

A Study of Freedom Struggle in Madras Presidency: Nationalist Muslim Press And Nation-Building

S. Nazeemunnisa Begum

*Assistant Professor and Head, Department of History, J.B.A.S. College for Women,
Teynampet, Chennai.*

Abstract

The influence of Nationalist Muslim Press and Political literature helped the spread of Indian nationalism in the Madras Presidency between 1914 and 1920. The active propaganda of the Muslim Press and political literature in favour of the national movement and government's rigid stand against the Muslim press marked a turning point in the political history of the Madras Presidency.

Key Words: Khilafat, Calipha, *Quami Report*, *Azad Hind*, *Muhammadden*, Ghadr party, Rowlatt Satyagraha.

Introduction

Despite severe stand on the part of the Government, this period i.e., from 1914 to 1920 witnessed a spate of publications which propagated the message of Indian nationalism to the grassroots level. By and large, the public opinion was mobilised by the Muslim press in favour of Indian National Movement. Further, it was advocated by Gandhi and other nationalists. The stern measures in fact acted as a stimulant and made the Indian Press more volatile and anti-British. Thus contributions rendered by the Muslim Press in the Madras Presidency during the period take up for this study deserve the gratitude of the posterity.

In the Madras Presidency between 1914 and 1920, nationalist Muslim literature and press contributed to the growth of Indian nationalism an important turning point in the political history of the Madras Presidency was the active propaganda of the Muslim press and political literature in support of the national movement, and the government's rigid stand against the Muslim press. P.C.Bomford's, *Histories of Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movements in the Madras Presidency*, Gail Minault's, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization India*, and Gerald N.Barrier's *Banned: Controversial Literature and Political Control in British India* have all discussed the nationalist Muslim press and political literature in the National Movement.

The activities of the nationalist press were predominantly influenced by the proscribed Urdu literature published from 1914 to 1920, as well as the C.I.D. file, Police Department records, Madras Native Newspaper Reports, Fortnightly Reports and Confidential files and Government Orders preserved in the National Archives of New Delhi and the Tamil Nadu Archives. The sources also reflect the true nature of British aggressive policies, colonial exploitation, and popular protests of Muslim press against the government in Madras Presidency during the period under discussion.

Press Attitude Toward Muslims

During the early Twentieth Century, the Muslims of Madras Presidency started a few newspapers to protect their communal religious interests. Both *Live-ul-Islam* and *Saiphul Islam* were influential among Muslims in the Madras Presidency. The *Quami Report*, newspaper, started by Majid Sharar catered to the needs nationalist sentiments of the Urdu speaking Muslims of the Madras Presidency.¹

In order to serve the Muslims' interests, the Muslim Press changed its attitude according to the circumstances. In 1909, there was a friendly atmosphere between the British and the Muslims over separate electorates. In 1909, there was a friendly atmosphere between the British and the Muslims over separate electorates. The change of attitude of the Muslim

Press towards the British became evident when the partition of Bengal was annulled in 1911, and the Calipha of Turkey was humbled during the First World War. By this time, the Muslim Press in India was enraged at the British policy towards Turkey. Gandhi utilized this situation as an opportunity to unite the Hindus and Muslims for organizing the Khilafat Movement in India. Gandhi, the Chairman of All India Khilafat Conference which met at Delhi on 24th November 1919, resolved to withdraw all co-operation to the Government. The propaganda against the British by the nationalist Muslim Press gathered momentum. Thus, the Hindus and Muslims joined hands against the British. Winning their support, Gandhi launched his Non Co-operation Movement in December 1920 at Nagpur. During the Non Co-operation Movement, the British Government took stern measures to control the anti-British tone of the Muslim Press through administrative laws as the Indian Press Act of 1910, Sections 124A & 153A of I.P.C. and Section 99A of Criminal Procedure Code of 1868.²

Prohibition during the First World War

The indifferent attitude of the British Government towards the Indian Press during the war time strengthened the cause of nationalism and sharpened the political consciousness of the Indians. During this period, the vernacular press gave a prominent coverage to the incidents connected with the war. The Muslim Press and political literature gave a vivid picture about the anti-war propaganda. The Urdu newspapers such as *Quami Report*, *Azad Hind*, and the *Muhammadden* and other political literature highlighted the condition of Turkey and Germany their stand against the British. They condemned the policies of the British during the war and declared the world war as their “Holy War”.³

