

The Aligarh College and the Non-Cooperation Movement



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Abstract

During the period which extends from 1919-1920, the political developments in India, adversely affected the Muslim University. The post war years were really a threat to the British Government as it witnessed the cementing of relations between the Congress, the Muslim League and the Khilafat Committee. To overcome this situation the British Government tried to bribe the loyalist lobby of the Muslim University. The Non-Cooperation programme was opposed by the loyalist group of Aligarh college led by Syed Raza Ali. On the other hand the nationalist group led by Maulana Shaukat Ali decided to establish contacts with the ulemas of Darul Uloom of Deoband, Firangi Mahal and Nadwatul Ulema of Lucknow. Shaukat Ali got the signature of about 200 students who extended their support to the National cause. Gandhiji tried to convince the Trustees of college and with the support of students an "Independent Muslim National University" was established under the nomenclature of Jamia Millia Islamia, at Aligarh on 29th October 1920. In some way or the other the Aligarh college was deeply influenced the ongoing National struggle and played a vital role in the Movement.

Keywords: Muslim University, Khilafat Committee, the Non – Cooperation, Darul Uloom, Firangi Mahal, Nadwatul Ulema, Jamia Milia Islamia, Swaraj

Introduction

The policy of the Non-Cooperation Movement was not a very new concept. Earlier it had been adopted by the Hungarian nation to free itself from Australian domination and later on it was adopted by Ireland, Egypt and in Korea. It was only due to triumph of the Non-Cooperation Movement in Hungary that Mr. Aruthur Griffiths had also adopted the same policy in Ireland.

It was in the 1920s that India also witnessed the dawn of the Non-Cooperation Movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. In his *Young India*, under the title 'Swaraj in One Year,' Gandhiji suggested to wage a struggle against the mighty British Empire based on discipline and self-sacrifice. He wrote- ".....For me the only training in swaraj we need is the ability to defend ourselves against the whole world and to live our natural life in perfect freedom even though it may be full of defects. Good government is no substitute for self-government. The Afghans have a bad government, but it is self-government. I envy them. The Japanese learnt the art through a sea of blood. And if we today had the power to drive out the English by superior brute force, we would be counted their superior, and inspite of our inexperience in debating at the Council table or in holding executive offices, we would be held fit to govern ourselves. For brute force is the only test the West has hitherto recognized. The Germans were defeated not because the Allied powers were found to possess greater brute strength. In the end, therefore the India must either learn the art of war which the British will not teach, or she must follow her own way of discipline and self-sacrifice through Non-Cooperation." He further states that-"Terrorism and deception are weapons not of the strong but of the weak."¹

The breach of the promises made by the British government during the war time resulted high discontentment in second decade of the twentieth century.

The new constitution popularly known as Government of India Act 1919*, in spite of hard opposition made by the Bengal leaders-B.C Pal, B. Chakarvarti and C.R Das was passed.² On 31st December 1919, Mr. Gandhi in his weekly paper 'Young India' wrote- "The Reform Act coupled with the proclamation is an earnest of the intention of the British people to do justice to India and it ought to remove suspicion on that score.....Our

duty therefore is not to subject the reform to carping criticism but to settle down quietly to work so as to make them a success."³

Suddenly the circumstances had been drastically changed within the next nine months. The Khilafat issue and the Punjab wrongs were the two most severe problems which arose after the war and were supposed to be the major cause for the existence of the Non-Cooperation Movement.⁴

The situations which turned him against the British government was described by Mr. Gandhi himself in March 1922, when he was tried by Mr. Broomfield, a British judge. He said-"The first shock came in the shape of Rowlatt Act, a law designed to rob the people of all real freedom, I felt called upon to lead an intensive agitation against it. Then followed the Punjab horrors beginning with the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh (Amritsar) and culminating in crawling orders, public floggings and other indescribable humiliations. I discovered too, that the plighted words of Prime Minister to the mussalamans of India regarding the integrity of Turkey and the holy places of Islam was not likely to be fulfilled."⁵

Rowlatt Bill was a malaise, and satyagraha, was the only remedy which exhibited and justified the demands of Gandhiji in particular and Indians as whole.

