The Role of Deobandi Ulema in Strengthening the Foundations of Indian Freedom Movement (1857-1924)

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Abstract

The main objective of the present study is to explain the role of the Deobandi faction of scholars in Indian Freedom Movement. In fact, there had been different schools of thought who supported the Movement and their works and achievements cannot be forgotten. Historically, Ulema played a key role in the politics of subcontinent and the contribution of Dar ul Uloom Deoband, Mazahir-ul-Uloom (Saharanpur), Madrassa Qasim-ul-Uloom (Muradabad), famous madaris of Deobandi faction is a settled fact. Their role became both effective and emphatic with the passage of time when they sided with the All India Muslim League. Their role and services in this historic episode is the focus of the study in hand.

Keywords: Deoband, Aligarh Movement, Khilafat, Muslim League, Congress

Ulama in Politics: Retrospect:

Besides performing their religious obligations, the religious ulama also took part in the War of Freedom 1857, similar to the other Indians, and it was only due to their active participation that the movement became in line and determined. These ulama used the pen and sword to fight against the British and it is also a fact that ordinary causes of 1857 War were blazed by these ulama. Mian Muhammad Shafi writes:

Who says that the fire lit by Sayyid Ahmad was extinguished or it had cooled down? These were the people who encouraged Muslims and the Hindus to fight against the British in 1857. The fire beneath the ashes was flamed by them which in turn spread across the subcontinent. All this caused mutiny but with the consistent call for safeguarding and supporting the deen¹.

Ulema played an active role in the War of Independence just only to support Islam and save the state.² Agha Shorash Kashmiri writes that, in 1857 when Delhi was destroyed, Muslims lost their pride and glory and there were no safe corners for them in the whole Hindustan and the people who suffered the most were the Scholars. They were dragged into the courts and even hanged.³ Although Hindus were also there in the War of Independence yet the British considered only the Muslims responsible for it and started hostility against them. All the Muslims and particularly scholars faced this situation with great courage. They sacrificed their “today” to save Muslims’ “tomorrow”. They heard their hanging orders with bliss and great will power.⁴ The British tried to ruin the Muslims but in spite of all this, they were so fearful that according to Sir William Muir (1819-1905):

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Muslims are considered lifeless and powerless; it might be so but most of the hunters acknowledge the threat of an injured lion, in spite of its weakness and bitter situation, its last leap is so dangerous, killing and destructive.

The British have remained fearful from Islam in the past to the extent that once, British Prime Minister Glade Stone, while addressing to a gathering, held the Holy Quran in his hands pointed out that this world could never be civilized and peaceful until this book was in this world. According to the editors of “News Week” and “Time” magazines, the print media tycoon in the West are of the view that the very first institute which taught and spread terrorism and extremism was “Madrassa” equally aided by “Masjid”. Resultantly Muslims became the victim of their brutality and hatred. Religious teaching institutes were either destroyed or forced to be vanished with the imposing of certain sanctions.

In these circumstances, although Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan had been working for educational and political uplifting of the Muslim yet the Muslim Scholars of the time like Maulana Zulfiqar Ali, Maulana Fazal-ur-Rahman, Muhammad Yaqub Nanotavi (1833-1886), Qasim Nanotavi (1833-1880), Sayyid Haji Muhammad Abid and Maulana Rafi-ud-din were also supporting the cause. These peers of Deoband laid the foundation of Madrassa Deoband on 30th May 1866. After a short span of time Madrassa Mazahir-ul-Uloom was established in Saharanpur and Madrassa Qasim-ul-Uloom in Murabad. But the popularity and glory gained by Madrassa Deoband had no match with the others. Maulana Qasim Nanotavi was a broad minded Scholar. He laid same stress on the acquisition of Knowledge of Quran and Sunnah viz a viz science and industry.

**Ulama in Educational and Political Movements:**

At the end of 19th century, Muslims had two main sources of inspiration - Aligarh and Deoband. A moderate group of ulema established a new Madrassa Nadwa tul Uloom in Deoband in 1893 having some differences of opinion with the mainstream scholars. But above all deprivation from independence made all of them sensible towards political awakening and banishment of slavery. Due to this political, semi political and social movements started working under local impressions. Keeping in view this restless and uneasy situation, the British Viceroy of India Lord Dufferin (1884-1888) brought forth the idea of establishing of Indian National Congress in 1885. This step created a clear rift among the scholarly ranks of India and a large number of ulema were not opposing the participation of Muslims in Congress, but Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan forbade them to do so.

