Chapter-IV

Political and Cultural contribution of Islam to Indian Independence struggle

The exposure of India to the influence of Islam continued unabated from the dates of its origin in Arabia till the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in 1206 A.D. Thereafter, over five hundred years Muslims remained politically dominant till the advent of the Britishers. Though the Muslim Rulers apparently appeared to patronize and sympathise with Islam and its followers, they saw to it that the clergy never drastically influenced them and over powered the administrative machinery. The citizens, in fact, enjoyed the pride and the privilege of a National Government.

The landing of Vasco Da Gama at Kozhikode on the Kerala Coast in May, 1498 marked the beginning of European Colonial expansion into India. The earliest resistance against the country’s alienation also took place within two years in Kerala. It was led by the Mappilas (Mus-
lims). During Cabral’s expedition (1500 AD) the Portuguese captured Arab vessels lying in Kozhikode Port, massacred their crew and indulged in act of wanton cruelty against the natives. This roused the hostility of the local Mappilas and Nairs. In violent retaliation they went on rampage and destroyed the Portuguese factory killing its chief and fifty three men. The Kunhali Marikars, the celebrated Admirals of the Zamorin Kings, rose in arms against the Portuguese, which acquired all the dimension of an epic war. In 1600, Muhammad Kunhali Marikar (Kunhali-IV) the last of the Kunhalis was taken prisoner by the Portuguese with the connivance of the Zamorin. He was taken to Goa along with his associates and all of them were executed in cold blood after the farce of a trial. Kunhali’s body was cut into four parts and exhibited in four prominent places. (To commemorate his martyrdom the flag ship of the Indian Navy was christened I.N.S. Kunhali)

In Colonising and enslaving India, the Portuguese were followed by the Dutch, the French and finally the British. ‘The East India company had received permission from the Mugal Emperor to start a factory at Surat early in the 17th century. Some years later they purchased a patch of land in the south and founded Madras. In 1662, the Island of Bombay was presented to Charles II of England by way of dowry from Portugal and he transferred it to the Company. In 1690 the city of Culcutta was founded. Thus by the end of seventeenth century the British had gained a number of foot holds in India and established some bridge heads on the Indian coast line’"
At the battle of Plassey in 1757 which could be considered India’s first war that resulted in it’s losing of Independence that could be re-claimed only after two centuries, the martyrdom was claimed by Nawab Siraj –Ud-Daula, who had been killed by the British under the leadership of Robert Clive with the treacherous assistance of Mir Jaffar. That battle brought a vast area under the control of the British which enabled them to secure a firm footing in Indian Soil towards the expansion of their empire. As a result of the dastak system started by Mir Jaffar, the British earned lucrative contracts. Within a few years, Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and East Coast were subjected to British administration. In Bengal, where, the victory had been very easy, the Muslim landed gentry who were looked upon as the ruling class were targeted to lose their power and destroy their sustenance. Bengal had the first full expansion of British rule in India. “The rule began with outright plunder and a land revenue system which extracted the utter most farthing not only from the living but also from the dead cultivators. It was pure loot. The famine of 1770 that followed swept away over a third of the population of Bengal and Bihar. India became for the first time a political and economic appendage of another country.”²

There were also factors at work to defeat India herself and those included the conquest and looting of India by Nadirsha, the failure of the great Afghan, Ahmad Sha Abdali to stabilize his empire, the weakness of the Mughal emperor Shah Alam and infight among the Maratas, that aided the British to make their task of expansion easy.
In the South, the Kingdom of VijayaNagar had collapsed and the Kingdom of Bijapur and Golconda that ensued divided most of the Deccan between them. The Nawab of Karnatic became helpless debtor to the East India Company. Tanjore was equally dependant on the British. The Malabar rulers were eclipsed by Mysore. The Nizam of Hyderabad was not a challenge to the British and the state of Travancore maintained a precarious treaty with the British. Only the state of Mysore, under Hyder Ali was not prepared to surrender to the British and posed a threat to them. His son Tippu, brilliant, fertile in expedients and most formidable in military tactics baffled the British and waged wars against the British continuously defeating them though at last he had been killed while fighting bravely for the Nation.

The establishment of British rule in India was an entirely novel phenomenon for her, not comparable with any other invasion or political or economic change. “India had been conquered before but by invaders who settled within her frontiers and made themselves part of her life. She had never lost her independence, never been enslaved” 3. It was felt that the British ruling class must maintain its prestige living in a superior world of its own keeping aloof the Indians. There were two worlds; the world of British officials and the world of Indian millions and there was nothing in common between them except a common dislike for each other.