Touring throughout India, Gandhiji realized that the Indians lacked organizing skills and in speeches at Cawnpore on 14th October he said that-"..... All of you should bear in mind that if we want to carry on the administration of India ourselves we should develop as much capacity and administrative ability as the English possess." Further explaining the non-cooperation he said-".....the first thing is opposition with swords, but at present I am not going to oppose with the sword; rather I want to get this work done through non-cooperation."⁶

Hindu-Muslim unity had been constantly preached by Gandhiji in his speeches while propagating non-cooperation movement. In one of his speeches delivered in the premises of Swaraj Sabha* on 28th November 1920 he remarks that-" One lac of 'Goras' are ruling over 30 crore of Indians. Such has not been the case elsewhere in the world. The chief cause of this lies in the fact that the Hindus and the Mohammedans have considered themselves to be enemies of each other. The heart of Hindus and Mohammedans had not been clean..... I ask both Hindus and Mohemmedans if they have any confidence in British Government.....if there be any difference between Hindus and Mohammedans we should understand that even then it is our duty to consider them as our brethren, with a view to ruin or ameliorate Government which is compelling us. Moreover words will not do but we have to clean our hearts."⁷

The ongoing national struggle through the medium of non violent non cooperation programme had a drastic effect on the movements which were limited in the particular area of the United Provinces. Such as the peasant discontent which was a familiar feature of the nineteenth century, had drastic impact on the national struggle and vice-versa.⁸ In the same

manner the boycott of schools and colleges had a great impact on the Aligarh College and it played a significant role in national struggle in the region of the United Provinces.

"It is widely known, that large sects of Indian Muslim intelligentsia have been greatly conscious of their fraternal links with their co-religionist in other countries, following their history with interest, driving comfort in their accomplishments, and lamenting their slow but steady decline."⁹ It was indeed a heavy pain on part of the Muslim's loyalty to support the British Government against their co-religionist, and provide them with arms and armies in Mesopotamia. The storm burst after the signing of the peace treaty with Turkey."¹⁰

On 14th May 1920, Lord Chelmsford tried his best to overcome Muslim fears in his message to the Muslims of India, published in 'The Times', on 18th May, 1920. He said ".....they include terms which I fear must be painful to all Muslims..... I desire to send you a message of encouragement and sympathy which I trust will uphold you..... I am confident that the conclusion of this new treaty that friendship will quickly take life again and that a Turkey, regenerate and full of hope and strength, will stand forth, in the future as in the past, a pillar of Islamic faith. This thought will, I trust, strengthen you to accept the peace terms with resignation, courage and fortitude, and keep your loyalty to the Crown bright and untarnished as it has been for many generations."¹¹

The political developments in India during 1919-20 such as the Jallianwalla Bagh Massacre, the passage of the Black laws (the Rowlatt Bills), the price hike of the food grains, Gandhiji's decision to pass a satyagraha for the attainment of swaraj and the Muslim's reaction over the fate of Turkey resulted in general unrest in India.¹² All these development adversely affected the Muslim University. The post war years witnessed the cementing of the relations among the Congress, the Muslim League, and the Khilafat Committee. This was a serious threat faced by the British Government, and therefore they thought to fulfill the demands of the loyalist lobby by providing them with the annual aid of one lakh of rupees.¹³

The real challenge faced by the British was the coming together of the Hindus and the Muslims. The only way left open to them was to appease the loyal *Aligarians*, was to pass the Act of Aligarh Muslim University (Act No.XL OF 1920), which was passed by the Imperial Legislative Council on 9th September 1920.¹⁴