However, the ulama of Deoband adopted a separate line from both Congress and Sir Syed and consequently Deoband became the central point for religious guidance, knowledge and exertion leading to Deoband edu-political movement. The first political party “Samru-tarbiat” was founded by Maulana Mahmood Hassan (1851-1920) in 1879 and he was the first student of Deoband. In this way ulama led all revolutionary parties to provide a base aiming the attainment of freedom from the British. In addition to religious scholars, these was a large group of common Muslims who was not only unwilling to join Congress but also not to depend wholly on ulama. Obstinate attitude of Hindu, anti-Muslim policies of
Congress and reemergence of Urdu Hindi Controversy of 1900 played a vital role to give political insight to the Muslims. According to Sayyid Raza Ali, “The seed sown by MacDonnell on April 18, 1900 had a root deep in the soil in six years and in 1906 it appeared as a plant in Dhaka”. Resultantly, a political party All India Muslim League” was established on 30th December 1906 as a result of an endless struggle of Nawab Saleem Ullah Khan, Nawab Viqar-ul-Mulk (1841-1917), Nawab Muhsin ul Mulk (1837-1907), Maulana Zafar Ali Khan (1873-1956) and Hakeem Ajmal Khan (1868-1927) etc. The establishment of this party could not gain any importance from the government or the press but it made the partition of India inevitable in the long run. With the passage of time Muslim League became the vice of thousands of Muslims of India. Maulana Mehmoord Hassan invited Muslim leaders like Hakim Ajmal Khan, Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari (1880-1936), Maulana Muhammad Ali Johar (1878-1831) and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958) to join the mission of “Samrat-tu-tarbiat”. They accepted this invitation. On the other hand; Maulana Shaukat Ali (1873-1939), Maulana Hasrat Mohani (1875-1951) and Maulana Shibli Nomani (1857-1914) also started taking active interest in politics. In this way ulema of Deoband and Nadwa joined the politics practically and preliminary effort was done to unite the great universities for the betterment of the Muslim nation. For this the hidden work of Samrat-tu-tarbiat came to height in the form of Jamiat-ul-Ansar in October 1909 and Maulana Obaidullah Sindhi was made its Secretary. In 1910, there was a gathering in Dar ul Uloom Deoband with a proposal that students from Dar ul Uloom Deoband would go Aligarh to study English and from Aligarh students would join Deoband for Arabic and Islamic studies. The main purpose behind this proposal was on one hand provision of Islamic and worldly education and on the other hand, to strengthen the relation of love and tolerance between Deoband and Aligarh with coordination among the students. The suggestion was very good but the result appeared very bitter. Maulana Mehmod Hassan was working to awake the people of India and to make the country free from British slavery from the platform of Jamiat-ul-Ansar with its success British government was shocked. But at that time the situation had gone more uneasy. Italy attached Tripoli in 1911, on one hand and on other hand Balkan States invaded Turkey in 1912, to throw it out of Europe, having a signal from England and other European countries. The students from Dar-ul-Uloom Deoband and Aligarh worked day and night to help the Turks. For the protection, safety and dignity of Holy Places Makkah, Medina and Bait-ul-Muqaddas Anjman Khuddam-e-Ka’ba was established in 1913. Maulana Abdul Bari was its first President and Maulana Shaukat Ali the Secretary. In the same year 1913, a Mosque was demolished in Kanpur. There was a great protest from the Muslims. Tripoli War, Balkan War, European conspiracy against Turkey and the incident of Kanpur played very improved role to give religions and political wisdom to the People of India. Maulana Obaidullah Sindhi was directed by Maulana Mahmood Hassan to shift to Delhi due to some problems. In Delhi Obaidullah Sindhi laid the foundation of Nazarat-ul-Ma’arif Al-Qur’ania in 1913. In Delhi, Obaidullah Sindhi had information of the politics of Muslims of India due to his meetings with Dr. Ansari, Maulana Abu-ul-Kalam Azad and Maulana Muhammad Ali Johar.
The Germans were defeated in First World War and plans were made to divide the territories under Ottoman Empire. The Muslims were in a state of sorrow. Sheikh Qidwai said that if the Muslims know that Islamic moon will face eclipse in Europe with British victory, they had never fought at front in World War I and expulsion of Khilafat from Europe will be a great cruelty.\textsuperscript{43}

