

Ulema and the Freedom Struggle for Pakistan



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Abstract

In the freedom struggle in British India, Ulama had played a significant role. Ranging from the socio-cultural guidance of the Muslims to leading them politically, they played their role actively in every sphere of life. Starting their active political role in British India in 1803, Ulama continued their struggle till 1947. Darul Uloom-i-Deoband, apparently a religious seminary, was built for the revitalization of Muslim society in India. The Ulama were the pioneers, who initiated the very idea of freedom from the imperial power. The tenderness, dynamism, and catholicity which was created in this movement, in fact, was due to the unending and countless struggle of the Ulama. It is an undeniable fact that the independence movement and the history of the Indo-Pak subcontinent are so mixed-up with the history of Ulama and religious personalities that it is now difficult to separate one from another.

Key Words: Ulama, Freedom Struggle, Darul Uloom-i-Deoband, Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, Jamaat-i-Islami

Introduction

The history of involvement of religion in politics in Pakistan can be traced back to the struggle for a separate homeland for the Muslims of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. Even before the concept and demand of a separate homeland for the Muslims, religion and religious clergy had an influential position in the politics of united India. The Ulama were actively involved in almost all the national movements for the independence of India against the British Empire.

The role of Ulama in the political front in British India started from the renowned verdict (*fatwa* or religious decree) of Shah Abdul Aziz of Delhi in 1803, which acknowledged and declared India an 'abode of war' (*Darul Harb*). In the views of Barbara Metcalf, that fatwa had far-reaching implications and consequences for the Muslims in general and Ulama in particular. The fatwa declared that "if the state cannot provide and establish a judicial system to administer Muslim law, it becomes the duty of the Ulama to come forward and fill the gap. It is for sure, without the state authority, the Ulama cannot compel people to abide by the law they interpret to them, but they at-least direct them on the issues of civil behavior, trade, family relations and inheritance etc. Thus the Ulama can become the custodian and center of an ideology that can give meaning and strive the lives of the faithful Muslims in India, a *Darul Harb* (Barbara, 1982, pp. 51-52).

Research Question

This study primarily focuses on the Ulama's role in the freedom movement of Indo-Pakistan. It investigates the question of "what role the Ulama and religious scholars played in the freedom struggle against the Imperial British in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent"?

Methodology

The nature of the study is qualitative within the domain of socio-political research. It primarily analysis the published materials and text-based scholarly works of different Pakistani and international scholars. It tries

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to evaluate critically the role of Ulama and religious scholars, their political organizations and struggle in the movement for Pakistan.

Ulama After the War Of Independence 1857

The events of 1857 and its consequences made and forced the religious clergy to think for some alternative measures for the survival of Indian Muslims in British India. The failure of "mutiny uprisings" made it clear that the Indian Muslims could not defeat the British army in active war. Therefore, the resistance had to be of some different kind. To institutionalize the alternative measures, the Ulama decided to educate the Muslims with the revealed knowledge instead of rational sciences. A Madrassa at Deoband was founded by Maulana Nanawtvi and Maulana Ganguhi in 1866 with the greater aims and objectives of the revitalization of Muslim society in India (Faroqi, 1963, p. 27).

In the words of Mehmood-ul- Hassan the aims of the Madrassa were not limited only to teach and educate people but it was built to perform some sacred duty. "Did Maulana (Nanawtvi) build this Madrassa just to learn and teach? Obviously not; the Madrassa was established before my eyes and I know that it was established to prepare the Muslims of India to recover the losses of 1857 (Gillani, 1373h, pp. , vol:2nd, 226).

Goyal (2004) is of the opinion that "it were the Ulama who warned the people regarding the threat to India's cultural life, autonomy and political power from the imperial British, who came in the hunt for trade amenities and through exploitation of differences among the chieftains and local rulers become the masters of the country. It was the Ulama who realized the grave consequences of the British occupation of India (Goyal, 2004, p. 58).