The East India Company was reluctant to spread education when
in fact, traditionally, free education was imparted both by Hindu and Muslim rulers in India though it may not be profitable in the modern sense. A deliberate policy was adopted by the British to confiscate ‘Muafis’ that is tax free grants of lands, for endowments intended for institutions chiefly imparting education in Persian. With the reorganization of judicial and revenue administration, the British replaced Muslims from authoritative positions. Permanent settlement in Bengal helped the transfer of control of power over landed property from Muslims to Hindus. The Muslim weavers of Bengal could not stand the competition put forth by the mills of Lancashire. A large segment of Muslims mostly soldiers employed with the sovereign were compelled to become the strong arm men of the East India Company or some British Magistrate or British zemindars.

The establishment of the British rule in India affected different classes of Muslims in different ways. For a minority it destroyed not a livelihood but a way of life and damaged their pride. For the Mughal Court at Delhi and the Muslim aristocracy attached to it life under British, who scorned them, was galling. Till 1830, the British initially sympathized with the Madrasa system of traditional education. But after coming of the Christian missionaries the British officials began to put restrictions on religious education. English language was introduced in administrative service as the medium of instruction in schools. In 1837 Persian was abolished as the language of the Court. The Court system, its rule of evidence and definition of offences and penalties that were
heavily inclined towards Islamic tenets were changed.

Muslim scholars did not like to see the express command of God openly disregarded. Ulama had been slow to react publicly until the East India Company began to legislate its own rules of evidence. Lastly scholars like Shah Abdul Azeez (1746-1824) son of Shah Waliullah openly protested. Syed Ahmad Rai Barely (1786-1831) made a more active call to Muslims to stand up for Islam as a public way of life. Haji Shariat Ulla (1781-1840) who was greatly influenced by the doctrines of Sheik Muhammad Abdul Wahab, at Arabia, after his return from Mecca in 1820 launched the Fraizi Movement which emphasized the performance of Fraiz, that is religious duties imposed by Allah and His Prophet. He considered British ruled Bengal, Dar-ul-Harb (Abode of War) and enjoined, that so long as the British rule in Bengal, the congregational prayers on Friday (Juma) and Eid Festivals should not be performed anywhere except in a Misr-al-Jamal (a town where an Amir, Governor and Quazi duly appointed by an independent Kalifa or Sultan exist.) His son Dadu Miyan divided the whole of Bengal into circles, appointed kalifa to look after them and vehemently opposed the levy of taxes by Hindu land lords. Titu Mir was an important leader of the Muslim Peasantry. He diligently worked for the independence and renaissance of the Muslims of Bengal. He was killed while in action against the Government in 1831.

Besides the political, social and economic reasons already stated,
there were also religious reasons behind India’s first ‘War of Independence, 1857’, wrongly christened as ‘Seyoys Mutiny’. The British after acquiring absolute command of the Government had unleashed a reign of terror to subjugate the local people. Their attitude to Muslims who were still considered the ruling class, was more severe. Conversion to Christianity was systematically pursued with the assistance of missionaries, incentives being given. In 1850, a Bill was passed by which the right of inheritance of those who converted into Christianity were acknowledged. The cartridges supplied to Hindu and Muslim troops were wrapped in Pig and Cow fat. The fat on the cartridges had to be removed with the teeth before they could be used in the guns. The Indian soldiers were forced to remove the fat by chewing it with their teeth. These unethical acts of the Government created unrest among the soldiers.

The soldiers’ reaction was sudden and vehement and the revolt was launched without any proper planning. The prestige of the empire at Delhi with its Hindu as well as Muslim affiliations made Delhi a rallying point and many Indians still considered the titular emperor Bahdur Shah-II who was a pensioner of East India Company, to be the rightful sovereign of the country. Almost half of the companies sepoys strength 2,32,224 opted out of the loyalty to their regimental colours, overcame the ideology of the army meticulously constructed over a period of time through training and discipline, and joined the revolt. The revolt that began on 11\textsuperscript{th} May 1857 at Meerat resulting in the capture of
Delhi proclaimed Bahadur Shah-II, Shahen-Shah-e-Hindustan. Simon Fraiser a political agent and several other English men were killed.