British government took no effect from this written or verbal protest so the people of India felt the importance of an organization to get their voice heard at higher level. Although Muslim League was working for institutional rights of Muslims yet its main objectives were political. It had assured the England government, its loyalty. In December 1918, there was an ordinary meeting of Muslim League in Delhi under the presidency of Fazal Haq. Ulema from different schools of thought like Mufti Kifayatullah, Maulvi Abdul Latif Dehlvi, Maulana Abdul Bari Farangi Mahali, Maulana Munir Zaman, Maulana Abdul Majid Badayuni, Sana Ullah Amritsari, Maulana Azad Sub’hani and Maulana Ibrahim Sialkoti joined it. Making reply to different speeches, Maulana Kifayatullah Dehlvi said that in Islam, religion and politics are not two different things. It is just a thinking of educated class to handover religion to Ulema and chooses the politics for themselves. Ulema were never away from the people and it will not be so even now \textsuperscript{44}. So Muslims with revolutionary mind set wished for a party to protest their rights without political reservations. As a result on 20\textsuperscript{th} March 1919 in Bombay, Khilafat Committee was formed in the presidency of Saith Jan Muhammad Chhotani. In India Khilafat Committee’s meeting of 5\textsuperscript{th} July 1919, Saith Jan Muhammad Chhotani and Maulana Shaukat Ali \textsuperscript{45} were elected President and the General Secretary simultaneously.\textsuperscript{46} This election, however, proved benefitting for the Khilafat Movement.

**Ulama and the Sway of Khilafat Movement:**
Khilafat Movement was the first movement of India in which Hindu and Muslim participated actively against the British. They cooperated with each other and the British government was shackled. According to Gandhi such event of Hindu Muslim unity may not be there in hundred years.\textsuperscript{47} The first meeting of Khilafat Conference held on November 22, 1919 at Delhi and the agenda was to make British government and the allies remember their promises. A reasonable strength of Hindu and Muslim thinkers participated in this meeting \textsuperscript{48}. At the end of this meeting twenty five Muslim Ulema gathered again \textsuperscript{49}. They formulated another group named “Jamiat Ulema Hind”. Maulana Kifayat Ullah was selected President and Maulana Ahmad Saeed Dehlvi the Secretary.\textsuperscript{50} The main purpose of Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind was to unite Scholars and experts with a duty to analyse political and international incidents in the light of Islam principles and to formulate guiding bacons for the Muslim of south Asia \textsuperscript{51}. It was the very first phase of Indian history that Hindu Muslim unity reached its climax, although it was for a short span of time. Mahatma Gandhi favoured the Muslim opinion that Turks were right and they should be given their rights \textsuperscript{52} and the Muslim prayed for this alliance in Temples with Hindu. They accepted Vedas as Heavenly Book, participated in the worship of Ramayana and had colored marks on the forehead. Gandhi, Sharthanand\textsuperscript{53} and other Hindu leaders made
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speeches even in Jamia Masjid Delhi. The slaughtering of cow was checked to please Hindus. According to Gandhi protection of cow was compulsory and he intended to make law about this on acquiring power. In this regard Maulana Abdul Bari Frangi Mahali went to such extent that it declared it sacred for Muslim. He asked the Muslim not to slaughter cow to avoid hurting the Hindu but grew that it is actable according to Quran.

Treaty of Sevres (10th August 1920) added insult to injury and all the rights of Muslim community were ignored and denied which added fuel to the Non-cooperation Movement. A non-ending chain of protest started and many Hindu and Muslim were arrested. In September, 1921, when these people were arrested, Khilafat Movement had reached its climax but on 4th February 1922 Gandhi announced the end of Non-cooperation Movement on the base of “Chaura Chauri” incident. With this Khilafat Movement was affected too much because both the movements were considered supporting each other. In 1924, Ataturk Mustafa Kemal (1881-1938) announced democracy in the country and the abolishment of Khilafat Institution.

Ulema were always there in the gatherings of Khilafat Committee, Congress and Tehrik Tark-e-Muwalat. They struggled at the forefront for the independence of India but they were unaware of Gandhi’s designs that he used Khilafat Movement for his personal motives. The Hindus were exposed with the end of the Khilafat in Turkey. Anti-Muslim movements started under the leadership of biased Hindu Lala Japat Rai-Sharthanad and Madan Mohan Malovita. On 25th July 1926, Hindu Maha Sabha leader said in his presidential address, “the main aim of Hindu Maha Sabha is to unite all the Hindus and promote the Hindu religion in such a way that Hindustan could be called Hindustan in real sense of the word- state of Hindus.” Maulana Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali were disappointed due to poor attitude of the Hindu. Confronting the Hindu organizations Muslims made two parties named as Tanzim and Tabligh under the leadership of Dr. Saif-ud-Din Kichlu and Ghulam Muhammad Bheek. The purpose was to protect Islam and to check Hindu preaching activities.

