

**ROLE OF QUR'ANIC INTERPRETATION IN THE SOCIAL  
MOBILIZATION DURING INDIA'S STRUGGLE  
FOR INDEPENDENCE**

- Mubashir V.P.

**Abstract**

*Throughout the history, Quran has served as an inspiration for the people to embark on the social transformation through massive social mobilization. All bygone sects in the Islamic history have somehow tactically used the Qur'anic interpretations to justify their movements and appeal to the people for the unwavering support. Arberr traces the revolutionary background of Quran to its unrivalled authority among the laity and the general scholarly stipulation for the firm adherence to the Qur'anic teachings. In the colonial era, freedom fighters of different Muslim nations like Umer Mukhtar and Abdul Qadir Jaza'ri have taken recourse to Qur'anic teachings to drive home the importance of holy war among the masses. The Indian war for independence in which Muslims ardently participated was not an exception. The war for the independence of India assumed paramount significance among the Muslims as they waged the war for the restoration of the lost glory of Islamic rule. Leaders with different affiliations used the Qur'anic interpretation to draw the people to their movements. Hasrat Mohani and Azad from the Congress, scholars from the Deobandi, Barelwi and Ahle Hadeeth and even the proponents of the partition advocated their idea through the loose interpretation of the Quran. This paper presents in-depth study about the various discourses of Qur'anic interpretations of Indo-Pak scholars during the war for the independence from various spectrums.*

***Keywords:** Qur'anic interpretation, freedom movement, Muslim scholars, Indian subcontinent*

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## Introduction

Enlightenment and the subsequent renaissance in Europe prompted the western emerging powers to embark on global colonization mission. Portugal and Spanish forces were the forerunners among the European powers who set out to Africa and Asia exploring their fortunes. In 1498, Vasco de Gama scripted a new history when he successfully blazed the sea trail to Indian subcontinent and for the first time hoisted the flag of European colonialism in Indian soil. The advent of Portuguese power to the Indian soil and the whopping amount of profits they accumulated lured the Dutch and British powers to navigate their sails towards the charming Indian subcontinent. Disguised as ambitious trade entrepreneurs, the entrance of these alien powers spawned various troubles in India and ultimately the encounters of the local people against the colonial forces turned gorier.

Native people of India opposed tooth and nail the colonial subjugation that wreaked havoc over their economic welfare and posed potential threat to the religious and the cultural practices of local people. Various struggles against the colonial oppression bear witness to the reality of people being united, without least consideration for their religious and ethnic affiliations, against the common grievance of infringing the freedom of the nation. Muslims, as noted by K.N Panikkar, was in the vanguard in the struggles against the colonial powers due to their aversion against the Christian west and the rise of west challenged mercantile supremacy enjoyed by Muslims in Mediterranean Sea.

Muslims of India relentlessly vied to overthrow the colonial administration and, hence, staged bloody rebellions against the rule of colonial forces. Muslims proved to be detrimental force for the rapid expansion of colonialism in India, while other communities came to terms with western masters in due course of time. The zeal to secure religious rights in the country they reside, Muslims, guided by the revolutionary precepts of Qur'an, rose in rebellions and mutinies against the alien oppressors. The timely broad interpretation of Qur'an by the erudite scholars stirred the Muslim community to take resort to violence in their hope to retard the growth of colonial powers. This paper analyzes the role of Qur'anic interpretation in the social mobilization of Muslims against the British *raj*.

### **Arrival of British Traders**

Indian trade links with Europe started in through sea route only after the arrival of Vasco de Gama in Calicut, India on May 20, 1498. The Portuguese had traded in Goa as early as 1510, and later founded three other colonies on the west coast in Diu, Bassein, and Mangalore. In 1601 the East India Company was chartered, and the English began their first inroads into the Indian Ocean. At first they were little interested in India, but rather, like the Portuguese and Dutch before them, they were engaged in trades with the Spice Islands. But, the English were unable to dislodge the Dutch from Spice Islands and the war for supremacy ensued. In 1610, the British chased away a Portuguese naval squadron, and the East India Company created its own outpost at Surat. This small outpost marked the beginning of a remarkable presence that would last over 300 years and eventually dominate the entire subcontinent. In 1612 British established a trading post in Gujarat. As a result of English disappointments with dislodging the Dutch from the Spice Islands, they turned instead to India.

