



ROLE OF THE NATIONALIST MUSLIMS IN THE NON-CO-OPERATION MOVEMENT IN CACHAR (1920-22)

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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Abstract

The colonial rule in Indian sub-continent was begun with the acquisition of Bengal by the English East India Company in 1757. Gradually, the whole of India was annexed by the English within the 1st century of their rule in India. But the attempt of the Indian to drive out the British from India was also started since the beginning of their rule in India. The first countrywide uprising against the English was observed in the rebellion of 1857. After the failure of the revolt of 1857, apart from swadeshi movement in 1906, the next mass movement of the Indian was the non-co-operation movement against the British Government of India that took place after the first world war in 1920. The khilafat non-co-operation movement was started in India under the prominent leaders like M.K. Gandhi, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Motilal Nehru, Mohammad Ali, Saukat Ali and others. The paper is an attempt to find out the role of the nationalist Muslims of Cachar in Assam in this historic movement, which had touched the every Indian and inaugurated a new era of constitutional politics in India.

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Introduction

The non-cooperation movement was the first organized struggle of the Indians after the uprising of 1857, which shook the pillars of the British Raj in India. It was the sporadic outcome of the great discontent of the Indian on the issue of the Rawlat Act, Jallianwala Bagh massacre, Martial law in Punjab and the dismemberment of Caliphate in Turkey.¹ India helped the Great Britain, in their war efforts by providing its soldiers and war materials during the first world war (1914-18), with a view to achieve maximum constitutional benefits after the war was over. But India received the Rawlat Act, Jallianwala Bagh tragedy etc. in the end of the war. All these brought about a dramatic change in the political situation of India, which became further surcharged with the Khilafat issue. The Government of England among other things assured the Indians during the war that Caliphate in Turkey would not be dissolved and its territorial position would remain undisturbed. But after the war, they cut Turkey into pieces and dismembered the Caliphate system. All these extremely dissatisfied the Indian and the Muslims in particular for abolishing the Caliphate system, as the Caliph was regarded the custodian of Islamic law. So, the prominent Muslim leaders of India like Moulana Mohammad Ali, Moulana Abdul Bari, Moulana Sawkat Ali, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Moulana Abul Kalam Azad and others formed All India Khilafat Committee in a conference held at Delhi in November 1919. The All India Khilafat Committee, as per the suggestion of M.K. Gandhi, adopted the resolution of Torke-e-Muallath i.e., non-co-operation against the British Government of India in its Allahabad session held on June 1920.² Meanwhile, many ulemas of national repute like Maulana Kefayatullah, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Maulana Abdul Bari, Maulana Habibur Rahman and others formed All India Jamiat Ulama Hind in 1919. The All India Congress Committee also met in May 1920 to discuss the issue of non-co-operation. But many Congress stalwarts like M. Ali Jinnah, C.R. Das and others were against the transformation of Congress policy from constitutional means to destructive means to attain the aims of Congress. The Indian National Congress, however, finally agreed to launch the non-co-operation movement against the British in its Nagpur session held on December, 1920. It was launched for placing three demands like Khilafat issue, redresses of Punjab wrongs, and the attainment of Swaraj. Gandhi declared at Nagpur "The British people will have to be aware, that if they do not want to do justice, it will be the bounden duty of every Indian to destroy the empire." Almost all the Congress leaders but Mohammed Ali Jinnah finally supported the policy of non-co-operation of Gandhi. The non-co-operation movement had both constructive and destructive programmes.

The constructive programme includes (a) large scale popularization of Charka, Khadi and Swadeshi goods. (b) foundation of national schools and colleges, where the students who left government schools and colleges could admit themselves to continue their study. (c) establishment of arbitrary courts for solving the problems locally. (d) formation of Volunteer Corps to make the non-co-operation movement a successful one. While the destructive programme included (a) boycott of foreign goods, cloths and shops. (b) refuse to attend in all kinds of official and non-official function of the government. (c) surrender of honorary titles, honourary offices etc. (d) resign from government offices, schools and colleges. (e) boycott of British law courts and administration to defunct the administrative machinery of the state. (f) boycott of election to the ensuing legislative council both by candidate and voters. Hitherto, the Congress had scrupulously avoided direct involvement in religious matter. But M.K. Gandhi felt that the movement gave an opportunity to unite the Muslims and Hindus that might not come again for a hundred years. He wrote that the Congress plea for Hindu- Muslim unity "would be an empty phrase if the Hindus keep aloof from the Muslims when their vital interest were at stake." The Muslim League which was then under the control of the nationalist Muslims, gave full support to the non-co-operation programme started by Jamiat, Khilafat and Congress leaders.