Deobandi Ulema, Khilafat Movement and Ideological Foundations of the Freedom Movement:

As a matter of fact, different movements by Muslims were the result of an emotional attachment. All the suggestions made during Khilafat Movement were driven by Gandhi mindset and the Muslims followed these blindly. Gandhi planted a seed of turbulence in the whole country and the Muslim became prey to his malicious interests. so most of the ulema and thinkers including Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi, Peer Mehr Ali Shah, Allama Muhammad Iqbal and Muhammad Ali Jinnah were against this unity. Ishthaq Hussain Qureshi is of the view that the Migration Movement (1920)—an offshoot of Khilafat Movement had no capacity to produce any productive result and the sincere and passionate people joined it and faced serious problems.

Maulana Thanvi had no difference of opinion with the objectives of Khilafat Movement about the protection of Muslim Ummah and sacred places. The
only difference he had was its mode of functioning. Maulana Thanvi believed in this unity only if the central command was in the hands of Muslims. Likewise; Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani actively participated in these movements but he considered it an un-Islamic unity. Ishitiaq Hussain Qureshi writes about his determined attitude, “he had participated in the Khilafat Movement, but he was opposed to extravagant acts against the teaching of Islam in demonstration of unity with the Hindus”. Sarwat Saulat, a biographer of Maulana Uthmani has given details about the support provided by Maulana Uthmani during Khilafat Movement. According to her, Maulana played a pivotal role in the movement. The British exiled Maulana Mehmood Hassan to Malta. In his absence Maulana Uthmani toured every corner of the country and gave new life to the movement. But he opposed Congress’ idea of a combined government. He was of the view that the Muslim can have agreement and cooperation with any nation but they cannot merge their identity.

Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah supported the Khilafat Movement but opposed the programme and the line of action. He said that main purpose behind Khilafat Movement and Tarke-Muwalat was nothing else than political supremacy of Gandhi. At that time Quaid-e-Azam was the only leader who opposed Gandhi. He believed that Gandhi’s actions will take us towards destruction.

Dr. Allama Muhammad Iqbal wanted the scholars to organize Muslims instead of supporting Congress. He said the Scholars helping Congress are misled and if the nation went with them, the result will be destruction. Allama Iqbal and Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi both have the same point of view that unconditional joining in Congress will be harmful for Islam and the Muslims.

However, the role of ulama in strengthening the ideology of Pakistan deviated from its speed in 1924. After the failure of Khilafat Movement, Muslims divided into two groups. One (Madni Group) was convinced to have unity with Hindus. But the other (Thanvi Group) being disappointed from Hindus attitude slipped away and later on played a significant role in Pakistan Movement. This group kept fighting for the creation of new homeland for the Muslims by remaining in their own cloaks under the guidance of Allama Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani and his companions. They struggled hard to defend the rights of common man and awoke the Muslims of subcontinent from their deep slumber of ignorance.

Conclusion:

After reviewing the episode of history discussed above, one comes to the conclusion that religious scholars, especially those from Deobandi school of thought rendered great services during the Khilafat Movement and supported all such other movements unconditionally thus providing a strong base to the Indian freedom movement. Thus their efforts were admired as the ‘forerunner to the Indian independence’. Convinced by the fact that they continue to enjoy the status of the leaders having strong opinion in our society with ever-rising number of their followers, their role can be utilized for the country's socio-economic development other than just spreading and teaching Islam. Apart from the role of politicians of the sub-continent in the struggle of freedom for Muslims of India, the contribution of
writers, theologians, journalists, students, women and mainly the Ulema and masha’ikh is worth remembering. They all channeled their energies and sources in the making of the Muslim nation and the idea of what is called two-nation theory.

Notes and References:
5. Sayyed Toufail Ahmad Mangloori (1945), *Musilmanoo ka Roshan Mustaqbil*, Delhi: Kutab Khana Azizia, p.27
10. There are great institutions in Egypt and Baghdad, among them “Jamia-al-Azhar, Jamia-Nizamia and University of Cordova (Spain) are more famous. But these Universities were run by their respective governments; while all the expenditures of Madaris were recovered by the support of donors. Sayyid Mulana Muhammad Mian (1986), *Ulema Hind ka Shandar Madhi*, Part 5th-6th, Karachi: Maktab Rashidia, p. 4
12. The British were not encouraged education for people. Because when they established institutions in America and they lost it. This is why they said that, one who learned education he may go to England. See, Sayyid Tufail Ahmed Mangloori, *Musalanman Ka Roshon Mustaqbel*, Lahore: Hamad-ul-Kutbi, p.164.
21. Chudhary Muhammad Ali (1938), The Emergence of Pakistan, Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan University of the Punjab, pp.81-104.
22. K.K. Aziz (1963), Britain and Muslim India, London: Heinemann, p. 64.
25. Dr. Ali Arshad (2005), Allama Shabbir Ahmad Usmani Ka Tehrik Pakistan Mien Kirdar, Lahore: Pakistan Study Centre Punjab University, P.32.
30. Real name of Moulana Abdul Bari (1878-1926) was Kayam-ud-Din Bin Abdul Wahab.
34. Zaiul Hassan Farooqi, The Deoband School and the demand for Pakistan, pp.58-60.
Rab Nawaz of Multan arrested Abdul Haq with the handkerchiefs and got his reward from the British government. For details see, Wali Mazhar Advocate (1983), Azeem Qaid, Azeem Tehreek, Multan: Sho’aba Nashr-o-Esha’et Muslim League, p.121.

