India's Freedom Struggle: The Response of Muslim Students in Tamilnadu

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Abstract:

The student community acted as a shakers and movers of the society in many Asian countries, for instance KMM or Kesatuan Melayu Muda (Young Malay Union) in 1938 at Malaysia, Beijing University student's protests at China in 1919, Young Annan Party in 1920's at Vietnam and Dacca University Students agitation in1971 at Bangladesh were not only created awareness about freedom but also changed the face of the Political scenario and fate of the foreign yokes. In India the student's community has been responded and aroused their social and political consciousness during freedom struggle. Their services to the freedom struggle is memorable one but a meagre information's were recorded here and there in the historical records. There is no exclusive works were carved out from the historical accounts in the above said topic. This paper is an attempt to trace the role of Muslim students in India's freedom struggle.

Keywords: Muslim Students Federation, Muslim Students Association of Uttamapalayam, Vaniyambadi, Tiruchirappalli, Khilafat, Students Movements, Islamiah College, Muhammadan (Islamiah) Girls School, National School and College, Students Federation, India's Freedom Struggle, Khajamian Rowther, Yakub Hasan, Syed Murtuza, Abdul Majid Sharar, Mahadi Hussain, Madhakhan Saheb, Nagoor Meeran Samsudin Saheb, K.C. Muhamed Ismail, Mahboob Ali Baig, Rafiuddin Ahamed, Mahidi Ali, Amir Ali, Abdul Hayu Mahajir, Zyed Haneef, Mirza Backer Ali and Abdul Wahab, Ladies Khilafat Society,

Introduction:

The Partition of Bengal in 1905 stimulated the student's community to took part in large number in freedom movement. The youths were mainly behind the Indian National Congress at that time. Split in the Lahore Session of congress in 1907 reflected with the student's community also. They united under the leadership of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhiji and Muhamad Ali Jinnah. Students became a formidable force in India under the leadership of Gandhiji. The student's community took part in a large in number when Gandhiji announced campaign against Rowlatt Act in1919 and the agitation against

Jallianwalah Bagh Massacre in 1919, No Tax' Campaign in 1921, the Civil Disobedience Movement and Dandi Satyagraha of 1930 and also participated in popularising the 'Swadeshi' articles and the use of 'Khadi' Quit India movement in 1942 etc., As a part of Civil Disobedience movement Gandhiji announced the students to withdraw from British curriculum schools and colleges. The students from all over the country boycotted schools and colleges in large number. An organised student's movement mobilised against the British rule in this agitation. Lala Lajpat Rai presided the First All-India Students' Conference held in Nagpur in 1920. The native Students get the guidance of leaders like, Subash Chandra Bose etc., To participate in freedom struggle, the first organised All-India Students' Federation was started in India on 12 August, 1936 under the guidance of Nehru, with the banner Freedom Peace Progress, which was also known as 'Baby of the Congress', and later it was split into two groups in 1938 as All-Indian Youth Congress and All-India Students' Federation. All India Muslim Students Federation was formed on January, 1936. The Nationalist Muslim Students of Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan, North West Frontier Province, Central Provinces, Delhi, Madras, Orissa, United Province, Bangalore formed their own Muslim Students Federations to arouse the Political consciousness amongst the Muslims. A Red Crescent Hospital was set up by Madras Students Federation in 1946 to provide treatment, First Aid and also training for the people affected by disasters etc,. They organized mass processions and rallies in the major towns and cities in the country. A few section of the students involved in some violent actions to paralyse the British administration by cutting telephone wires, blocking transport routes, destroying public property, disturbing postal, police, banking and other services. Thereby they brought the government machinery to a standstill.

The clarion call of the national leaders like Annie Besant motivated the students of Tamil Nadu actively participated in the Indian National Movement[1]. Lord Pentland, the Governor of madras issued orders prohibiting the students from participating in the political movement[2]. Several students were imprisoned and met British officials' atrocities like inhuman torture, harassment and some of them were killed in police firings. For instance, K.C. Muhamed Ismail, the President of the Muslim Students Association of Uttamapalayam and the Vice-President of the Madurai District Congress Committee met with harsh punishment for raising anti-war slogans and inciting the people to rise against the British[3]. The British authorities labelled him as a rebel and imprisoned him in Alipuram Jail for several months[4].

