

Muslims & Indian Freedom Struggle: - Reality and Correct Viewpoint

This article will serve as a clarification of the noble aims in the struggle of Muslims especially Ulemas (scholars) against the occupation of British.

For the past 77 years, especially on every August and January months, Indians have been actively expressing their patriotism. In the same context, Muslims are in a situation forced to prove their patriotism in order to ensure their existence in this country. As a response, some political and historical comments are being made to prove the contribution of Muslims toward freedom struggle by the current generation of Muslims.

Few examples,

1. Muslims in general and scholars in particular were the first to face the struggle against the British
2. The contribution of Muslims towards Non-Cooperation Movement; Quit India Movement is innumerable
3. Muslims were among the first, foremost and strongest "National Freedom Fighters"
4. The contribution and work done by Muslims in framing the Secular Democratic Constitution can never be side-lined.

To confine the 200 years struggle of Muslims against the British to the mere cause of National independence and to create a secular democratic Indian state indicates the lackness in understanding of the true history.

In 1787, Tipu Sultan sent an ambassador to the Ottoman Caliph Sultan Abdul Hamid I seeking urgent help against the British East India Company. Tipu Sultan also sought permission from the caliph (khaleefah) to contribute to the maintenance of mosques and tombs in Mecca, Medina, Najaf and Karbala. In 1802, Shah Abdul Aziz Dehlawi (Rh) declared the territory of India under British rule as Dar-al-Harb and declared that fighting against the British government is an obligation upon the Muslims and considered it as Jihad.

In 1831, Syed Ahmad and his followers made their base in towns of Hund and Zaida in Swabi District. Syed Ahmad called upon the local Pashtun and Hazarewal tribes to wage jihad, and demanded that they renounce their tribal customs and adopt the Sharia'. The traditional khans were replaced by Islamic scholars and Islamic tax systems was established to finance the jihad. Soon after this campaign and the establishment of the Sharia system, jihad was declared. He sent a message to Ranjit Singh, demanding: "Either become Muslim, pay Jizya or fight".

In 1857, about 33 ulema in Delhi especially Maulana Nanudavi; Maulana Rasheed Ahmed Gangohi participated and issued a fatwa for Jihad against the British. The above mentioned events represent that the objective of Muslims was to revive the nation with Islamic notions not with the democratic nationalistic notions.

At the beginning of the twentieth century (20th Century), while the British invasion was bringing the Islamic land largely under colonial rule, in 1907 Tehreekah Reshmi Rumal (Silk Letter Movement) was started by the well renowned and prominent scholars (Maulana Mahmud Al Hasan; Maulana Ubaidullah Sindi) and many letters were written to the governors of the then Ottoman Caliphate (Uthmani Khilafah) asking for military assistance.

The purpose of this Tehreek led by the Ulama was with a noble intention that causing a setback to British in the Indian subcontinent would weaken the position of colonialists in other Islamic territories. Later these Ulama were imprisoned in Malta jail.

1920, Muhammad Ali and his brother Maulana Shaukat Ali and other Muslim leaders like Bir Ghulam Mujadid Sarhandi, Sheikh Shaukat Ali Siddiqui, Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari, Raees-ul-Muhajireen Barrister John Muhammad Junejo, Hazrat Mohani, Syed Ata Ullah joined together to form the All India Khilafat Committee. Other Muslim leaders like Mohammad Farooq Chishti, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Dr. Hakeem Ajmal Khan were also joined this movement. They worked with the aim of building political unity among Muslims and to secure the weakening Khilafah.

A brief examination of the contributions of the above-mentioned scholars shows that their Al-wala (Loyalty) is for the sake of Islam and Khilafah. And their Al-Bara (disavowal) was on the side of nationalist and secular thoughts. However, by the effort of Britain and France, the Ottoman Caliphate was destroyed in the year 1924. After 1924, the Muslims world went into a new reality where there is no Khilafah. In this environment, there is a change in the fighting stance of the Muslims in Indian Subcontinent.

After the abolition of the Caliphate in Turkey (1924 CE), the Khilafat Movement was diffused owing to the dominance of a Muslim Nationalist movement under the guise of the Muslim League led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah. This movement came to the foreground, thus replacing the Khilafat Movement in the struggle against the British. The subtle difference between the two movements must be noted. The Muslim League was based on a kind of Religious Nationalism (Cultural Nationalism) whereas the Khilafat Movement was ideological in nature. The Religious Nationalism that led to the formation of Pakistan did not last long and within few decades caused a split in 1971 (Formation of Bangladesh) in the name of Language Nationalism (Cultural Nationalism). On the contrary, though India was declared a Secular country in 1947, the effects of Hindu Nationalism can be seen right from its formation.

In this reality of the People in India, it is sad that Muslims in India including scholars, in their madrasas are celebrating the so-called independence and republic day and falsely portraying the history of our pious predecessors as they fought and struggle for the Indian Nationalistic Independence.

The words of one of the pioneers of the Khilafat movements tells us the real cause of their struggle was not Indian Independence rather it is to remove the occupation from an Islamic land and to protect the Khilafah. **Maulana Abul Kalam Azad** was one of the speakers of Khilafah conference who published a book in 1920 called **Masla-e-Khilafat** (The Issue of Khilafah), he stated: **“Without the Khilafah the existence of Islam is not possible, the Muslims of Hind with all their effort and power need to work for this”**. **Maulana Mohammad Ali Johar** also stated: **“The ruler of Turkey was the Khaleefah or successor of the Prophet and Amir-u-Mu’mineen or chief of the believers and the Khilafah is as essentially our religious concern as the Quran or the Sunnah of the Prophet.”** [My Life a Fragment, Mohammed Ali Johar, pg.41].

Hence, it is must for every Muslims to know the true history so that we preserve our identity and also to present the people in India the meaning of true liberation and present them how Islam as an alternative ideology solved people’s problems in the past and will do in the future In sha Allah. Even after the destruction of the Khilafah, the people of Hind continued their struggle to reestablish the Khilafah, so in the 1940’s Maulana Abul Ala Maududi stood up with a call to re-establish the Islamic State.

Thus, Muslims in India must give up the inferior feeling emanating out of ‘the minority tag’ assigned to them after the so-called Indian independence of 1947. Under this tag, Muslims have come to live in an inferiority complex and an unnecessary fear psychosis. They must give up this inferior feeling of being tagged as minority and they must proudly define their identity as Muslims alone and realize their position as leaders of humankind – leaders who lead towards the path lit by the Light from the Creator of humankind and all that exists. They should never forget that the greatest contribution that even today’s India stands for was from the Muslims who ruled this land by Islam for over 10 centuries and implemented the just system of Islam over its population.

﴿الرَّ كِتَابَ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ لِتُخْرِجَ النَّاسَ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ﴾

“Alif, Lām, Rā.1 [This is] a Book which We have revealed to you, [O Muḥammad], that you might bring mankind out of darkneses into the light by permission of their Lord - to the path of the Exalted in Might, the Praiseworthy” [TMQ: Surah Ibrahim, 14:1]

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