Khilafat and non-co-operation movement in Cachar

The non-co-operation movement had its tremendous response in different parts of India. In Assam also, it was led by Gopinath Bordoloi, N.C. Bordoloi, T.R. Phukan, Sir Sayeed Mohammed Saadullah, Mohammed Tayeebullah and others. In Cachar, a district of Assam, the Khilafat-non-co-operation movement evoked an unprecedented response throughout the different parts of the district. The people, belonging to different communities jointly carried the movement. The prominent personalities who organised the movement in Cachar were Sufi Mahmud Ali (Madhurbond), Tabarak Ali Barlaskar (Udharbond), Basarat Ali Mazumder (Kanakpur), Sajid Raja Mazumder (Bhaga). These leaders in their respective areas organised meetings to awaken the people against the exploitation, oppression and misrule of the British Raj. They tried to popularize the Khadi cloths and the use of other domestic goods and the boycotting of foreign cloths and goods. The Khilafat and non-co-operation movement had received tremendous response among the people of both rural and urban areas of Cachar. The Khilafat offices were set up in different parts of rural areas. In Silchar, Sufi Mahmud Ali, Basarat Ali Mazumder (Kanakpur), Tabarak Ali Barlaskar (Udharbond), Ambar Ali Laskar (Dayapur), Munshi Mansur Ali (Srikona), Gulam Rasul Laskar (Salchapra), Rahmatullah (Surthera), Hazi Abdus Sattar Mazumder (Hatirhar), Abdul Mia Mazumder (Dudpatil), Hazi Adan Mia (Ramnagar), Qudir Mia (Malugram), Gulezar Ali Mazumder (Dudpathil), Mohim Chandra Biswas, Dr. Nagendra Nath Dutta, Din Nath Dutta, Ganga Dayal Dikshit, Ashok Kumar Chanda, Satindra Mohan Dev, and others organised the movement. The house of Sufi Mahmud Ali of Madhurbond, Silchar was symbolized as the headquarter of the movement.³

The activists of the distant areas had close link with Madhurbond Khilafat Head Office. The Khilafat non-co-operation leaders met together at Madhurbond and the programme of mass struggle was circulated from there. The office had very active role not only being the central office of Cachar in regulating the activities of the agitators, but also it had the provision of fooding and lodging free of cost. It also served as an unarmed training institute to qualify and train its workers and to make them fit enough for the ongoing political struggle for independence. Consequently, a good number of trained activists emerged in different parts of the district and numerous mass meetings were organised in many areas of the district. The meetings witnessed strong promises like boycott of British goods, cloths, institutions, resignation from Government bodies and abstain from voting of the Council elections.