An Urdu notice entitled *Ilani-i-jang* (Declaration of War) published by the Ghadr party blamed the British for having put the Indians in great difficulties and sufferings. The author of the leaflet stated, “*Peringhees* took possession of our beloved country of India. They mined the civilization and morals of India. Three crores of persons died from famine, plague and daily disgrace. As a result, Indians began to immigrate to other foreign lands.” The tract also appealed to the Indians who lived abroad to return to the land of Bharatha, and to the Youth of India to be ready to organise a mutiny against the British. Finding the tone of the tract anti-British, the Government initiated action against the Urdu notice under section 4(1) of the Indian Press Act of 1910.⁴

Another Urdu leaflet entitled *Indian Insurrection* was published on 1st December 1914. The tone of this leaflet was highly explosive in character. The author of the leaflet said that, “No European should be left alive in the world, kill them secretly, kill them openly”. It urged the Mussalmans and the Hindus to sacrifice their lives for the cause of Independence. Laying stress on self-sacrifice, the author stated that: “Let the spirit of self-sacrifice animate every vein and hair of your bodies...”. Finally, the author exhorted the Indians to come forward protect their religion or otherwise they would be ruined. The pamphlet which is concluded with the observation, “Rise! Rise United! Rise at Once!... Do not hesitate now! do it to-day”, called upon both Muslims and the Hindus to join together and hoist the national flag symbolized Independence.⁵

Another Urdu leaflet entitled *Zameana Bagawat Hindustan* dated 8th January 1915 adopted the extreme stand and extended its support to Turkey and Germany. The author of the leaflet exhorted the young men of India who aspired for self-government to arise slumber and eliminate the British. He also referred to the misdeeds the Colonial Government. The temples and mosques were destroyed and British education in India left many illiterates.⁶ Further, the author described the tyranny of the British as follows: “There is no Country as prosperous as India so far as produce is concerned. But it is a matter for regret

that lakhs of our brethren have died of hunger. Crores are living of half meals. The tyranny has reached its limits. Arise! Brethren Arise! God's help is with you. Wreck vengeance on the tyrants for we done to the oppressed". The Government forfeited the leaflet on 16th January 1915 under section 4(1) of the Indian Press Act, 1910.⁷

An Urdu leaflet entitled, *An Appeal to the Indians* was published in January 1915. This leaflet supported the cause of Turkey and Germany in the War equating it to the religious crusade and declared that everyone who died in the war would reach 'Allah'. It wanted every Mussalman to treat this was as 'Holy War'. It denounced who did not regard it as 'Holy War' as follows: 'We regret at the fate and spirit at the faith of those, who owing, to English pressure did not regard this as a religious War'. The author went to the extent of calling the British as monkeys, dogs and pigs. It asked, "Did not these dogs promise to give back Egypt after thirty Years. Did not these pigs issue proclamation promising religious toleration! What of these promises have they fulfilled! When did these faithless people grant self-government to Indians".⁸ This Urdu leaflet was proscribed on 15th March 1915 under the Indian Press Act of 1910. The post 1915 period proved to be very important politically when Gandhi entered the area of politics. Annie Besant launched the Home Rule Movement in 1916 and the Hindus and the Muslims came closer at Lucknow by entering in to a compact. At this juncture, the Rowlatt Satyagraha gained momentum. The Muslim Press focused much again during the Jallian Walabagh Tragedy in April 1919.

The Jallian Walabagh Tragedy and Controversial Muslim Press

The Jallian wala bagh Massacre took place on 13th April 1919 at Amirstar in Punjab. It occupied a major place in the annals of the Indian National Movement. The Tragedy evoked strong reaction from the public and press alike. The Nationalist press held the Government responsible for is gruesome tragedy.⁹ Later Ali Khan, the editor of *Zamindar*, a Panjabee daily was so much enraged by the act of General Dyer, he called him a 'Yazid and a 'Bastard!'. The Government of Punjab took action against him under sections 124A and 153A of I.P.C. and sentenced him to five years' transportation and demanded security under section 4(1) of the Press Act.¹⁰

Apart from the Newspapers, there were pamphlets, tracts etc. which exposed the atrocities of the British. The Muslim press and literature severely criticised the wrong doings of General Dyer and his fellowmen. An Urdu pamphlet entitled *Fughani Muslim or Fughani Ali*, written by Munshi Ahemed Ali was published in 1922. It said, "How could the people of India receive the Prince of Wales, (who visited in 1922) when the Indians were oppressed and aggrieved by his brother Officer, General Dyer in India". The author advised the police and military men to leave their services and obey the dictates of *Koran* and destroy the kingdom of Tyrants by taking recourse to non-violent methods. Further, it adds, 'We have co-operated with the Government with the result that we are thrown in to sorrows and miseries. Now we are ready to non-co-operate with her and are determined to become Independent". The Government of Madras did not tolerate this and proscribed the leaflet under section 99A of Cr.P.C. of 1898 on 14th June 1922.¹¹