40. See, Sayyid Maulana Muhammad Mian, Ulema-i-Hind Ka Shandar Madhi, Part 5th 6th, p.150.

41. For details see, Moulana Sayyed Hussain Ahmad Madni, Safar Nama Aseer Malta, Lahore: Tayyab Publications, p.36.

42. H.B. Khan, Barey-e-Sagheer Pak-o-Hind ki Sayasat mein Ulema Ka Kirdar, p.139.

43. Moulana Abdul Bari Farangi Mahal was the “Peer” of Moulana Shokat Ali and Moulana Muhammad Ali and head of “Madrisa Nizamia Uloom-i-Islamia”. He awarded the honorary degree of Moulana to Ali brothers. This is why Mr. Shoukat Ali and Mr. Muhammad Ali being called with the title of Moulana among the people. For details see, H.B. Khan, Barey-e-Sagheer Pak-o-Hind ki Sayasat mein Ulema Ka Kirdar, p.146.


45. Uma, Kaura (1977), Muslims and Indian Nationalism: the Emergence of the Demand for India (1928-40), Delhi: Manohar, p. 22.

46. Sayyed Toufail Ahmad Manglori, Musalmanu Ka Roshan Mustaqbal, p. 526.


51. Sawami Sharda Nanda was a sectarian Hindu Leader who later on (1922) started Shuddhi Movement to turn the Muslims into Hinduism

52. Sayyid Toufail Ahmad Mangloori, Musalman Ka Roshan Mustaqbal, p. 394

53. Muhammad Ameen Zubairi (1941), Siyasat-i-Milla, Agra: Azizi Press, p. 161


57. It was included in “Civil Disobedience Movement” to boycott the support to administrative councils, boycott of courts, schools, colleges, which were given government posts and titles given by the government. See, Sayyid

59. An aggressive group of peoples fired a police station at Chora Chori in which 21 Constable was burnt. Prof. Ahmed Saeed, Hasool-i-Pakistan, p. 127.

60. Sayyed Hassan Raiz wrote that, Mr. Talak said in the presence of Maulana Hasret Mohani that Mr. Ghandi will leave the Muslims in the midway of Khilafat Movement and it took place. See, Sayyad Hassan Raiz, Pakistan Naguzir Tha, p. 145.

61. On the End of Khilafat Movement, Moulana Muhammad Ali Johar said with Sorrows in his speech at Aligarh Masjid that “Turks used him as a tissue paper”. For details see, Maym Kamal O. K, Tehrik-i-Khilafat, pp. 203-204


63. The real name of Sawami Shardha Nanda was Munshi Ram who lived in Jalandhar; A Muslim Qazi Abdur Rashid killed him on 23 December 1962, due to his attacks on the Muslim Leaders and his wrong statements about the Holy Prophet (PBUH). Daily, Jung, 9 August 1973.

64. Wali Mazher, Advocate, Azeem Quaid-Azeem Tehreik, p. 73.

65. Muhammad Amin Zubairi, Siyasat-i-Millia, p.211

66. Once Moulana Thanvi said, “That if that Hindu (Ghandi) was well wisher of the Muslims as some fool people think, Muhammad Ali is near saw his decision, how he separated himself”. See, Prof. Saeed Ahmed, Maulana Ashref Ali Thanvi AWR Tehreek-e-Azadi, p. 70


73. Ibid. pp.42-43

74. Ibid. p.47

75. See, I.H. Qureshi (1972), Ulema in Politics, Karachi: IBS, Ma,‘aref Ltd, p. 359.

76. Sarwat Saulat (1972), Tareekh-i-Pakistan Key Bary Log, Lahore: Islami Publications, p. 212