In Sonai, Formuz Ali, Masad Ali, Ambar Ali, Dr. Azir Uddin (Kazidahar) Siraj Uddin Choudhry (Bouri), Sajid Mia Barbhuiya (Sangurtal), Irfan Ali Laskar (Bashartal), Mohamed Tuti Raja (Mazirgram), Moulana Mohsin Ali (Zanzarabali), Abdur Rashid Barbhuiya (Kazidahar), Abdul Khaliq Barbhuiya (Amjurghat), Sajid Ali Khalifa (Kachudaram), Abdus Samad Laskar (Rajghat), Furkan Ali Laskar (Nairgram, Sonabarighat), Idar Ali Laskar (Nairgram) took active part in the non-co-operation movement.⁴ In Bhaga, Sajid Raja Mazumder, Munshi Masad Ali, Mahmat Ali, Hazi Hasan Mia (Dholai), Hasan Ali Barbhuiya (Saptagram), Yakub Ali (Saptagram), Moulana Basir Uddin (Bhaga), Moulana Formuz Ali (Dolai) and others inspired the local people to purchase the swadeshi goods and boycott the symbol of white administration.⁵ In Jatrapur, Munshi Abbas Ali (Kalain), Irman Ali Barbhuiya (Borkhola), Mubarak Ali Barlaskar (Durgapur), Mazibur Rahman Barbhuiya (Borkhola), Moulana Umed Ali (Buribail), Moulana Makaddas Ali (Buribail) and others were active non-co-operators and instigated student to boycott schools and madrassas.⁶ In Joynagar, Nur Mohammed Muktar, Jaifor Ali (Dubagh), Sikandar Ali (Joynagar), Azfor Ali (Dubagh), Ibrahim Ali (Dubagh), Wazed Ali (Joynagar), Aatur Ali (Joynagar), Rahman Ali, Hamid Ali, Usman Ali (Tupkhana), Rejan Ali (Jatrapur) and others organised non-co-operation meeting in their local area.⁷ In Kalain, Abbas Ali, Rashid Ali, Munshi Arzan Ali, Insab Ali, Anjib Ali and others asked the people not to attend Kalain T.E. Market and advised them not to sell food stuff to tea garden labourers. They were sentenced to jail on 31st March, 1922.⁸ In Katigorah, Maulana Fayeze Ahmed Choudhury (Harinagar), Hazi Suraz Ali (Sibnarayanpur), Abdul Hoque Laskar (Razatila), Munshi Abbas Ali (Dumkar, Katigorah), Hazi Khadim Nisar Ali (Katigorah), Ambar Ali (Haritikar) organised Khilafat-non-co-operation meetings in their locality.⁹

In Banskandi, Moulana Ilias Ali, Moulana Nur Ali, Mohsin Ali, Ibrahim Ali (Ujantarapur), Moulana Abdur Rahman, Moulana Hamid Raja (Ujantarapur), Hafiz Ali (Safarmoina), Hazi Abdul Hamid (Safarmoina), Tuti Raja Laskar (Safarmoina), Mohamed Raja (Safarmoina), Abdur Rahim (Ujantarapur), Haydar Ali (Ujantarapur), Mofiz Ali (Ujantarapur) participated in the non-co-operation movement and appealed to the people to boycott the schools and madrassas and foreign goods.¹⁰ In Lakhipur, Kutub Ali Mia, Hussain Ali (Fulertal), Mubeshwar Ali, Samer Ali, Sabar Ali, Md. Wazed Ali, Hamid Uddin, Hazi Moin Uddin, Jahir Uddin, Karim Uddin organised khilafat non-co-operation meetings and urged the people not to send their sons to the British schools.¹¹ In Hailakandi, Umar Ali, Moulana Habibur Rahman, Monuhar Ali, Montaz Ali, Mudaris Ali Choudhury (Ratanpur),

Mohamed Ali Mazumder (Kalibari Bazar), Abdul Hakim (Matijuri) and others urged the people to non-co-operate with the British Government.¹² In Katlichera, Mazraf Ali, Abdul Latif Laskar, Moulana Mohsin Ali, Mahmed Saman, Masaraf Ali Choudhury, Abdur Rahman Choudhury, Musabbir Ali Barbhuiya (Baurghat), Abdul Wazed Choudhury, Arzad Ali Laskar and others organised non-co-operation meetings and appealed to the people to boycott the foreign goods.¹³ Consequently, the bulk of voters remained aloof from taking part in the Legislative Council election. Many members of Silchar Bar Council like K. C. Dev and others boycotted their legal practice while others surrendered government titles. The student of different educational institutions of Silchar boycotted their classes. The guardian also denied to send their sons to such Government educational institutions.¹⁴