Regarding the role of Ulama in the freedom struggle and politics in United India, the official website of Darul-Uloom Deoband claims that "the Ulama associated to Deoband, with determination and trust in Allah, were not only actively involved in the struggle and movement for Indian independence, rather they for quite some time lead the movement. They were indeed the first and the initiators who introduced the very idea of freedom. The tenderness, vitality, and catholicity which were produced in this movement should be credited to them. Most of these Ulama and other people associated with them, hoisted the banner of revolt against the British government, fought with the imperial army and spent precious part of their lives in jails. The fact is that the history of the independence movement of India is so mixed up with the history of Ulama and religious personalities that it is now difficult to separate one from another (Darul Uloom-i-Deoband, 2016).

Bacha Khan (Abdul Ghaffar Khan), a freedom fighter from North-West of India (presently Pakistan), during his visit to Darul Uloom-i-Deoband in 1967, addressed a gathering and said that it was Darul Uloom and the people associated to it were concerned with the freedom struggle more than other activists. "I have relations with the Darul Uloom since the time of Mehmood Hassan. We used to sit here and make plans for the freedom of the motherland. The efforts of this institution are countless for the independence and freedom of India (Darul Uloom-i-Deoband, 2016).

However, until 1919 the Ulama could not start an organized and formal type of political struggle. Though in many issues they supported the (political) stance of Indian National Congress (INC), founded in 1885 by an English civil servant for the protection and civil rights of Indians and promotion of better understanding and cooperation with the British administration, yet the Deobandi Ulama were neither debarred nor compelled to join INC. The inclination of some Ulama and Muslims towards the INC was based on the *Fatwa* of Maulana Ganguhi in which he directed and allowed the Muslims to cooperate with the Hindus in all those matters which are not against their religion and Islamic culture. In his opinion, all such relations are *Mubaah* (Miyani, 2008, p. 92).

A question may arise here that if cooperation with Hindus was *Mubaah* then why didn't any prominent Deobandi *Alim* join INC? It may have two reasons. First, the Ulama were ready for limited cooperation with Hindus but not with the British. In their opinion, the Hindus in INC are striving for strengthening British

rule in India. Under the very objectives of INC, it was sensed that they did not want confrontation with the British authorities. It also seemed that they (INC) were ready to work under the British Empire if they were granted certain rights. The Ulama were not ready for any sort of cooperation with the British. They were not satisfied with any sorts of rights less than the full freedom of India (Miyan, 2008, p. 96).

Secondly, the Ulama of Deoband until the failure of the "Silk handkerchief movement" in 1916 believed that the British cannot be ousted from India by peaceful means. A revolution is necessary for recapturing the governmental power (Miyan, Aseeran-i-Malta, 1967, p. 31).

Foundation of Jamiat Ulama-I-Hind

Till 1916, the Deobandi Ulama did not believe in peaceful or political means for the freedom of India. Revolution was the only solution for the Indian problems for them, and not the political involvement and political struggle. Therefore, they could not join or form any political party as others did.

In the wake of the *Khilafat* movement, the Ulama realized the importance of political groups. In November 1919 the foundation of Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind was laid. Maulana Abdul Bari presided the first meeting and the following objectives were put forth.

1. To guide and assist the Indian Muslims in their political and non-political affairs, and issues with respect to religious point of view.
2. To protect Islam, the center of Islam (Hijaz), Islamic customs, practices and way of life against all odds.
3. To struggle for the complete freedom and independence of India.
4. To struggle for the protection and achievement of national rights of the Muslims in India.
5. To protect and promote the rights of other communities in the country.
6. To unite and organize the Ulama on a common platform.
7. To promote and establish good and brotherly relations with the other non-Muslim indigenous communities in India.
8. To establish religious courts (*Mahkima-i-Shariah*) to meet the religious needs of the Muslim community within India.
9. To propagate Islam by means of missionary activities in India and other countries of the World (Robinson, 2014, p. 92).

However, with the emergence of Ulama in the political front, they were now confronted with other political and religious group especially the Muslim League.

The *Khilafat* Movement proved to be a critical juncture for the introduction of religion in politics in Indo-Pakistan (Yaqoob, 2003). Gaining the support of Hindus and Indian National Congress for the institution of *Khilafat* in Turkey, though for a brief period of time, was an excellent example of the consensual political nature and culture of the Ulama and Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind (Madani, n.d, pp. 8-11). However, the two prominent leaders of the Muslim League i.e. Muhammad Iqbal and Muhammad Ali Jinnah could not be agreed to join the *Khilafat* Movement. Along with their opinion and fear of the violent fundamentalist and pan-Islamic nature of the movement both the leaders were deeply impressed and inspired by Mustafa Kamal Attaturk's leadership qualities and his reforms (Cohen, 2005, p. 26).