Another pamphlet entitled *A Mendicant's Cry Jaiianwalabagh* contained a collection of poems written by many nationalist poets including one Munshi Abdul Khaliq, describing the atrocities committed at Jallianwalabagh. The second poem in the collection entitled *The Cry of Martial* was written by Abdul Khaliq. He blamed the officers of Punjab, who caused rivers of blood to flow in a manner that even the highest heaven cried out "God Forbid". Further the poet asked the New Viceroy to punish General Dyer, who was responsible for the tragedy and requested him to stop his pension. The author regarded the Rowlatt Act as an

unlawful one which was the root cause of this outrage. Hence, the Government of Madras issued re-notification to proscribe it under section 99A of Cr.P.C. of 1898.¹²

An Urdu booklet entitled, *Sanqit O'Dwyer sahiyani, Punjab* (song on Micheal O' Dyer of Punjab) held Michael O' Dwyer, Lt. Governor of Punjab responsible for the loss of young blood in Punjab. The author equalled the act of General Dyer with that of king Nadir Shah, the cruel ruler of medieval India. He lamented that, ". . . helpless India is bound and locked up by the aliens.. - The Hindus, Muslims and the Sikhs have all found rebels. It is to-day that we have to revenge for the mutiny". The Urdu leaflet was proscribed by the Government of Madras under section 99A of Cr.P.C. of 1898."¹³

Apart from the pamphlets and tracts, there were pictures and cartoons which exhibited the wrong doings of General Dyer Jallianwalabagh. Here mention must be made to a picture published by G.D. Newar in Urdu entitled, *Jallianwalabagh - Amritsar, Punjab*. The picture depicted the tragedy. A note beneath the picture stated that "the merciless wretched Dyer showered bullets on the people during the Baisaki festival, killed the dharma and liberty of men". Further, the note expressed the fear that one day the people would be wiped out on account of this "Dyerism".¹⁴

The Muslim press and literature thus heroically encountered the dictatorial administrative measures of the British. The repressive attitude of the British was denounced unequivocally in the nationalist Muslim Press, published between 1914 and 1919. These works provoked the national consciousness among the Indians against the wrong done by the British bureaucrats in Punjab. Thus, during the pre-Gandhian period, the Muslim press vied with each other in expressing their bold views in shaping the public opinion in the Madras Presidency.

Khilafat and Non Co-operation and the Proscribed Muslim Press

Gandhi emerged as a national leader after the Rowlatt Satyagraha. The year 1919 in the history of national movement is popularly known as the "Beginning of Gandhian Era". The Khilafat and Non Co-operation movements gained momentum in the Gandhian Era. By and large, Gandhi called upon the people to extend their support to these movements. The Muslim press launched nationwide propaganda in support of these movements. The *Quami Report* and the *Muhammeden* appeared vehement on the question of Khilafat. The editors of *Quami Report* and *Azad Hind* were warned.

In August 1920, the *Quami Report* complained that the British had destroyed the powers of khilafat. The publisher of the paper, Gulam Ahemed was prosecuted. He was found guilty of printing seditious articles and was sentenced to undergo nine months' imprisonment. Md. Amir Ali Shaheb, the printer and publisher of the *Azad Hind*, an Urdu paper of Madras was sentenced to six months' imprisonment for publishing articles on Khilafat. Md. Abdul Latif Farukhi, the editor of the paper was also warned. The repressive measures indicated that the Government was determined to deal severely with the attempt of the Muslim press to create anti-British tendency among the Indians.¹⁵ Apart from the action against the newspapers, a number of actions were carried on the political literature for publishing articles on khilafat and non co-operation movements.

