MUSLIM FREEDOM FIGHTERS

Contribution of Indian Muslims to the Independence Movement

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The title of this book is so obvious that the reader can guess its contents even before opening it. It is a collection of short biographical sketches of just forty prominent statesmen from amongst hundreds of them who had a leading role in the almost a century long (nine decades, to be exact from 1857 to 1947) war of independence. In fact, these biographical sketches cover only the part of their lives devoted to, even sacrificed for the cause of independence which is enjoyed today by those who don't have an iota of knowledge about it.

As the author of the book Syed Ubaidur Rahman proceeds with the introduction he virtually narrates all that unfolds in the following pages. But before that he mentions the compulsive realizations which made him take so much pains to sift mountains of literature about the freedom struggle. And that compulsive realization was the ignorance of the generations that have come up since the independence about the sacrifices made by Indian Muslims for that great national cause. The lies and falsehood spread and propagated by sham historians and narrators blurred the sight and vision of their own people. It is in fact a sinful disservice to the people whom they claim to serve and educate. The darkness of the falsehood prompted the author to at least lit a lamp of truth and rightness. He has done this through the description of actual facts with references from the lives of some of the leading freedom fighters.

The effort is praiseworthy, one may wish that many more such lamps will be lit from the flame of this singular lamp. As one proceeds through the pages he will find that the actual role of Indian Muslims was so different from what is being tried to show today by the gods of falsehood who call the beacons of light as the clouds of darkness.

گر نہ بیند بروز شب پرہ چشم

چشمۂ آفتاب را چہ گناہ

If the bat cannot see during the day

what is the fault of the bright sun.

Syed Ubaidur Rahman rightly begins the book with the description of Shaikhul Hind Maulana Mahmud Al Hassan (1851 – 1920) who had devoted his life for the cause of India's freedom, suffered immeasurably and immediately after his release from captivity in Malta he founded Indian Government in exile in Kabul, Afghanistan. It was his firm belief in secularism that he made Raja Mahendra Pratap as the President of that government, Maulana Barkatullah Bhopali was made the Prime Minister and he himself settled in Makka as the Ameer. He formed that Indian government in exile before other Indian leaders could have thought of even limited freedom or provincial autonomy far from the Quit India Movement.

Maulana Barkatullah Bhopali (1854 – 1927) travelled to many countries seeking their support for the Indian Government in exile. He went to the United States, Russia, France, Egypt, Germany, Turkey, Japan, Malaya, Hejaz and many other countries. He spent about 45 years in self assumed a sort of political exile and world tottering.

Hakim Ajmal Khan (1868 – 1927) led The Indian National Conference and the Khilafat Movement. In fact, the Khilafat Movement was a unifying force of the freedom movement and brought Indian Muslims closer to the Indian National Congress. Personalities like Hakim Ajmal Khan, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari played an important role in unifying the freedom struggle and bringing Hindus and Muslims closer.

Maulana Obaidullah Sindhi (1872 – 1944) was an Islamic scholar but still he always opposed the establishment of a Muslim religions government. On the contrary he supported Mahatma Gandhi and his Non- Cooperation Movement.

Professor Abdul Bari (1892 – 1947) was strictly against the divisive agenda of everyone from Hindu Maha Sabha to the Muslim League. He paid the price for opposing them. He was assassinated. He lived very simple life like a poor man. Mahatma Gandhi was aghast to see the condition of his house when he went there after his assassination.

There is a long chain of Muslim freedom fighters and the vein of secularism passes through the whole chain from the top leaders to those at the lowest rung of the ladder. There are glaring examples such as Asaf Ali who fought the case of Shaheed Bhagat Singh. Ashfaqullah Khan's last wish was only to be hanged on the same day as Durga Prasad Bismil would be, a humble person like Batak Mian, a cook of a British planter in Calcutta saved the lives of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Rajendra Prasad by throwing away the glass of poisoned milk intended to be served to them before their press conference.

While this short comment cannot showcase all that is compressed in the book under review much more remains beyond it. The role of Muslim journalists in the freedom struggle is not less important who were imprisoned and got their papers, printing press and other properties confiscated because of their writings against the British Raj. Maulana Mohammad Ali Jauhar (1878 – 1931) and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1888 – 1958) have been included in the book but there are many others, for example Molvi Mohammad Baqar, editor of Delhi Urdu Akhbar who invited capital punishment for his anti-British writings; there is no other such example in the whole history of Indian journalism. Then there were professionals who gave up their professions and joined the independence movement like Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed Ansari and many Muslim students who gave up their study and put their whole future at stake. This stellar list is long.

Apart from the individuals mentioned in this book, and many more whose names history failed to record, there have been Muslim organizations who worked for the great national and humanitarian cause without any discrimination of community or cast. Jamiat-ul-Ulama is one such glaring example. Its members individually and collectively fought for the freedom of the country. The organization was strongly against the partition of the country as it saw in that a British conspiracy to divide the people of India on communal lines and thus breakdown their united force.

Jamiat-ul-Ulama strongly supported the non-cooperation movement launched by the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Similarly the Congress had supported the Khilafat movement launched by the Jamiat to protest against British machination to abolish Khilafat in Turkey. The non-parochial approach of the Jamiat on other national issues continues to this day.

Many books have been written on these subjects in Urdu but the need of the hour is to write in English and various regional languages to reach to the masses. Syed Ubaidur Rahman has shown the way by writing his book in English and at the same time its translations in Urdu.

نوا را تلخ تر می زن چوں ذوقِ نغمہ کم یابی

Strike a stronger note if you see no liking for the melody.

The book is available from Global Media Publications, E- 42, Abul Fazal Enclave, Jamia Nagar New Delhi 110025. Tel: +91-9818327757