The leadership of JUH was of the opinion that complete freedom from the British is a sacred cause and neither the Hindus nor the Muslims can get it from them while struggling individually. For the achievement of this sacred cause, all communities within the Indian subcontinent must unite irrespective of their religions and beliefs and overthrow the British government. Thus in the words of Hussain Madani, it is the Islamic duty and obligation of every Muslim in India under these circumstances. In his opinion, the concept of Muslim nationalism and two-nations in India are the British 'divide and rule policy'.

For any such unity, we are not needed and required to amalgamate our religious identities, no man of faith and belief would endure it. Hindus as Hindus and Muslims as Muslims should come together and strive for the liberation of the country. All people should follow the advice of the leaders. It should at the same time be born in mind that the enemy and its lackey would try to break this unity by raising religious-related problems and disrupt this unity. They should not be listened to and we should proceed with utmost care and perseverance (Goyal, 2004, pp. 107-108).

The concept of composite nationalism of JUH bears great importance and weight in the history of Indo-Pakistan. Opposite to this i.e. Muslims in India is a separate nation later on become the reason and cause for the Indian division. The concept of separate nationality of Muslims was advocated by the Muslim League, some Deobandi scholars (who later on founded their own faction of Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam) and Maulana Maududi.

In Madani's opinion nation was not essentially constituted by bonds and ties of faith, belief and religion. Rather, the term nation denotes the concept where the people of different ethnic and religious communities live together. A nation did not necessarily need similarity in religion and faith. In his opinion, the state of Madina, which the Prophet (PBUH) himself founded was termed as one nation by Him, although it was not exclusively constituted by Muslims. Jews and Christians were also part of the same nation. However, *Millat* is having a different concept and meaning. It exclusively denotes a religion, religious law and faith-based path to be followed by the followers. And also that the concept of *Millat* is universal and with the abolition of *Khilafat* the Indian Muslims while striving for freedom from the British are to become one nation with the other religious entities and communities within India (Zaman, 2004, p. 33). Accepting the Muslims in India a separate nation would mean that they are also separate and different from the Muslims around the world. The Muslims in India would no more be considered as a constituting part of *Millat-e-Islamia* (Zaman, 2004, p. 40).

On the other hand, the Muslim League which was using the rhetoric of religious nationalism and mobilizing the Muslim masses for the division of British India severely criticized the Madani and JUH concept of composite nationalism. In response to it, a philosopher-poet and a Muslim League leader Dr. Iqbal declared that it is the religion that provides the sole and base for Muslim nation-hood. "According to the Quran, it is the religion of Islam alone which sustains a nation and its true cultural or political sense. It is for this reason that the Quran openly declares that any system other than that of Islam must be deprecated and rejected" (Sherwani, 1977, pp. 251-263).

Similarly, Maulana Madani's stance was criticized by Ashraf Ali Thanvi and some of his close associates. In their opinion, the only way to preserve the Islamic identity and Islamic culture in India is a separate state for the Muslims. Thanvi supported Muslim League for the struggle for a separate Muslim India. The close associates of Thanvi including his nephew Maulana Zafar Ahmad Usmani later in 1945 founded their own faction of the association of Deobandi Ulama i.e. Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam. In Maulana Thanvi's opinion, the dominance of non-Muslims in the Indian National Congress was a severe threat to the Muslim identity and culture preservation in India (Usmani, n.d., pp. 60-62).

In a similar way, Maulana Zafar Ahmad Usmani also debated the Madani concept of composite nationalism. The argument of Usmani was that the concept of composite or united nationalism for Indian Muslims would be acceptable according to Shariah and teachings of the divine book if they constitute the majority. If the law they believe and follow and the culture they practice define the law and the culture of the land, they are living in; there is no detriment in the composite nationalism and nationhood then. However, unified nationhood where Muslims are in minority would certainly result in the destruction of their Islamic way of life (Zaman, 2004, pp. 42-47).