In 1614 Sir Thomas Roe was instructed by James I to visit the court of Jahangir, the Mughal emperor of Hindustan. Sir Thomas was to arrange a commercial treaty and to secure for the East India Company sites for commercial agencies, or "factories" as they were called. Sir Thomas was successful in getting permission from Jahangir for setting up factories. East India Company set up factories at Ahmadabad, Broach and Agra. In 1640 East India Company established an outpost at Madras. In 1661 the company obtained Bombay from Charles II and converted it to a flourishing centre of trade by 1668. English settlements rose in Orissa and Bengal. In 1633, in the Mahanadi delta of Hariharpur at Balasore in Orissa, factories were set up. In 1650 Gabriel Boughton an employee of the Company obtained a license for trade in Bengal. An English factory was set up in 1651 at Hugli. In 1690 Job Charnock established a factory. In 1698 the factory was fortified and called Fort William. The villages of Sutanati, Kalikata and Gobindpore were developed into a single area called Calcutta. Calcutta became a trading centre for East India Company. Once in India, the British began to compete with the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the French. Through a combination of

outright combat and deft alliances with local princes, the East India Company gained control of all European trade in India by 1769. In 1672 the French established themselves at Pondicherry and stage was set for a rivalry between the British and French for control of Indian trade.

Gradually, British merchants began to interfere with state affairs and the day-to-day activities of local politics, under the garb of making the business more convenient. Taking advantage of the seething feuds among the ruling dynasties, financial bankruptcy of government coffers and the religious factionalism, crooked British machinery struggled hard to get a firm foothold in India. The shouldering antagonism of Indian rulers against the foul play of British festered and got the expression through the battle of Plassey waged between British general Robert Clive and Bengal Nawab Siraj-ud-Doula. On June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1757 at Plassey, between Calcutta and Murshidabad, the forces of the East India Company under Robert Clive met the army of Siraj-ud-Doula, the Nawab of Bengal. Clive had 800 Europeans and 2200 Indians whereas Siraj-ud-doula in his entrenched camp at Plassey was said to have about 50,000 men with a train of heavy artillery. The aspirant to the Nawab's throne, Mir Jafar was induced to throw in his lot with Clive, and by far the greater numbers of the Nawab's soldiers were bribed to throw away their weapons, surrender prematurely, and even turn their arms against their own army. Siraj-ud-Doula was defeated. Battle of Plassey marked the first major military success for British East India Company.

### **India Under The British Queen**

Emboldened by the thumping victory secured by British army, British East India Company resorted to various betrayals to get monopoly over Indian market and supremacy over Indian administration. Frustrated Indian people defied the British dictates in various parts of country, thus challenging the British ambitions for the time being. Bengal Presidency continued to enjoy the notoriety as the epicentre of freedom movement and Muslims as staunch rivals to British authority. In 1857, northern India virtually engulfed in anti-British agitation and reinstalled the erstwhile Mughal administration in India after British forces abruptly failed to douse the raging fire of freedom movement. The popular mass uprising or

first war of Indian independence, as called many historians, was the natural result of British imperialist policies that perceived India as milchcow in economic exploitation and the interference in religious affairs struck a raw nerve of the local people. After the 1856 rebellion British East India Company was disbanded and India came under the direct administration of British queen.

Called the "Proclamation Durbar", the Durbar of 1877 was held beginning on 1 January 1877 to designate the coronation and proclaim Queen Victoria as Empress of India. The 1877 Durbar was largely an official event and not a popular occasion with mass appeal like 1903 and 1911. It was attended by the 1st Earl of Lytton - Viceroy of India, Maharajas, Nawabs and intellectuals. This was the culmination of transfer of control of much of India from the British East India Company to The Crown. The Durbar was the beginning of a great transformation for India where the campaign for a free India was formally launched. India recalcitrantly continued under the rule of the crown until she achieved her freedom in 1947.

### **Muslim Response Towards British**

The book written by Thomas .P. Hardy gives in-depth analysis over the chequered relation of Muslims had with British in various course of time. Rather than reaching a sweeping generalization, prudent would be to weigh the various approach of Muslim of community according to the relevant social condition. Ever since colonial powers made inroads into the India, no consensus existed among the scholars and they stood divided on many issues like paying of tax to government, cooperation with the infidels, and establishment of Dar-ul-Islam and so on. So was the case of Muslim stance against British and they adopted political and religious positions expedient to the changing complex social conditions. However, Muslim relation with the British, according to Hardy, could be classified into major four stages.<sup>1</sup>

- Before the 1857 mutiny, Muslims altogether abhorred the British for disrupting the Islamic rule in various parts of the country.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas .P. Hardy, *Muslim Response Towards British*, Oxford, pp 53-67

- After 1857 educated Muslim intelligentsia coming to terms with British reformative policies like modern scientific education.
- Liberal and orthodox Muslim scholars join hands with congress against British policies towards Ottoman Khilafat, in the wake of latter's defeat in world war first.
- Growing rapport of Muslim community towards British policies and the evolution of two state theories.