The Revolt that initially found success was put down with a heavy hand by the British. The first War of Independence ended in disaster resulting in the demolition of the Mughal Empire. The city of Delhi was ransacked and destroyed by the British forces. The British army took their revenge by gruesome killing of the innocent people indiscriminately. Captain Hudson, the ruthless British commander captured Bahadur Shah-II from his sanctuary, the Tomb of Humayun and subjected him to most inhuman torture and humiliation. The emperor’s sons Mirza Mughal, Mirza Sultan and Mirza Abubaker were slaughtered in cold blood. Their bodies were beheaded and their heads were presented to the ageing emperor in the prison. Later twenty four Shahzads (Princes) were tried and executed. Bahadur Shah was tried and exiled to Rangoon.

The Muslims who were in the vanguard of the war of independence were to bear the brunt of the British wrath. In the British view it was Muslim intrigue and Muslim leadership that converted a sepoy mutiny into a political conspiracy aimed at the extinction of British Raj. The British directed their vengeance towards the Muslims gruesomely. “After 1857 the heavy hand of the British fell more upon the Muslims than the Hindus” 4.

‘Catastrophe befell the Muslim intelligentsia in Delhi’. Zahir Dahlavi (1835-1911) wrote in his ‘Dastan-I-Ghadar’. The English sol-
diers began to shoot whomsoever they met upon the way. Mian Muhammad Amin Panjakush, an excellent writer, and Moulavi Imam Baksh Sabhavi along with his two sons were arrested and taken to Raj Ghat gate. They were shot dead and their bodies were thrown into Jumna. During the weeks when the British military authorities held Delhi at their mercy they made every citizen who wished to return to the city after expulsion pay a fine. Muslims were required to pay twenty five percent of the value of their real property while Hindus had to pay only ten percent.

The Revolt threw up some fine guerrilla leaders. Firos Shah, a relative of Bahadur Shah of Delhi was one of them. The assassination of Chief Justice Norman of the Culcutta High Court by a Muslim in August 1871 and the assassination of the Viceroy Lord Mayo by a Muslim in February, 1872 proved that Muslims and British were in collision course. The British recognized that political persecution of Muslims would not yield desired results.

The savage British suppression of the mutiny, the destruction of Delhi, the centre of Muslim Culture and dispersion of the descendents of Akbar and Aurangzeb by execution or exile at last forced educated Muslims to realize not only that the British were in India, to stay, but also that they intended to stay in their own terms. The Indian Muslims had lost their empire in India. They sought to derive some psychological satisfaction from a contemplation of Islam’s past greatness. The search for cultural roots led some of the middle class in them to reach at the
Turkish sultan, the only Muslim power practically left at that moment as a vestige. This resulted in the Khilafat movement which considered Sultan Abdul Hameed as the traditional Khalifa entitled to lead the faithful through out the world.

Sir Syed Ahamad Khan who was responsible for the Aligharh Movement was an ardent reformer who wanted to reconcile modern scientific thought with Islam. Through the publication of the most influential magazine ‘Tahzib-ul-Akhlq’ he described the ethical aspects of the Muslim culture. He worked diligently for the promotion of Urdu also. He had a number of able and notable colleagues. In his rationalistic approach he was supported, among others, by Sayed Chirag Ali and Nawab Muhsin-ul-Mulk. His educational activities attracted Munshi Karamat Ali, Munshi Zakhaullah of Delhi, Dr. Nazir Ahmad, Maulana Shibli Nomani and poet Hali, who is one of the outstanding figures of Urdu literature. Sir Syed was opposed to the Pan Islamic movement encouraged by Sultan Abdul Hameed of Turkey.

At the outset Sir Syed was an ardent supporter of Hindu-Muslim unity. He said in 1884 “Do you not inhabit this land? Are you not buried in it or cremated on it? Surely you live and die on the same land. Remember that Hindus and Muslims are religious terms. Otherwise Hindus, Muslims and Christians who live in the country are by virtue of this fact, one Qaum (nation or community)” 5.

Ironically, in later years Syed Ahmad Khan counterposed to the
national movement initiated by the Indian National Congress. In 1887 Dufferin, the Viceroy and A-Colvin, the Lieutenant Governor of UP launched a frontal public attack on the National Congress once its anti-imperial edge became clear. Syed Ahmad believing that the Muslim share on the administrative posts and in profession could be increased only by professing and proving loyalty to the colonial rulers, decided to join in the attack. However a large number of Muslim intellectuals supported the national movement. Badaruddin Tayabji presided over the Congress session in 1887 and the number of Muslim delegates to the Congress increased in the succeeding years. R.M.Sayani, A Bhimji, Mir Mushraf Hussain, Hamid Alikhan and numerous other Muslim intellectuals from Bombay, Bengal and Northern Indian joined the Congress.