Among others, Maulana Maududi was very much comprehensive in response to Maulana Madani and the INC concept of nationalism. In two of his masterworks, Maududi argued that nationalism is a concept of the West just as secularism. In his opinion, European colonialism and secular nationalism were the two faces of the same coin.

Maulana Maududi and Indian Nationalism

Maulana Maududi, unlike his contemporary (Deobandi) Ulama, did not accept the Indian National Congress' idea of Indian Nationalism. He discarded the notion of composite nationalism and nationhood and holds an opinion that Islam believes in Pan-Islamism. According to Maulana Maududi, the civilizational ascendancy of the liberal and secular west and the self-made and self-perceived national ideals of the Indian National Congress are mere deceptions for the Indian Muslims (Maududi, 1940). He was also a stern critique of the 'Muslim Nationalism' theory of the Muslim League, as it was too cramped Islam and Muslims within a geographical boundary. In his understandings the ideology of Islam is universal, so it cannot be confined and restricted to a specified geographical boundary. Furthermore, he also had concerns about the Islamic character and understanding of the people in charge of the freedom movement for Pakistan (Haqqani, 2005, p. 21). The leadership of the Muslim League, who in the opinion of Maududi were western educated, secular-minded and least aware of the Islamic injunctions, directives and responsibilities of an Islamic state, only believe in the norms and values associated with western democracy and culture. In Aziz's (2001) opinion, three elements are considered as the base of western civilization and the evil nature of the modern world by Maududi. Western democracy, secularism and nationalism are those elements that are very much contradictory to the Islamic injunctions and philosophy and are evil in nature (Aziz, 2001, p. 262).

In Maududi's opinion, all religiopolitical movements in British India should be based on the theory and ideology of Islamic universalism. He was a stern critic of his contemporary religiopolitical movements, as those were nothing to do with the universal message of Islam. Nationalism, which he termed as a disease, made Arab and Turk's staunch enemies of each other, consequently, ruined *khilafat*, the symbolic institution of Muslim unity. This only benefited the British imperialist, who exploited the young, energetic and enthusiastic youth of both the nations and expanded her own sphere of influence. Similarly, the Indian Nationalism slogans of the Indian Nation Congress and the allegiance of the Indian Muslim to that was merely a misapprehension and delusion. Muslims in India are required to struggle for a state of their own, based on the concept and ideology of pan-Islamism where moral values according to the holy Quran and *Uswa-i-Hasana* cement the foundation of an Islamic society, anchored with the Islamic concept of social, political and economic justice. He stated that the fundamentals of an Islamic state can only be erected on the directives and words of God (the teachings of the Holy Quran). However, his denunciation of the formation of Pakistan was because of his understanding and perception that the people who are in charge of the Pakistan movement wanted to make it a secular state. Their characters and understanding of Islam and Islamic directives regarding the Islamic state was a witness to the fact that Pakistan would not be an Islamic or theocratic state. If they really want to struggle for a separate state of the Muslims, it must be a land of the pure (*Dar-ul-Islam*), exclusively based on the system of governance of Islam. He (Maududi) and other Muslims in India were not going to accept any other system than Islam. In this regard, Maududi has criticized the strategies in the freedom struggle, ideologies and leadership of not only the Muslim League but of JUH as well. However, JUH responded very harshly. Mufti Kifayatullah, a central leader of JUH challenged the religious authority of Maududi and directed his companions to criticize and question his religious understandings in public gatherings (Qureshi, 1972, p. 352). Muslim League, on the other hand, benefited from the writings of Maududi, which, somehow, supported their claim and two nations theory i.e. Muslims in India constitute a separate nation, distant from other non-Muslims in many respect and characteristics (Haqqani, 2005, p. 21).

In Vali Nasr's opinion "the Jamaat and Muslim League, each legitimated the political function of the other in furthering their common communalist cause. The Jamaat legitimated communalism in Islamic terms and helped the League find a base of support by appealing to religious symbols. The Muslim League, in turn, increasingly Islamized the political discourse on Pakistan to the Jamaat's advantage, creating a suitable gateway for the party's entry into the political fray" (Nasr, 1994, p. 115). Muslim League propagated and widely publicized Maududi's ideas and his criticism of JUH leadership regarding political and religious issues.

