

Review

ROLE OF ULAMA IN THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT

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For quite sometime Syed Ubaidur Rahman is dashing his head against the stonewall of ignorance raised by the gods of falsehood. He is trying to make the non-believers believe that there was an era of India's history, not a plethora of myths, spanning about a millennium. That history was not written only in letters of gold but written with blood also and indelibly carved on the face of earth.

But I may draw his attention to the following:

Whether you warn them

Or do not warn them

Allah hath set a seal

On their hearts and on their hearing

And on their eyes is a veil

Great is the penalty (they incur) *(Al-Baqara 2:7)*

Not long ago he brought about a book "Muslim Freedom Fighters: Contribution of Indian Muslims in the Independence Movement". It is a compilation of short biographical descriptions of forty Muslim leaders but for whose sacrifices the dream of freedom from British Raj would not have materialized. It is not a complete list of Muslim freedom fighters. It is just a sample from the multitude, from many thousands who sacrificed everything, including their lives and remained in oblivion.

Now Syed Ubaidur Rahman has come up with another marvelous book “Ulema’s Role in India’s Freedom Movements”. In some ways these two books are complementary to each other. But while the first book highlights the role of individuals in the decades long freedom struggle, the second one emphasizes the role of ulama in that struggle. It is in fact a vivid description of various movements launched by venerable Ulama, such as Reshmi Rimal Tahreek and Faraizi Tehreek.

The Reshmi Rimal Tahreek launched and run by Shaikhul Hind Maulana Mahmud Hasan and his closest followers has been described in greater detail. The details of that movement, covering Indian subcontinent and several Muslim countries, including Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, as narrated by Syed Ubaidur Rahman makes the reader spellbound, he feels as if he is reading a detective story, a story of adventures and of suspense.

The narration is such that once you start reading you are absorbed and you drag on up to the end of the story which unfortunately ends in a tragedy, secret letters were discovered by British agents. Shaikhul Hind and his disciples were arrested and deported to Malta as prisoners. They returned to India after about three years but the fire lit by Shaikhul Hind continued to burn and it consumed innumerable lives.

Apart from this story there are several conclusions which must be read more loudly in view of the present day happenings.

Syed Ubaidur Rahman has narrated the Faraizi Movement of Bengal. The details given in this description are enough to give an insight about the movement. The whole story should be loudly read in the present day context: How a movement

meant for eradicating certain un-Islamic practices among the Muslims of Bengal spread and covered all people of Bengal indiscriminately, especially affecting the poorest peasants suffering hardships at the hands of landlords. A movement intended for religious and social reforms of the Muslim community in Bengal transformed into a great agrarian reform. Bengalees in general became devotees of their benefactors. Undivided Bengal was a big province covering present day Bangladesh and west Bengal and had a great influence over Assam, then a Muslim majority province. Bengal province was under the Muslim League rule which was believed to be responsible for the partition of the country and strongly hated.

Much needed land reforms were brought about during the chief minister-ship of Moulvi Fazlul Haq. According to those reforms the tiller was made the owner of the land. Thus the landless labours having a huge majority in the province were immensely benefited and perhaps that was the reason why Muslim League leaders were forgiven for their perceived sin of partition of the country. The people of Bengal were greatly obliged and grateful for that act of benefaction. It is apparent from the fact that when Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy, Chief Minister of Bengal at the time of partition came to Calcutta to see Gandhiji, who was on his way to Noakhali in East Pakistan, a blood thirsty crowd of Bengalees gathered there. Gandhiji wanted to go out to pacify the crowd. But Mr. Suhrawardy himself went out and declared: "I am Suhrawardy, I am here." Immediately the crowd melted away.

Another instance: Long after that in 1956 when Moulvi Fazlul Haq visited Calcutta Bengalees swarmed to see him. These examples are an eye opener in view of the present day agitations which seemed to be for a Muslim cause but developed into a movement for the common cause of the poor and suffering class of Indian masses.

Syed Ubaidur Rahman provides a brief and yet a comprehensive description of the decline of the Moghal Empire and the rise of the British Raj. These contexts provide the reader an opportunity to observe the period of about two centuries at a glance and see the contribution of Ulama to the freedom struggle during that period. Thus the book becomes more interesting and absorbing. There are many books in various languages on these subjects, the author of this book himself has referred to about four scores of books, about a score of them in Urdu and the rest in English. This reference itself is very helpful for those doing research on the related subjects.

The book reminds the important, rather leading role of Ulama-i-Deoband throughout the nationalist movement which was not limited to the struggle for freedom only. From the day one to this day they never budged from their nationalist stand. They passed through several spans of trying time, especially when there was a movement for the partition of the country. Ulama-i-Deoband were firmly against it. They suffered and faced all sorts of humiliations from their own coreligionists. They were one with the Indian National Congress on that issue. They did not accept it even after the congress had surrendered. Maulana Hussain Ahmed Madani and Maulana Azad and their colleagues were extremely unhappy. It should also be noted that the whole approach of those Ulama was peaceful and free from communalism.

A glaring example of this fact is the establishment of the Indian government in exile in Kabul, Afghanistan in 1915. When Shaikhul Hind Maulana Mahmud Hasan established that government in exile Raja Mahindra Pratap Singh was made the president of that government and Maulana Barkatullah Bhopali was made the Prime Minister. What a great act of inclusive nationalism!

It is not enough to write books on such subjects. Newly emerging forms of media should be made use of to take the message to the masses and continue the crusade.