The British decision to partition Bengal, its real motive being political, was opposed by Indians by launching the Swadeshi movement on 17th August 1905, though however it could not stop the decision. Abdul Rasul, President of Barisal conference, April, 1906, put it ‘what we could not have accomplished in fifty or hundred years, the great disaster, the partition of Bengal, has done for us in six months, its fruits have been the great national movement, know as Swadeshi movement”6. 16th October 1905, the day of partition was declared a day of mourning throughout Bengal. The people fasted and no fires were lit at the cooking hearth. In their achievement in the partition of Bengal, the British had, infact, sowed the seeds of partition of India itself.
The militarily nationalist Ahrar Movement was founded under the leadership of Maulavi Mohammad Ali, Hakim Ajamal Khan, Hassan Imama, Moulana Safar Ali Khan and Mazhar-ul-Haq. They got support from a section of orthodox ulama belonging to the Deoband school.

The young Maulana Adbul Kalam Azad, aged 24, who was educated at the famous Al-Azhar university at Cairo joined the national movement and welcomed the young Turks opposed to the Sultan of Turkey. The year 1912 was notable in the development of Muslim mind by publication of ‘Al-Hilal’ in Urdu and the ‘Comrade’ in English, the former by Adbul Kalam Azad. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote “Abdul Kalam Azad spoke in a new language to them in his weekly Al Hilal. It was not only a new language in thought and approach, even its texture was different for Azad’s style was tense and virile, though some times a little difficult because of its Persian back ground. He used new phrases for new ideas and was a definite influence in giving shape to the Urdu language as it is today…. He was a strange mixture of medieval scholasticism, eighteenth century rationalism and modern outlook. The Comrade was edited by Maulana Mohammad Ali. A famous and enormously long article of his (his speech and writings did not err on the side of brevity or consciousness) in the Comrade entitled “The choice of the Turks” put an end to the Comrade which was stopped by the Government. Soon after, government arrested him and his brother Shaukath Ali and interned them for the duration of the war and a year after. They were released at the end of 1919 and both immediately joined the Na-
The philosopher poet Muhammad Iqbal the author of the National Song containing the universally acclaimed and immortal lines “Sara Jahanse achaa Hindustan hamara….” Kindled the fire of patriotism in aid of the struggle for India’s independence. Dr. Anzari was another leader of the National movement.

The institution of the Caliphate for which the Indian Muslims had struggled so sincerely under the banner of the Khilafat movement, was demolished not by the enemies of Muslims, but by a Muslim hero Mustafa Kamal Ataturk. On November, 1922 he established a national government in Turkey. The last Khalifa Sultan Abdul Majeed was banished from Turkey in 1924. The Indian Muslims were stunned on this action of Ataturk under whose leadership the Turks decided to make a new start. The sacrifices of the Indian Muslims towards the Khilafat movement, it appeared, were in vain and they were doomed.

The participation of the Muslims in the disobedience movement of 1930 was very considerable. Among those who were jailed in connection with the movement there were at least ten thousand Muslims. The frontier province under the command of the remarkable Khan Abdul Gafar Khan, the unquestioned and beloved leader of the Pathans stood firmly by the side of the National Congress.

The Muslim League was started in 1906 under the inspiration of
the British Court and the leadership of one of its Chief Supporters, the Agakhan. M.A. Jinna whom Jawaharlal Nehru described as “able, tenacious and not open to the lure of office, which had been such a failing of so many others”8, had joined the Muslim League. Confusion was still prevailing over Muslim politics and the means of sorting out their problems. Several constitutional devices and arrangements were tried, schemes of reforms were introduced and political forums established to watch over Muslim interest, which claimed safeguards, separate electorates, adequate representation, quota in public service and preservation of religious liberties and cultural values. Yet all shields and concessions envisaged failed to satisfy the Muslims. This situation was eventually canvassed by the Muslim League who in March 1940, at Lahore, adopted a Resolution for the partition of India. Rather than the politicians, the intellectuals were behind the move. It was the Hoshiarpure born, Cambridge University, Law graduate Rahmat Ali (1897-1951) who proposed the name ‘Pakistan’.

Under the leadership of Maulana Hasan Ahmad Milani (1879-1957) of Deoband, the Jamiiyyat-ul-Ulama-I-Hind had campaigned against the Pakistan demand arising out of the Lahore resolution. An Azad Muslim conference in April 1940 convened on behalf of the Jamiiyyat and other organizations declared India will have geographical and political boundaries of an individual whole and as such is the common homeland of all its citizens irrespective of race and religion who are joint owners of its resources. From the national point of view every
Muslim is an Indian. Milani said that Indian Muslims were fellow nationals with other communities and groups in India though separate from them in religion.

