

## Role of madrasas in the 1857 War of Independence

More than half a million Muslim clerics sacrificed their lives for India during the various phases of the great 1857 revolt - a fact almost buried like the mutineers themselves. These Indian freedom fighters came from the same madrasas that have been under scanner all over the world since 9/11.

In 1997, I was witness as well as part of the grand celebration of India's completion of 50 years of independence. Not one word was mentioned during that event about the role of the ulema and the madrasas in the battle against the English. It was hurting. Celebrated Punjabi litterateur Kartar Singh Duggal says in his autobiography that the Indian maulvis were one with the pandits on the issue of retaining the age-old Indian traditions - both Vedic and Islamic.

Relates Maulana Umar Gautam of Madrasa Markaz-ul-Ma'arif that madrasas are a legacy of the Mughal rule when these 'institutions of higher learning' were set up to promote both religious and scientific knowledge. In the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny, as the English call it, the madrasas had become hubs of nationalism and had to bear the wrath of the British.

The madrasas remained the hub of the anti-British movement even later.

It is to the credit of the Deoband Madrasa that an Indian government in exile was formed in Kabul on July 9, 1916 after Maulana Obaidullah Sindhi was sent there on a special mission. Maharaja Pratap Singh was the government's 'president' and Sheikh-ul-Hind Maulana Mehmood-ul-Hasan the 'prime minister'. Maulana Barkatullah Bhopali and Maulana Obaidullah Sindhi were its ministers.

According to the account of Dilli Urdu Akhbar, 222 ulema were arrested including Sheikh-ul-Islam Maulana Hussain Ahmed Madani, Maulana Waheed Ahmed Faizabadi, Maulana Aziz Gul and Hakeem Sayeed Nusrat Hussain. They were sent to Malta via Cairo by a ship Feb 21, 1917 and released June 8, 1920. There were many who were there for the whole of their life.

Members of the Khilafat Committee issued a favour supporting the non-cooperation movement in July 1920. The fatwa, published in the Aljamiaat Urdu daily of Delhi, was signed by 500 ulema declaring the British government as 'haraam' (prohibited by the Sharia). This implored the Hindus to start the Shuddhikaran movement to oppose the English.

The service rendered by madrasas to the country and the Muslim community is an established fact. In India, these madrasas have played an important role in protecting human, Islamic and social values. These institutes have also played an important role in survival of Islamic practices -- dissemination, publication of Islamic literature, protection of Islamic faith and development of Islamic culture and civilization besides contributing in the development of the country.

According to Maulana Azad's Al-Hilal, Hazrat Alif Mujaddid Sani, Maulana Ajmal Khan, Maulana Syed Ataullah Shah Bukhari, Allama Anwar Shah Kashmiri, Ashfaquallah Khan Kakorvi, Maulana Imam Bakhsh Suhbai, Maulana Hasrat Mohani and Shah Abdur Rahim Raipuri were all madrasa products who fought the English tooth and nail.

Who can forget the sacrifice of Bahadur Shah Zafar, who became the symbol of Hindu-Muslim concord? Can one forget Muslim women like Chand Bibi, Begum Hazrat Mahal and Begum Zeenat Mahal who rather than being raped at the hands of the English went down fighting the English?

The first and foremost entity to foresee British plans to enslave India was a product of these very Islamic madrasas - Shah Waliullah Muhaddis Dehlawi. He was a great saint as well!

States the Savera Urdu monthly of Lahore that Shah Waliullah Muhaddis Dehlawi saw the destruction of country with his own eyes. He deeply studied the conditions prevailing in [Europe](#) and Asia and laid down certain reformative ideas for future government with a view to banishing the British from India.

He started a movement for this and made madrasas the centers of national movement. In 1731, the plan for the country's freedom was prepared under the leadership of Shah Sahab and ulema like Shah Abdul Aziz and Shah Rafiuddin.

The true heir of Shah Saheb's legacy and his ideas, the Imam-e-Hurriyat, Shah Abdul Aziz Muhaddis Dehlawi, raised the banner of revolt against the British and gave a fatwa that the country had been enslaved and it was the duty of everyone to undertake jehad for freedom.

After this declaration of jehad by the Imam-e-Hurriyat, the scholars of religious madrasas made the freedom of the country the mission of their life. From 1818 to 1831, under the leadership of Syed Ahmad Shahid Barelwi, who was brought up by Shah Abdul Aziz Muhaddis Dehlawi, a group of ulema toured the entire country extensively.

In 1831, while fighting the British at Balakot, leader of the Hurriyat Caravan, Syed Ahmad Shahid, and his true follower, Ismail Shaheed, laid down their lives and attained martyrdom.

Their deaths turned the freedom wave into a storm.

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