Rejuvenation of the khilafat-non-co-operation movement

It was with a view to accelerate the movement, a group of ulemas and Khilafat volunteers including Moulana Sakawatul Ambia, Karimuzzaman, Abu Sayeed, Anjir Ali and others of Sylhet district toured Cachar and went down to different rural areas like Sonai, Bagha, Lakhipur, Buribail, Banskandi, of Cachar. They undertook a number of meetings and even paraded the main streets of Silchar along with the Khilafat activist and boys of different schools. On 24th January 1921, a meeting was held in front of Commissioner's Bungalow in Silchar by the boys of both Government High School and Narsing High School. The meeting resolved to boycott the Government institutions. On 25th January 1921, accordingly, about 100 boys of Government High School and Narsing High School went out and paraded the main streets of the town with slogans like Hindu-Muslim Ki Joy, Bande Mataram etc. The anti-British movement went to more aggressive with the visit of M.K. Gandhi, Mohammed Ali and others in Silchar. M.K. Gandhi, and Moulana Mohammed Ali came to Silchar on 26 August 1921, and stayed in Chanda Bhawan as the guest of Kamini Kumar Chanda. M. Ali addressed a public meeting attended by 10,000 people at Fatak Bazar, Silchar. They urged the people to boycott the British goods, resign from government institutions and to maintain Hindu-Muslim unity etc. Thousands of people took oath in front of Gandhi and M. Ali that they would not wear foreign cloths and sell British goods henceforth. Later on, the mob at Fatak Bazar organised bonfire of foreign cloths in the presence of national leaders amidst shouting slogans like Gandhiji ki joy, Ali Baiya ki joy, Hindu Muslim bai bai etc. Begum M. Ali also addressed a woman's meeting at Theatre Hall.¹⁵ Many nationalist Muslim leaders of Cachar like Sufi Mahmud Ali, Tabarak Ali Barlaskar, Basarat Ali Mazumder, Sajid Raja Mazumder organised meetings in different parts of Cachar. In Cachar also, the effect of the Calcutta College strike was observed. Bonfires of foreign cloths were made in various parts of Cachar such as Srikona, Jaynagar, Jatrapur, Lakhipur, Sonai etc.¹⁶ Many charkas were setup in the houses of many Congress Khilafat workers of rural areas of Cachar to prepare Khadi cloths and caps. Noor Mohammed Muktar (Jaynagar) Gulam Jinari Choudhury, Abdul Mia Mazumder (Dudpahil) Hazi Adon Mia (Ram Nagar), Arman Ali Mazumder (Kanakpur) and Kalaraja Barbhuiya, Mufiz Ali, Abid Raja from Hailakandi took part in the fourth session of Surma Valley National Conference held at Karimganj in March 1920. Many nationalist Muslims like Sajid Raja Mazumder, Tabarak Ali Barlaskar, Munshi Gulam Rabbani, Jaifor Ali, Azfor Ali, Basarat Ali Mazumder, Gulazor Ali Mazumder, Moulana Usma Ali and others were sentenced to jail for different periods.

It was a period of great stress and strain for the Silchar Government H. S. School. The countrywide agitation created revolutionary feelings among the students. The national leaders described the Silchar Government H.S. school as "Gulami Khana" and asked the boys to leave it. Consequently, many boys of Silchar Government School left the school and joined the movement. The sharp fall in number in the rolls was 515 in 1919-20; 428 in 1920-21, 367 in 1921-1922, 357 in 1922-23 and 376 in 1923-24. The sharp fall of the student in the school register was to some extent due to the expulsion of 76 boys for their active participation in the Khilafat-non-cooperation movement.¹⁷ The enrolment of Muslim boys was seriously affected by the non-co-operation movement. On 31st March, 1922, the number of Muslim boys in the roll was only 64 against 99 in the previous year. That year six Muslim boys took admission as against 28 in the preceding year.¹⁸