Another Urdu pamphlet *Awrang-i-Khilafat*, published by Munshi Absan-ul-Haq pointed out that the British completely destroyed the naval power of Turkey during the War. The khalipha lost his prestige and authority due to the mobilization of English power in Turkey. The author recollected the story of the *Mahabharatha*, where the Pandavas were guided by Lord Krishna and said that the Indians too were guided by Mahatma Gandhi who dedicated his life for the cause of Indian freedom.¹⁶

In another instance, all the copies of a pamphlet which contained a speech in Urdu delivered at the Oudh Khilafat conference on 1st May 1920 by Shaikh Mushir Hussain Ridwani were declared forfeited for it contained objectionable matter under the Press Act of 1910. The speaker who condemned the limitless expansion of the British dwelt at length about the importance of Hindu-Muslim unity. Another leaflet entitled, *Khilafat*, condemned the oppressive tendencies of the British over the Indian Muslims. It called the Prophet to help the Muslims and the Hindus from the horrible punishment of the British.¹⁷ Another Urdu pamphlet *Tarana-i-Khilafai* (song of khilafat) written by Maulvi Mishah-ul-Islam Siddiqui, urged the Muslims that every one of them should dedicate himself to the khilafat and should take part in the Non-Co- operation Movement.¹⁸ An Urdu pamphlet entitled, *Takir-darbarae Tark-e-Malavale-Kuffar* published from Lahore referred to the evils which the Muhammedans were subjected to since the post world period.¹⁹

Another Urdu pamphlet *Faryad-i-ind Hiusa Awwal* (The lamentation of India) published by Ilahi, began with the statement that Europeans obtained a small plot of land (in India) by deceiving the Indians and then caused a drain on the wealth of the country. The author blamed the Indians for this predicament and deplored their cowardice.²⁰ A Tamil leaflet entitled *Indian Muslims and Swaraj* written by Ibrahim, preached the ideas of khilafat and the Hindu-Muslim unity. Further, it lured law abiding Muslims from their loyalty to the British Government and instructed them to have “Jai Hind” as their watch word. The author advocated the killing of the enemies of the khilafat and take up arms for the attainment of “Jai Hind”. For the first time, the Muslim press wrote in support of the concepts like ‘Swaraj’ ‘Swadeshi’ and “Jai Hind”. This Tamil tract was also proscribed under the Press Act of 1910.²¹

Gandhi’s Non Co-operation Movement heralded a new era in Indian press. Many nationalist newspapers opened their columns to the non-violent agitation of Gandhi. The content of the Muslim press was widely read and hotly debated. *Tark-i-Muvalai* (Review of Non Co-Operation Movement) in Urdu was published during the movement. It was written by Maulvi Shabir Ahnied and presented at the sessions of the Ulamas of Delhi. The author advised the Ulamas to try their best to remove cowardice, disunion and pride from the Muslammans. The author believed that the non Co-operation was one of the spiritual arms and it was bound to be effective provided the whole nation worked on it jointly to remove the British from India. The Government found the pamphlet seditious and forfeited it under the Press Act of 1910.²²

Another Urdu pamphlet entitled, *Angrezon-ki-akarfun* (the arrogance of Englishmen) appeared and attacked the British administration. The author of this tract even though was an English officer never hesitated to criticise the repressive policies of the British.²³ In another poem of the pamphlet headed, *Oppression of the Tyrants*, the author cautioned the English officials to give up oppression because their government was about to end and Indians are going to be liberated from the bonds of the British officials. The Government F proscribed it under section 99A of Cr.P.C. of 1898.²⁴

Another leaflet in Urdu which advocated the necessity of *Khaddar* entitled *Ckarka-ki-Charrakh Chun* (The creating spinning wheel) written by Shaiker Dildar Hussian, contained three poems which were more or less anti-British in tone. The author urged the people to encourage the *khaddar* products which would shake the English economy in India and as a result they would be forced to leave. Calling the English, “Fraudulent people”, the author of the leaflet said “you are in the habit of cheating, you never fulfill your promise”. The Government of Madras banned the leaflet under section 99A of Cr. P.C. of 1898.²⁵ The

Muslim press and political literature during this period laid stress on the Gandhian principles of Non-Co-operation and published articles which exposed the misdeeds of the alien Government. Thus the first phase of the Gandhian era was a period of heroic conflict between the nationalist press and imperialist government in India.

Despite severe stand on the part of the Government, this period i.e., from 1914 to 1920 witnessed a spate of publications which propagated the message of Indian nationalism to the grassroots level. By and large, the public opinion was mobilised by the Muslim press in favour of Indian National Movement. Further, it was advocated by Gandhi and other nationalists. The stern measures in fact acted as a stimulant and made the Indian Press more volatile and anti-British. Thus contributions rendered by the Muslim Press in the Madras Presidency during the period take up for this study deserve the gratitude of the posterity.

End Notes

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