

Biographical Encyclopedia of Indian Muslim Freedom Fighters: A review

Review by

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نوارا تلخ ترمی زن چوں ذوقِ نغمہ کم یابی
حدی را تیز ترمی خواں چوں محمل را گراں بینی

Strike a stronger note when you see a lack of liking for the melody

Cry the prodding louder when you see the burden heavier

Biographical Encyclopedia of Indian Muslim Freedom Fighters is Syed Ubaidur Rahman's third attempt to strike a louder and stronger note to narrate and remind the story of Indian Muslims' participation in the Indians' war of independence, in fact a true jihad for the freedom of the country. He is persistently trying to describe the story of an endless, **بخاک و خون** **غلطیدن** splashing in the dust and blood, beyond description, nay beyond imagination. Who can imagine a bumper crop of hanging bodies from LAL QUILA to DILLI DARWAZA and beyond in the wake of 1857 mutiny? Maulana Arshad Madanisaid in a recent speech that thirtyfive thousand ulama had been killed at that time.

Maulvi Mohammad Baqir's case is an unparalleled example in the whole history of Indian journalism. He was tied to a canon and blown up in front of a crowd. He was the editor of Delhi Urdu Akhbar and was punished for his critical writings against the British Raj. He came from a highly respectable and venerable family.

The book presently under review contains one hundred and twenty five biographical sketches, thirty eight out of them were included in Syed Ubaidur Rahman's earlier book "Contribution of Indian Muslims in the Freedom Movement." Biographies are generally long and exhaustive writings. It is not possible to compile a book containing a large number of biographies in full. At the most there could be summary of every biography, that is why I have mentioned this book as a collection of sketches. However, the author should be credited for his art of condensing biographies in such a way that it encompasses all aspects of the life of the person concerned especially focusing his contribution in the freedom struggle. Author's effort in choosing and enlisting the names included in the book and gathering authentic information about them is praiseworthy. It requires devotion and thorough investigative efforts to reach and confirm facts at every step.

A salient feature of this book is that it includes persons from all strata of the society from Bahadur Shah Zafar at the top to Batak Mian, a cook in Calcutta, at the bottom and the rest in between. To quote just a few examples:

Bahadur Shah Zafar was an icon for the freedom fighters and a symbol of unity for all, he was not seen as a king or a ruler of India, naturally then his name should be at the top of any reckoning of freedom fighters.

Shaikhul Hind Maulana Mahmud Hasan the torchbearer of the war of independence who lit the dormant sparks of revolt. He introduced revolution much before the Bolshevik Revolution in the Soviet Union by establishing the India government in exile in Kabul, Afghanistan. At the same time he proved his passion for a united and homogenous, accommodative Hindustan by appointing Raja Mahendra Pratap as the President of that government and Maulana Barkatullah Bhopali as the Prime Minister. His plan for an armed struggle also preceded Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's Azad Hind Fauj, the Reshmi Rumal Tehreek was a prelude to that armed struggle which unfortunately could not materialize.

Bakhat Khan Rohilla who had served as a soldier in the British army led the freedom warriors in the western districts of United Provinces, now Uttar Pradesh.

Batak Mian, a cook in Champaran, Bihar who saved the lives of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Rajendra Prasad by foiling the attempt to kill them by poisoning them.

Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari, a reputed surgeon of his time who had perfected his professional skills in England and Germany.

Asif Ali, bar at law who was a famous lawyer, was jailed several times for his active participation in the freedom struggle. He himself pleading his case but he is remembered for pleading the case of Shaheed Bhagat Singh.

It is interesting to note that several Indian lawyers and others educated in England turned against the British imperialism such as Jyoti Basu, the Marxist Chief Minister of West Bengal, and a number of Indian intellectuals educated in England where they had realized what the freedom of the people meant.

To the question why Syed Ubaidur Rahman chose to portray and glorify the role of Indian Muslims only in the war of independence to the exclusion of others. The answer is quite obvious:

The historians of Indian freedom movement have recorded almost all events related to that struggle and given all possibly available details but unfortunately the partition of the country at the end of the epic war created a sort of mindset in almost all thoughtful and thinking class of writers including historians. Even the unbiased among them could not remain unaffected. In such circumstances the Muslim role in the whole episode could not be highlighted as it should have been.

The unfortunate partition of the country dealt a deadly blow to the cause for which thousands of ulama had offered supreme sacrifice, most of the surviving ulama preferred to remain where they were and continue to suffer. Moreover, a big responsibility to look after the great heritage their

forefathers had built during the past centuries, fell on their shoulders. Unfortunately the tsunami of partition scattered the fabrics of a great and beautiful and harmonious culture that can never be built again. This resulted in minimizing the Muslim role in the whole past and present history of the subcontinent. Their influence over all events of the subcontinent dropped down to almost negligibility.

In such circumstances the least one can do is to remind the past sacrifices of Muslims and tell the world the true story. The blind will never see that but one should continue to hammer. That is what Syed Ubaidur Rehman is doing. May Allah bless him with success in the Herculean task he has taken up.

The outreach of such book is limited to a very small section of intellectuals and thinkers. It does not touch even marginally the ignorant masses blindfolded by the gods of falsehood. The new messenger of social media is the most effective instrument to convey the message to the masses. The recent interviews that Syed Ubaidur Rehman has given to two channels is the right step in that direction. Yet another step in that direction is the advertisements on channels. These books should be translated at least in Hindi as the author has done by translating his precious book in Urdu and Hindi.