The Buribail Tragedy

The most tragic incident happened at Buribail in the western part of Silchar. Being inspired by the speeches of Gandhi and M. Ali, the inhabitants of Buribail started protest movement in 1922. On March 22nd 1922, a khilafat-non-co-operation conference was held at Buribail, which was attended by people from different parts of Surma valley. Among the prominent leaders who attended the conference were Moulana Abdul Mussabbir Choudhury from Sylhet, Moulana Ibrahim Ali of Jaintia, S. K. Das, S. M. Dev and others. Speeches were delivered mostly on the boycott of British goods, schools and the courts. Mr. Walker, the Deputy Commissioner of Cachar arrived with a dozen of Gurkha soldiers with fifty police force under Sub-Inspector, Vinod Gupta. The mob was dispersed by the police and they were kept in a nearby L.P. School and 49 No. Model School. Mr. Walker scolded the freedom mongers with slang words like "Sale Suarka Bacha log, Swaraj Kaha" i.e. son of pigs, where is freedom! The Gurkha soldiers then tortured the non-co-operators with their guns. Many non-co-operators like Moulana Umed Ali, Khursed Ali, Abdul Hamid Barlaskar, Hatim Mia Barbhuiya, Hasim Ali, Abdul Rahman, Munsir Mubarak Ali, Jila Mia Barbhuiya, Akbar Mia Barbhuiya, Gulam Mastufa and others were fined and it started from rupees eleven to rupees eighty-eight. The fine collected from the poor cultivators rose to ten thousand within a short span of three hours. Moulana Umad Ali, Kurshed Ali, Mubarak Ali, Hamid Ali, Zila Mia, Hatim Mia and others were sentenced to jail in the evening.¹⁹

So, the 22nd March, 1922 is known to the people of Buribail as 'Historic 22nd March'. The most inhuman treatment and punishment meted out to the freedom mongers left a terrible impact in the area for a long time. The British atrocities were severely criticized and condemned by the press stating that it was an inhuman and barbaric on the part of the rulers. It was stated that about 400 people were sentenced to jail in Cachar in connection with the khilafath non-co-operation movement and among

them almost eighty percent were Muslims. The participation of the nationalist Muslims in the non-co-operation movement could be realized on the formation of Khilafat Volunteer Force. The Khilafat Volunteer Force was formed everywhere in India. In Cachar also, (including Hailakandi) it was formed with the initiative of Congress-Jamiat-Khilafat leaders. It was stated that the number of Muslims in the Khilafat Volunteer Force was 82,000 out of 90,000 of total activist.²⁰ Shri Ashok Kumar Chanda (Silchar), Shri Satindra Mohan Dev (Silchar), and Gulejar Ali Mazumder (Dudpatil), were made Captain, Vice-Captain and Secretary of the Volunteer Force respectively. Moulana Alim Uddin, Hamidur Raja (Lakhipur) Moulavi Kursed Ali (Jatrapur), Munshi Masad Ali were entrusted to work as the organizers of the volunteer force in the rural areas.²¹

Conclusion

The non-co-operation movement occupied a significant place in the history of India's freedom struggle against the colonial rulers of India. The movement was led by many Indian intellectuals, educationists, industrialist and participated by all the classes of the Indian society irrespective of religions, caste, creed etc. The movement had evoked an unprecedented response throughout the country. The main weapon used against the government was boycott of legislation, law courts and educational institutions. Numerous students and teachers had sacrificed their bright prospects by leaving their studies and jobs respectively. Though the movement was called off by M.K. Gandhi due to the inclusion of some violence in the movement, a decision which was not appreciated by many Congress and non-Congress leaders. Nevertheless, the movement had usured a new era of democratic movement against the colonial rulers, which undoubtedly paved the way towards the great struggle for freedom in future.

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Notes:

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20. *Ibid*.

21. *Ibid*

* Hurmat Ali Barlaskar was a freedom fighter and senior journalist of Surma Valley. He was the editor of *Surma* (a leading newspaper of the Valley) in 1949, *Azad*, *Cachar Samachar* (newspaper) etc in post-independent period. In all his papers, he vividly described the different phases of freedom struggle of India and the role of Cachar, Karimganj and Assam. He was also one of the members of the Enquiry Committee of Freedom Fighters of Assam, which was formed by the Govt. of Assam. The Report of the Enquiry Committee of Freedom Fighters was published in 1979 by the Govt. of Assam.

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