Khilafat Movement and its impact on student community:

The Jallianwalla Bagh Tragedy on 13th April 1919, the arrest of Indian Leaders on 14th April 1919 and the proclamation of Martial Law on 15th April 1919 had created an aversion among the Hindus and Muslims against the British Government in India[5]. At the end of the First World War, the anti-Turkish attitude of the victorious entente powers became more and more apparent and the terms of the secret treaties they had entered into during the war for the purpose began to leak out[6]. The strategy of partitioning the Turkish Empire with the aim of weakening the Asian countries and strengthening Europeans hold on their colonies in Asia through the establishment of their supremacy in Suez Canal. This alarmed the peoples of India and they decided to prevent the danger and threat faced by Turkey. The humiliation of Turkey at the hands of Great Britain and the Allies triggered the augmented abhorrence of Tamilnadu Muslims towards British rule, burst out and appeared in the form of Khilafat Movement in November 1919[7].

It was associated with the non-co-operation Movement launched by Gandhi in 1920 and became one of the vital issues in the Indian National Movement. The appearance of Khilafat Movement was golden opportunity for Gandhi to made India's freedom struggle as a mass movement and the thirst for the freedom spread to the masses of India from elitists. To reduce the intensity of the participation of peoples in these Movements. The mighty alien British officers using their 'Divide and Rule' policy by saying to the Hindus that the Muslims would derive benefits from them through India and its riches and finally in due course they would rule and treat the Indians as slaves[8]. To aloof Hindus from the Muslims, the British teased the Muslims by saying that the struggle between the Crescent and the Cross, the Cross alone would emerge victorious at the end during the Khilafat Movement[9] was fruitless then. The students of Tamil Nadu took active part in these movement without any sectarian moods. Yacub Hassan's wife and another lady started a "Ladies Khilafat Society" similar movement was underway at Vaniyambadi in North Arcot district with the object of persuading mothers to take their children away from Government Schools[10].

Role of Muslim Students in Khilafat Day:

The authorities of the Muslim Educational Institutions also infused the Khilafat spirit openly among the Muslim students. The Muslim students with great zeal and earnest enthusiasm acted according to the decisions and directives of the All India Khilafat Committee. Their meticulous obedience added strength and vigour to the Khilafat Movement[11]. The Madras Presidency Khilafat Committee observed the Second Khilafat Day on 19 March 1920 in Madras, as per the directions of the Central Khilafat Committee [12].

Posters printed in Urdu, Tamil and English were displayed for the observation of the public. A public meeting was held in the Second Khilafat Day in the Marina Beach, opposite to the Presidency College by the Madras Presidency Khilafat Committee. A procession was held from Triplicane with the slogans of "Hindu Mussalman ki Jai" and "Turkey ki Jai" against British. Muslim students wore caps with the symbol of crescent and sold Crescent pin flags which were worn by both Hindus and Muslims[13].

Muslim Students' Khilafat Conference:

Muslim Students' Khilafat Conference was organised by the Law College Students like Mahboob Ali Baig and Rafiuddin Ahamed, etc., and the Arts College students like Mahidi Ali, Amir Ali, Abdul Hayu Mahajir, Zyed Haneef, Mirza Backer Ali and Abdul Wahab, were the principal organisers of the Muslim Students' Khilafat Conference. The permanent committee of nine students formed in this conference. The main objective of the committee was to spread the Khilafat Movement among the students population[14]. Muslim students of Tamilnadu organised Khilafat meeting in Madras on 13th March, 1920. The students mass was addressed by leaders like Yakub Hasan, Syed Murtuza Sahib of Thiruchirapalli, Abdul Majid Sharar, Mahadi Hussain, Kasthuriranga Iyengar and Rajagopalachari[15]. The Madras Muslim students conference was also held on 15 March 1920 in Lawley Hall, Madras and was presided over by Yakub Hasan Sahib[16]. Syed Muruthuza Sahib of Thiruchirapalli, Abdul Majid Sharar, Mahadi Hussain, Kasthuriranga Iyengar and Rajagopalachari were the leading personalities who participated in the conference[17].

Organised Agitation of Muslim Students in Khilafat:

The Muslims students from all over Tamilnadu formed and established a volunteer groups to assist in the propagation camp of promoting Khilafat Movement. Tiruchirappalli and Madras became the nerve centre for student’s participation in formation of such groups. A large number of Muslim students enrolled them voluntarily in the Khilafat Volunteer groups in all over Tamil Nadu.

Muslim Volunteer Corps was formed as a service unit for Khilafat propaganda during the Khilafat Movement in May 1919. Muslim students joined the Muslim Volunteer Corps in Madras Provincial conference held at Thiruchirapalli and also formed a Boy Scouts[18] in the annual conference of the Majlis-UI-Ulama of Tanjore[19]. The Muslim students' Khilafat Association was formed by Abdul Majid Sharar and Syed Murtuza in 1920 and was supported by Akbar Hussain and Yakub Hasan sait[20]. Rahamatulla Khan, follower of Abdul Majid Sharar and the school boys joined the Muslim Volunteer Corps in Madras[21]. The

success of the movement was due to the participation of the students greatly influenced the government[22].