The treatment meted out to Turkey after the World War-I, caused much resentment among the Muslim throughout the country. The Mussalmans of India wanted an assurance to protect the holy places of Arabia from the clutches of the Allied Powers.¹⁵ Ulemas also join with the Muslim political leaders for the cause of Khilafat.¹⁶ The Sultan of Turkey badly lost his position, and the Indian Muslims stand by and large to protect the Khilafat. In June 1920, Gandhiji put forward the Non-Cooperation programme, in the meeting of Central Khilafat Committee.¹⁷ The loyalist group led by Syed Raza Ali opposed the proposal, but

they could not stand against the nationalist group which was more dominant.¹⁸ Maulana Shaukat Ali was supported by Maulana Abdul Bari and it was decided in the next Khilafat Committee meeting to include the renunciation of titles, it was also decided to establish contacts with the *ulemas of Darul-Uloom of Deoband, Firangi Mahal and Nadwatul Ulema of Lucknow*.¹⁹ Aligarh was much affected with these political developments and the division of opinion regarding the Khilafat issue.²⁰ Gandhiji and his associates visit to the Aligarh college seriously affected the college. Mohammad Ali and Shaukat Ali backed by maulavis and the other Muslim agitators from outside, stirred up large number of students against the British rule. According to the reports Mohammad Ali got signature of 200 students who promise to extend their support for the national cause.²¹

The news of the visit of Messers. Shaukat Ali and Gandhiji to Aligarh college to persuade the students to adopt the non-cooperation cult to them as their own college was doing nothing in this regard.²² The visit of Mr. Gandhi and Maulana Shaukat Ali was a matter of great concern for the British Government as it may create an awkward situation in the province.²³

On 11th October, Gandhiji reached Aligarh accompanied by Jan Mohammad, Swami Satyadev, and Maulana Azad Subhani and others.²⁴ Gandhiji and his associates were invited by Ali brothers in order to persuade the Trustees and to appeal the students to boycott the British and to take part in non-cooperation programme.²⁵

The most 'mischievous attack' attack made on the youth of the country who were to be sacrificed for the political campaign was a matter of great concern for the British Government.²⁶ According to the British Government, the best weapon to combat this danger lies in gaining the support of the 'sober minded' people. The Government appreciated the move of the liberals and moderate minds throughout the country to show their displeasure in regard to the mischievous attack made on the system of education. The opposition at Aligarh was generally led by the Trustees of M.A.O College, by majority of teachers and even by large number of students themselves.²⁷ Gandhiji's direct appeal to the students without the consent of the teachers, Trustees and the Principal was objected by Dr. Ziauddin, but Gandhiji replied that his opinion has been greatly influenced by the Hunter Committee Report and the terms of treaty with Turkey.²⁸

In Aligarh, the anti-British feelings were gaining momentum as generated by the Ali brothers and Hasrat Mohani. Even in the atmosphere of great displeasure of Trustees of M.A.O College, large number of students joined the Khilafat and the Non-Cooperation Movement.²⁹ Sheikh Abdulla was so much worried with these developments as he himself admits that majority of the students joined the non-cooperation programme felt that "joining the Gandhian way would ruin the college and in turn harm the community."³⁰

On 12th October 1920, Mahatma Gandhi made a speech in the premises of the Aligarh college

that-"..... We are taught the lesson of slavery in the Aligarh college." We should boycott this slavish education. This is my first lesson. If we want to give up friendly relations with government, if we want to non-cooperate with it, if we realize that we cannot save Islam from the danger into which it has fallen by cutting the throats of Englishmen, the roads before us is clear and open. Thirty crore of men cannot remain under the leadership of handful-one lakh of Englishmen.....for this we should give up the favours received from Government. We should boycott Government educational institutions. It is a shame for us that we have not as yet left them as the non-cooperation movement has been in existence for some months..... Non-Cooperation is nothing more than sacrifice for our betterment and religion. The sacrifice we have to make in the first stage is very significant. If we do not have the strength to make even such a sacrifice, how can we become free."³¹