This has introduced him to a vast majority of people during the freedom movement which earned him a great name, fame, prestige, and recognition in the masses (Qureshi, 1972, p. 352).

Formation of Jamiat Ulama-I-Islam

Many Ulama in JUH had differences in different issues related to politics even from the early 30s however, the first formal kind of split in the parent organization occurred in 1945 with the formation of Kul Hind Jamiat Ulama-i-Islam (KHJUI). Though the leaders of KHJUI were politically and religiously affiliated to JUH and Deoband, however, the pro-Congress attitude of JUH and specifically its understanding of the issue of nation and nationalism forced them to formulate another organization of the like-minded Ulama. Many renowned Ulama in the Dar-ul-Uloom Deoband got a perception that Indian National Congress was a Hindu majority organization and was least interested in the issues exclusively related to the Muslims in India. Maulana Shabir Ahmad Uthmani was more vocal in criticizing the anti-Muslim attitude of Congress (Arshad, 2005, p. 59). Maulana Uthmani announced his resignation from JUH and did not participate in the annual conference of the party at Saharanpur from 4-7 May 1945 (Shairkoti, 1957, p. 663). Many other Ulama also joined hands with Maulana Uthmani. Among other strategies, the Ulama decided to counter the JUH alliance with Congress by publishing *fatwas* (religious decrees) declaring cooperation, assistance and support of any kind with Congress as *haram* (unlawful in Islam) (Fatehpuri, 1990, p. 74).

On July 11, 1945, some Ulama in Calcutta in the leadership of Allama Azad Subhani laid the foundation of Jamiat Ulama-i-Islam Calcutta (Arshad, 2005, p. 78). Maulana Uthmani admired and praised the new organization of the Ulama, however, showed his concerns over the confusing situation and the division of the Muslims over the issue of a separate homeland for the Muslims of India. Some Ulama recommended the formation of an organization of the like-minded Ulama in the pattern of JUH. Muslim League also showed its interest in any such organization of the Ulama.

A grand convention of Ulama was arranged from 26-29 October 1945 in Calcutta. Hussain Shaheed Soharwardi and Khwaja Nazim-ud-Din were appointed by the Muslim League for facilitation and gathering Ulama and providing essential guidance to the conference attendees (Pirzada, 2000, p. 9).

Ulama from different areas across the Indo-Pak subcontinent participated in the conference. Maulana Matin read the message of Maulana Uthmani, in which he stressed on the essential components of nationalism and nation in the light of Islam. He argued that according to the divine injunctions and directives, all the people are classified in two classes (nations) i.e. the believers and the non-believers. Hence, Muslims in the Indo-Pak subcontinent constitute a separate nation in the light of the Holy book. They can never make a single nation with other religious communities in India. It is a sacred duty and obligation on every Muslim individual to live his/her life in the light of the teaching of Islam and *Sunnah*. The Muslims in India should therefore, struggle for such a place and center where they can practice their religious ideas and ideals and live their lives without the interference of any other religiopolitical community. Maulana Uthmani asked the Ulama to get unite and join hands with the Muslim League and Jinnah for the sacred cause of the Pakistan movement. He warned them that this is the last chance for the independence of Muslims in India. Muslim League is the vanguard of this movement, so if it failed to achieve its goal of independence for the Muslims in India, there would be no chance for them to re-unite and strive for an independent state of their own in the near future (Uthmani, n.d., pp. 12-29).

Ulama decided to establish an organization of the like-minded Ulama the "All India Jamiat Ulama-i-Islam". Maulana Shabir Uthmani (in his absence) was elected the president, Maulana Zafar Ahmad Uthmani as vice president and Maulana Quraish Shamsi as its General Secretary. An advisory committee (*shura*) of twelve members was selected, which primarily has to help and assist the office bearer of the organization in matters related to religion and politics (Pirzada, 2000, p. 10). In the very first official meeting of the organization, they decided and announced their unconditional support to the Muslim League in the demand for Pakistan. The shura appointed Maulana Uthmani as the advisor for religious affairs in the Muslim League (Tirmidhi, 1977, p. 373).

