

CONTRIBUTION OF MUSLIMS FREEDOM FIGHTERS

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ABSTRACT

The present work is designed to highlight the contribution of the Muslim freedom fighters in India and abroad. It is hoped that it will certainly add something more to what is available on the vast subject of Indian freedom struggle and shall bring before the people many facts which have hitherto remained unknown.

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INTRODUCTION

We all know the old adage that “history belongs to the victors.” In the case of Muslim India, this is reflected in the historical accounts of Muslim South Asia’s decline during the eighteenth century and its final defeat in 1857. Written mainly by European and other historians who often had no contacts beyond the Mughal court’s outer fringes, they could hardly be expected to present the Muslim interpretation of events. Closer to our own time, the success of M. K. Gandhi’s (1869-1948) non-violent mass movement, which finally forced the British out of India, has overshadowed earlier Muslim efforts to obtain the same goal. In this research, a glimpse is offered into this often ignored history in order to remind people that Gandhi’s movement did not arise in a vacuum, but rather in a particular historical context in which Muslims had played a prominent role (Altaf Fatima). The great Indian revolt of 1857 was actually our first war of independence. It was an attempt to overthrow the yoke of British colonial exploitation. Though this failed but succeeded in igniting the fire of liberty and freedom in the hearts and minds of Indians. This was nurtured by the succeeding generations and finally gave us our independence in 1947.

Then the prevailing situation prompted the great revolt as resentment was brewing in every nook and corner of the country. British imperialism was gradually strengthening its deadly grip over India. The increasing imports from factories of England were causing irreversible damage to Indian products. India was being reduced to the status of a supplier of raw materials and docile consumer of British products. Agriculture was in doldrums because of backbreaking burden of taxes. Famines became a recurring feature. Indian princely states were being annexed one by one on this or that excuse. The last Mogul king was reduced to a prisoner who was counting his days and sustaining himself on the pension provided by the East India Company. His edicts did not run beyond the walls of Red Fort. Evangelism by Christian missionaries was causing resentment and heart burning among both Hindus and Muslims. The British were eagerly waiting for the death of the old and powerless king to capture Delhi, the capital of India.

Mutiny in Meerut provided the first spark for the great revolt, which was crushed with an iron hand and savage force. Lakhs of fighters and civilians were executed and massacred in cold blood. Thousands including the last Mogul king were tried by the military courts and thrown behind bars or exiled. Confiscation of properties and all other repressive measures were employed on a large scale in the cruelest possible manner. Because the Muslims were in the

forefront of this struggle they bore the brunt of British tyranny and were victimized and marginalized in a planned way after the revolt.

We Indians are remembering the sacrifices rendered by those courageous souls. The heroes who challenged the might of British Empire. They fought valiantly, did not flinch, did not think about saving their own lives and thought only about the future of their motherland. Had they not risen, taken arms and set a glorious example, the Indian womb would have given birth to slaves only. It is because of their sacrifices that we are able to proudly raise our heads, stand on our feet and proclaim our independence. They laid down their lives, faced untold hardships and sacrificed the future of their families. They have written the brightest chapter of Indian history by their sweat and blood. As long as the spirit of freedom is alive India would remain indebted to them for their patriotism, sense of sacrifice and courage. It is because of their selfless sacrifices that we the 110 crore strong Indians are able to breathe as free men and women and enjoy the fruits of freedom and progress.

It is unfortunate that the dominant role played by Muslim rulers, Ulema, scholars and commoners is being downplayed by certain prejudiced elements known for their communal paranoid vision. It is high time that we bring to the notice of common Indian citizens the praiseworthy role played by the Muslims, the sacrifices rendered and hardships braved by them for their motherland.

We remember to Bahadur Shah Zafar, Maulvi Ahmedullah Shah, Begum Hazrat Mahal, Rani Laxmi Bai, Azmatullah Khan, Tanya Tope, Nana Rao, General Bakht Khan, Prince Feroz Shah, Maulana Fazl-e-Haq Khairabadi and scores of other leaders and lakhs of those unmentioned unnamed and unknown fighters and mujahideen who challenged the might of British Empire and laid the foundations of Indian freedom. We succeeded in building a peaceful and prosperous India whose people, and who, as citizens of this free country, establish the rule of law and justice for one and all here and also play their role as standard bearers of justice throughout the world.

KHILAFAT MOVEMENT

The Muslims all over the world considered the Turkish Empire to be Khilafat-e-Islamia and as such they were emotionally attached to it. But, after the victory, the Allied forces decided to put an end to the Turkish Empire and distributed it among the victorious forces. Maulana Abdul Bari of Firangi Mahal, Maulana Muhammad Ali, Shaukat Ali, Hasrat Muhani, Maulana Azad and almost the entire Muslim leadership of India opposed it. They launched a movement to support the cause of Khilafah. Gandhiji and other leaders of the Indian National

Congress supported the cause and decided to start non-cooperation with the British Government till Muslim grievances were paid heed to.

MUSLIM POETS

Poetry has been the staple diet of most of the revolutions. In fact, poetry plays a pivotal role in spurring revolutionaries and in fetching moral support as well as financial and human resources from the grassroots. Poetry has contributed a lot to our struggle to unchain ourselves from the fetters of the English colonialists.

ULAMA IN FREEDOM STRUGGLE

The independence of India from British colonial rule would not have been possible without the participation of Ulama and the deployment of their followers, in all the big events that paved the way to achieve freedom. The first war of independence or the mutiny as it is called in common parlance was specifically a resistance put out by the Ulama scattered throughout north India. Syed Ahmad Shaheed and Syed Ismaeel Shaheed's uprising against the British rule and the armed conflict in parts of Afghanistan and parts of Punjab, where they had migrated from United Province (now Uttar Pradesh), only to wage a jihad or war of resistance against the Colonial rule was a big headache for the Colonial rulers of India.

CONCLUSION

"India's struggle against British imperialism for her freedom is unparalleled and worth emulating in world history. It is unique because people belonging to different religions fought unitedly not only to free themselves from the yoke of British imperialism but also to achieve the noble sentiments of equality, fraternity and patriotism.

Although Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and others had unitedly blown the bugle of freedom from the bonds of British imperialism as early as 1857, but the beginning of the 20th century gave an impetus to this struggle. Many Muslim freedom fighters, in particular, made remarkable contribution for the freedom of the country during this period. These actions of those Muslim patriots are not only a cause of national pride but are also a great source of inspiration for national integration and unity even today as they were in those days.

Keeping in view, giving an authentic and secular understanding of Indian freedom movement. In the aftermath of independence, it has become necessary to assess the contribution of Muslim zealots in the freedom of India. No doubt, the partition was a sad event.

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