Muslim Volunteer Corps established a Muslim Volunteer Club at the Jani Jan Khan Road, Triplicane in Madras in August, 1920[23]. The local Khilafat Committee maintained and financed the club and the corps[24]. To curb the activities of the volunteer corps and club, the British Government issued the orders on 2nd August, 1920 to all Muslim students of the college and the Madras-i-Azam, "either to leave the institution or to break their connection with the Muslim Volunteer Corps". Abdul Majid Sharar, editor of *Quami Report* advised the students not to leave the college[25]. Gandhiji addressed the student gathering in a meeting at Purasawakkam arranged by students in 22nd August, 1920. Shaukat Ali, a trustee of Aligarh College and Secretary of the Aligarh Old Boys Association addressed that "if the end and aim of their education is to seek government service, death is preferable to such an education(British Curriculum) in the students meeting[26]. The Muslim leaders were keen to keep the students in the Khilafat Movement.

Response of Muslim Students' Community at Tiruchirappalli:

Yakub Hasan, Abdul Majid Sharar, Syed Murtuza, Kaja Mian Rowther, Rajagopalachari and other Khilafat workers requested the students to leave the college. The students of Tiruchirappalli fully participated in the Khilafat Movement. Hajee Usman Sait and Ghulam Mohammed went to St. Joseph's College and made an appeal to the students to join the new National School and College[27] in Tiruchirappalli, where education would be imparted to them in their mother tongue on September, 1920[28]. The Muslim youths infused enthusiasm among the students by providing with uniforms and badges during Khilafat Movement[29]. Khajamian Rowther and Syed Murtuza from Tiruchirapalli led the Non-cooperation and Khilafat Movement in Tiruchirapalli along with the students. The student leaders Amir Ali, Abdul Hai Mohajir and Syed Mohideen[30] along with fellow students in front of St. Joseph's College Mosque boycotted the schools and colleges in favour of the Khilafat Movement on 22nd October, 1920[31]. It had its impact on the students and they voluntarily boycotted the college in support of the movement[32]. A 1000 members procession along with Muslim volunteers, students and sympathisers of Civil Disobedience carried the national flags sang patriotic songs and went on procession in Tiruchirapalli on 7 September 1930. The tricolour flags were hoisted in all over Tiruchirapalli town[33].

Response of Muslim Students' Community at Vaniyambadi:

The Muslim students of Vaniyambadi in North Arcot District took part in the Khilafat Movement. Under the guidance of Abdul Majid Sharar, majority of the Islamiah School

Trustees and its executive members requested the Secretary of the school to remove the government restriction on the school. Students threatened the management to quit the school if the government control was not removed[34]. The students of the Islamiah College[35] and the Muhammadan (Islamiah) Girls School[36] at Vaniyambadi boycotted in response to the call of the committee[37]. Further, the local Muslims of Vaniyambadi threatened that their subscription to the school were withdrawn unless the Government aid was refused[38]. The boycott of the educational institutions was quite successful for the pupils absented themselves in large numbers. The number of pupils had fallen from 393 to 179 at the Islamiah College at Vaniyambadi in 1921[39]. The Khilafat student leaders made more efforts to boycott their educational institutions. The hartals**,** public meetings, fastings, secret meetings and the participation of the students, both Hindus and Muslims, made the Khilafat Movement a grand success.

Non-Cooperation Movement and its impact on Muslim Students' Community:

Boycott of law courts by lawyers, the boycott of school and colleges by students, boycott of elections to assembly, the surrender of the honours and titles, and the boycott of British goods were the important programmes put forth by the Non-Co-operation Movement. In Tamil Nadu, the Hindu and Muslim Magistrates, councillors, Union panchayat members, Tahsildar etc., resigned their posts in favour of the resolution[40]. Madhakhan Saheb and Nagoor Meeran Samsudin Saheb from Vaniyambadi resigned their government jobs[41]. Non-Co-operation Movement spread like wild fire to other Muslim educational institutions from the Aligarh College [42]. Attempts were made to induce the students of the Mohammadan College at Madras to follow the lead of Aligarh. Similar movement was on rooted at Vaniyambadi in the North Arcot district[43]. The parents and the students indulged in various programmes of boycott and resulted with the 75 percent of college students were boycotted[44]. Parents also joined with their children (students), and made the movement a great success. In the North Arcot district the Muslim participation in Non-Cooperation Movement was significant. Speeches of Muslim leaders Maulvi Mohammed Yousuff of South Arcot district and Abdul Rasheed Sahib of North Arcot district attracted the attention of the Muslims[45]. The arrest of the national leaders including Gandhiji on 9 August was resented in the Presidency. Both Hindus and Muslims were keen to participate in the mass Civil Disobedience Movement to dislodge the British government. There were clashes between the students and the police in Chennai. The students were lathi charged at several places. Students, all over the Presidency, decided to continue their agitation[46].