Kerala Muslims’ struggle for independence is not less significant and it has its own distinctiveness too. The earliest martyrdom of Kunhali Marakar has been mentioned at the outset. The Mappila outbreak of the nineteenth century deserves mention among the anti British uprising. To put in the words of Sumit Sarkar “The turbulent history of the Mappilas of Malabar reveals yet another facet of the complexities of the Indian situation-the way in which religious fanaticism has served as the outward form for the expression of anti-land lord and anti-foreign discontent.”. The Mappila revolts reached their peak during the period 1836-1853, against which the British Authorities took strong measures to suppress. The Mappilas braved police bullets and courted death in the honest belief that they would become Shahid and would go straight to heaven. The immediate outcome was the enactment of the Malabar Compensation for tenants Improvement Act of 1887 based on the Logan Report.

‘Swadesabhimani’ a Malayalam News Paper was published from Trivandrum by the well-known social activist Vakkom Abdul Khadar Moulavi carrying the message of freedom and criticism of British policies. Ramakrishna Pillai, popularly known as Swadeshabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai; who became its editor in 1906, was deported to the Andaman’s for his criticism of the Government and the newspaper and
press were confiscated by the Travancore government by a Royal proclamation issued on September 26, 1910. The arbitrary and tyrannical action was strongly disapproved by the enlightened public and condemned by the press.

The year 1920 was a turning point in the History of the Indian National Movement. Mahatma Gandhi had emerged as the unchallenged leader of the Indian National Congress. Its annual session held at Nagpur, in 1920 gave a new orientation. Malabar Rebellion of 1921, sometimes known as the Mappila uprising was an upsurge the like of which Kerala had never seen before. It spread to an area comprising more than two hundred amsams and vast masses of people. The khilafat movement had made profound impact on the Mappilas. It made inroads in the Eranad and Valluvanad Taluks and parts of Ponnani Taluk. The Mappilas were in rebellious mood and as a precautionary measure the Government brought the area under section 144 of the CRPC and banned all meetings and demonstrations. Inspite of it, the rebellion broke out on August 20, 1921. The incidence of arrest of leaders based on false and fabricated charges, the raids of Masjids, attack of police station, ransacking and destruction of offices and records, pitched battle and killing followed and the Martial law that was enforced unleashing a British reign of terror failed to immediately contain the rebellion. However, the British intensified their efforts and at a decisive engagement at Melmuri on October-25, 1921, the Mappilas suffered a crushing defeat, their supply lines were cut off, their morale was broken and were forced to surrender.
The most gruesome incident known as the ‘Wagon Tragedy’ occurred on November, 1921. Ninety Mappilas arrested on the charge of rebellion were dumped into a closed railway goods wagon at Tirur for carrying them to Bellary Jail. On their way when it was opened at Podannur about sixty four had died of asphyxiation and the remaining were in the jaws of death.

The Malabar Rebellion threw up some dynamic leaders, the principals among them Valiakunnathu Kunjahammad Haji, Seethi Koya Thangal of Kumaran Puthoor and Ali Musliar. Kunjahammad Haji was in virtual control of Eranad and Valluvand Taluks where the British Authority almost became extinct. He even issued Passports to those who wanted to leave his ‘Kingdom’. Ali Musliar styled himself ‘king’ and issued circulars warning his followers against molesting Hindus or looting their property. The Congress leaders like M.P.Narayana Menon, K.Madhava Menon, K.Kelappan, E.Moidu Moulavi, Muhammad Abdul Rahman, K.P.Kesava Menon and Hassan Kayi Mulla had established useful contact with the rebel leaders in softening frayed tempers and ensuring peace.

A special court was set up by the British to try the rebels under special laws framed for the purpose. Many rebels were hanged or deported to Andaman or sentenced to long term imprisonment. Kunjahammad Haji, Seethi Koya Thangal and Ali Musliar were captured and shot dead. About Ten thousand people are estimated to have
lost their lives in the retaliation and thousands rendered homeless. The rebellion that had resulted on a combined operation of political, economic and social factors was at once an anti British upheaval aimed at securing India’s independence.
References:


2. Ibid


4. Jawaharlal Nehru- The Discovery of India.


7. Jawaharlal Nehru- The Discovery of India.

8. Ibid