The speeches delivered by Gandhiji, Maulana Shaukat Ali and the firm stand taken by Swami Satya Dev stirred the students and teachers. A letter was sent to Secretary of the college by Maulana Mohammad Ali and his associates including 9 Trustees regarding the termination of the affiliation of the college from the Allahabad University by 29th of October and to transform it into a 'national university' under the Central Khilafat Committee.³² The demand for an independent college was first made by Zakir Hussain, and was the first person to renounce the scholarship.³³ To chalk out future action and to deprive the nationalist of the student's support the college decided the closure of the college (sine-die). But according to Gandhiji, it was "a sin" for a nation to receive education in schools financed and controlled by a Government that has robbed Indians of their honour and put Islam in "peril."³⁴

Gandhiji tried to convince the Trustees of the college and assure them to build up a "larger, nobler and purer Aligarh that would carry out the inner most wishes of its founder without destroying its soul but by changing its form."³⁵ The Board of Trustees rejected the nationalist demands by 2/3rd majority, and to run the institution on the principles of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the founder.³⁶ The Liberals even do not give up the hope and continue their fight for the control of the institution and they managed to gain the support of about 1/3rd of the students and started an 'independent Muslim National University' under the nomenclature of Jamia Millia Islamia, at Aligarh on 29th October 1920.³⁷

Gandhiji addressing the parents of the Aligarh College said-".....the time has come for every young men and young women in this country to make their choice between duty to God and duty to others..... I have myself appealed to thousands of parents at scores of meetings at which hardly a parent has objected to the proposition of leaving Government controlled schools. Indeed they have with wonderful unanimity passed resolutions on non-cooperation including the item on schools. I therefore take leave to think that the parents of the Aligarh boys are no less convinced than the others of the necessity of withdrawing their children from schools and colleges supported or

controlled by Government that has participated in betraying the Mussalmans in India and has want only humiliated the nation through its barbarous treatment of the Punjab.³⁸ Worried about the fate of the University, the Trustees wrote to Hon'ble Secretary to protect the funds.³⁹ To counter the influence of the nationalist, the Government speeded up the implementation of the AMU Act and finally on December 1st 1920, the Act XL of AMU came into existence.⁴⁰

Aims of the Study

This paper deals with the impact of Non-Cooperation movement on educational institutions. Particularly dealing with the Aligarh College. This paper clearly highlight the facts of national fervor despite the fact that the "loyalist lobby" of Aligarians stood against Mahatma Gandhi and his programme of Non – cooperation movement. But the students of Aligarh College played a vital role in progress of national movement

Conclusion

Despite so many hurdles in the way of the non-cooperation movement, the students of the Aligarh College played a vital role in the progress of the national movement.

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Endnotes

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2. Bose Subash Chandra; *The Indian Struggle 1920-1942*, p.37-38
3. *Young India-31st December 1919*.
4. Bamford P.C, *Histories of Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movement*, p.1.
5. Bose S.C, *The Indian Struggle*, pp.37-38.
6. *Police Department*, File No. 16/9/1920., U.P.S.A, Lucknow- Swaraj Sabha is a place in Allahabad associated with non-cooperation movement. Attended by 25000 persons including 1000 villagers and number of students. The speakers were Gandhiji, Abul Kalam, Shaukat Ali, Wedgewood and Motilal Nehru. Gandhiji talked about Satanic Government, and the duty of non-cooperation; he repeated his promise of swarajya within year if all would accept his proposal. Report, K.W Knox, Chief Secretary, dated 28.11.1920. *Police Department File No., 16/14/1920*. U.P.S.A.
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17. Ahmad Aijaz, *Aligarh Muslim University*, op.cit, p. 94.
18. Ahmad Aijaz, *Aligarh Muslim University*, op.cit, p.95.
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26. Notes-Political-A, November 1920, Nos.273-274,p.7.
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