In the election campaign of 1946, Ulama actively participated and provided ideological support to the Muslim League. Maulana Uthmani along with a group of other Ulama and Muslim League leaders visited different parts of the country and mobilized people and convinced them to vote for the Muslim League and vote for Pakistan. He also wrote letters to Ulama and directed them to campaign for the candidates of the Muslim League. At the same time, he very actively convinced Ulama about the issues and objections of JUH against Muslim League leadership and the demand for Pakistan (Uthmani S. A., n.d., pp. 3-8). (Maulana Mazhar Ali had issued a *fatwa*, declaring Jinnah a *Kafir-i-Azam* (great infidel), while Maulana Madani had declared joining Muslim League as *Haram* (Qureshi, 1972, p. 354). Maulana Uthmani in different *fatwas* and letters to Ulama defended Jinnah's political role and his leadership position. He declared that the demand for Pakistan was a genuine demand and the *fatwas* of Maulana Madani, were against the very essence and norms of Islam (Shaikoti M. A., 1972, pp. 69-70).

A delegation from JUH, headed by Maulana Madani visited Maulana Uthmani at his home on December 07, 1945. The aim of the visit was to remove the misunderstandings between the Ulama over the issue of support for Pakistan. The meeting continued for three hours, however, Maulana Madani and his team could not convince Maulana Uthmani for withdrawal of his support to the Muslim League in the demand for Pakistan.

Maulana Uthmani argued that the demand for Pakistan was the need of the hour. It was beneficial for the Muslims of the Indian sub-continent and hence the demand for Pakistan was a legitimate and a timely demand. He showed his concern and expressed his views over the role and stance of JUH against the Muslim League and its leadership. He raised the issue of Muslim representation in the parliament in united India. In his opinion how an assembly of 60 to 70% of non-Muslim members would decide a matter in favor of the Muslim minority? He also defended Jinnah and his leading role in the freedom struggle. In his opinion, Jinnah in India was the only Muslim leader who can get a separate homeland for the Muslim of India. He also made them clear that neither Jinnah was an agent of the British nor the partition was the British plan of divide and rule. Pakistan is the need of the time and it is the duty of each Muslim to struggle for it. Maulana Uthmani with his strong arguments refused the plea of JUH delegation of withdrawal of support from the Muslim League and the demand for Pakistan (Rahman, 1966, p. 714).

Maulana Uthmani and other Ulama under the banner of Jamiat Ulama-i-Islam very efficiently propagated and defended the movement for the creation of Pakistan. They promoted the view and made the people aware of the fact that if they want to implement the Islamic and divine way of life as directed in the Holy Quran, it was only possible if a separate center of Islam (Pakistan) is established. Muslims in India can only survive as Muslims if they succeed to get Pakistan for themselves. In his address at Deoband on December 25th, 1945, Maulana Uthmani pointed out that he had left politics after the unsuccessful campaign for the restoration of *Khilafat*. However, after much thinking, he reached the conclusion that without a separate homeland for the Muslims in India, their destitutions cannot come to an end. The establishment of Pakistan was his final destination and if his blood was needed for the achievement of Pakistan he would not hesitate (Mazher, 1990, p. 11).

The unending and tireless struggle of the Ulama side by side with the Muslim League got impressive success for them in the 1945-46 elections. Jinnah in response to Maulana Uthmani's remarks on Muslim League success, commended the role, the Ulama played in the election campaign (Zafar, 2005, p. 541).

Conclusion

Ulama have played an important role in the freedom movement of Pakistan. It was the Ulama who for the first time propagated the idea of freedom from British imperialism. They were the ones who actively participated in the war of independence in 1857. After that when they realized that an active confrontation cannot win freedom for them, they changed their strategy and involved in preparing a class of Muslims, who through their knowledge and devoutness would lead the Muslim of India in the freedom struggle. JUH a political wing of Ulama played a vital role in the awakening of Muslims in the Indo-Pak sub-continent.

Though they had a different understanding of some national and international events, issues and concepts, yet, their role in the freedom struggle is undeniable. Muslim League which got success in getting a separate homeland for the Muslims of the sub-continent was supported by a faction of Deobandi Ulama, who actively participated in the Quaid's campaign for Pakistan.

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