulama*: Nowadays Pakistan movement is there in everybody's lips. It must be admired if at the Muslim dominated provinces, a government based on Islamic law and Prophet's model is to be introduced. No Muslim may obstruct that. Instead it is cowardice if some type of government is formed under the control of the British and called

the same as Islamic government. It is cheap also. It will give an opportunity to the British to divide and rule.[13]

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[1] Santimony Rai, *Freedom Movement and Indian Muslims,* New Delhi, 1983-87.
[2] Ibid,21
[3] Aziz Ahammed, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan*, London,1967,25
[4] W.C.Smith, *Modern Islam in India*, Lahore, 179
[5] Ram Gopal, *Indian Muslims, A political History*, 24
[6] Mahadi Husain, *Bahadur Sha II and the war of 1857*, p.13
[7] Kaye and Mallesan, *History of Indian Mutiny*, Vol. II, London,1888, p.27
[8] Ibid.p.355
[9] *History of the British Empire in India*, Vol. II, p.335
[10] Gandhi to Muhammed Ali, Nov. 1918, Gail Minault, *The Khilafath Movement*.P-68
[11] *The Indian Struggle* 1920 – 42, p.69
[12] Afzal Iqbal, *Writings and Speeches of Moulana Muhammed Ali*, pp.357 - 58
[13] Sayyid Muhammad Miyan, *Ulama e Haq*, Delhi, 1948, Viol. II, 113-114