Quit India Movement and its impact on Muslims Students' Community:

Muslim participation in the Movement was considerable in the district of Madurai. Besides Mohamed Maulana Sahib, T.S. Abdul Rahim, S.V.M. Syed Sahib were arrested for participating in the Movement. Gulam Mohuiuddeen, a student of American College, Madurai, mobilized other students and participated in the Quit India Movement and all of them were arrested[47]. Abdul Sattar Sahib of Dindigul, active participant in the Congress socialist students' organization, was sentenced to nine months imprisonment for his anti-war[48] propaganda. He mobilized the students to distribute pamphlets prejudicial to the government for the arrest of the Congress leaders in August 1942. He urged the students to picket the courts. He was under the secret surveillance by British government suspected to be a secret activist and imprisoned several times during the mass Civil Disobedience Movement[49].

This resulted in continued absenteeism in most of the educational institutions in the presidency. The Government issued a strict order against absenteeism as "those who had abstained from classes could be removed from the educational institutions" was also fruitless for British Government[50]. however, the students began to react against the orders and continued boycotting their classes. The participation of Muslim students was high and a number of students either got imprisoned or punished by the British officials during the days of Quit India Movement. *The Report on the Administration of Madras Presidency 1920-21* mentioned about the decrease in the strength of the Mohammedan pupils during the year. The total number of Mohammedan pupils were decreased by 4420[51]. The solid efforts of the peoples from all stratum of the society to break the feathers of the foreign yoke, that finally won for India's independence in the year 1947.

Conclusion:

The reaction of the Muslim students further inspired the Muslims and the Hindu leaders, several meetings were organised in Tamilnadu to protest against the British. The Tamil Daily *Desabhaktan*, explained about the students participation dated on 21st April 1920 in its Madras issue, the then system of education provided by British framed with the aim of formed the foundation on which the structure of British Empire was raised. If that structure was demolished, the foundation would be blown in to pieces could be done only, when the students boycott schools and colleges[52]. The formation of youth organisations and initiatives taken by the Khilafat Movement marked an important stage in the involvement of students in freedom movement[53]. The student members between 18 and 25 years of age[54] were enrolled in the Muslim students organisations. The significant share and the service of the Muslim students in Indian Freedom Movement from every part of the country is worthy of a study,

which bogged down in the welter of ideas and opinions in this current scenario. So, the emerging scholars should hasten the progress of digging the factual reports about the history which lurks at the bottom of its crater is need of the hour.

Summary:

The Muslim student's community in Tamil Nadu participated in almost all the movements like Khilafat Movement, Swadeshi Movement, Home Rule Movement, Nagpur Flag Agitation, Anti-Simon Demonstration, Civil Disobedience Movement, Salt Satyagraha, Anti-Two Nation Theory and Quit India Movement etc., in India's freedom struggle till the achievement of Independence in 1947. Particularly Gandhian phase in our freedom struggle was fuelled and energised by the arrival of Khilafat Movement and the active participation of Muslims. Contribution of Muslims, especially the student's community of Muslims were neglected in the historical writings and their names are slowly diminishing from the eyes of the historians. Their contribution is inalienable from the history of freedom struggle in Tamil Nadu. The purport of this paper is an attempt to initiate effort to dig out the real facts about the Muslim Students community in the history of India's freedom struggle.

Foot Notes:

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[4] G.O.No.1291, Home Department, 14 March 1941.
[5] *Public Department, G.O. No. 430*, 3rd July 1920
[6] *H.F.M. No. 81/22*, 14th February, 1920
[7] *Swadesamitran*, 3rd January 1920.
[8] G. O's relating to *Non-cooperation and Khilafat Movements*, 1920-22, p.35
[9] G. O's relating to *Non-cooperation and Khilafat Movements*, 1920-22, p.43
[10] Fortnightly Report, 02.11.1920.
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[13] *Letter from the Commissioner of Police*, Madras to the Personal Assistant to the D.I.G. of Police, Railway and C.I.D., Madras, Report No.632/I.D., 26 March 1920
[14] HFM. FileNo.81, p.158
[15] G.O.No.57, *Public (Secret) Department*, 15 March 1920
[16] *The Hindu*, 11 March 1920.
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[25] *The History of the Khilafat Movement in the Madras Presidency* - Extracts from secret files, Bundle No.22(A), pp.221-222

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[27] National School and Colleges were established by the Hindus and Muslims jointly to impart education through regional languages.
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