### **Qur'an And The Social Mobilization Process**

Post-colonial historians of Muslim world have strikingly characterized the adherents of Islam as agents of change in the localities they dwell, either through intellectual debates or through physical violence. The pattern of Muslim anti-colonial resistance from Africa to Middle East asserts the revolutionary nature of Islamic faith when their religious existence is seemed endangered by the Christians and Jews, historical arch-rivals of Islam. The religious susceptibility of Muslims is a hot subject among the academicians as they explore the staunch loyalty of Muslims of towards their religious cause and often attribute the zeal to court martyrdom to the tremendous rewards promised if one sacrificed his life for the sake of god.

Various elements drew the Muslim folks to take arms against the rivals and eventually shed the life in the cause of Allah the Almighty. In the book *Against Lord And State* which gives an extensive study over the uprisings of Malabar Muslims against the British forces, author K.N Panikkar traces the rebellious fervour of Muslims into various factors; immunity enjoyed by holy Qur'an and the prophetic Sunna, reverence to the Sufi saints and the martyrs, unflinching loyalty towards the scholars and the abundance of literary works in the form of ballads, speeches and folklores were the major sources that ignited the Muslims against British. The ill-equipped companions of prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) who accompanied him to the gruesome battlefield of Badr, the maiden war in the history of Islam, were stirred by the dictates of Qur'an to take on the formidable prowess of Makkan aristocracy. According to the Thomas Arnold, the verses in the Qur'an that signify moral battle between

Muslims and infidels are of importance in the history of Islamic conquests and the fact that Muslims voluntarily joined the forces fighting the unbelievers substantiates the augment of the historian.

Throughout the centuries, Qur'an enjoyed and will enjoy the status of a sole religious book poised to create troubles for the unjust colonial rulers, a fact relayed by various British government appointed committees to look into the causes of Muslims rebellions. Hence, after the breakout of first war of independence in 1857 British government ordered the seizure of the holy texts in the fear of rebellion blowing out of the conditions as these texts, according to British correspondence, spewed venomous hatred against the administration and the feudal institution that props up the injustice. The influence of Qur'an and its interpretations over the Muslims is not a fact exclusively belonged to India contexts, but is a globally perceived phenomenon wherever Muslims encountered the colonial forces.

Many historians have discussed the paramount significance of Qur'an behind the social mobilization of Muslim communities. All the discussions could be summarized as follows:

1. The supremacy enjoyed by the Qur'an among the masses as the lone fool proof divine revelation of god that exists to date without even minor abrogation
2. The wide currency of Qur'an among the people in written form because according to a layman religious education meant to acquire the ability to recite Qur'an, except for the other mandatory knowledge.
3. The inherent revolutionary teachings of Qur'an and the scholars' perception of Qur'an as a catalyst of positive change
4. Sacredness of Qur'an among all factions: although a great deal of divisions and disputes could be found among the people of various factions, the Qur'an in its scriptural form is identical to all, unlike any other sources of legislation in Islam.

The positions that the *ulama* took on the various issues took the form of juristic opinions or fatwas, mostly issued in response to questions raised by Muslims wanting to follow the religiously correct course of action, or were embedded in *shuruh* of the Qur'an and

Hadith. Muhammad Qasim Zaman describes commentaries as follows: “The discursive form of the commentary was, in fact, one of the principle means (the other was the fatwa) through which the law was not only elaborated but also expanded and modified to meet the exigencies of changing times. Commentaries allowed scholars to preserve the identity and authority of their school of law, their legal tradition, while simultaneously providing them with the means to make sometimes important adjustments in that tradition”<sup>2</sup>.

### **Faraizi Movement of Bengal**

The Faraizi movement fanned out through Bengal and Orissa is considered forerunner to the well-knit mass religious rebellions of nineteenth and twentieth century. India succumbed to anarchy towards the close of eighteenth century. Taking advantage of the chaos and the vacuum caused by the fall of central authority the British vied to carve out a place for themselves, which they retained for more than a century. Superior techniques and adept diplomacy further gave British an upper hand and in league with the indigenous states and rebellious princes, they came into prominence and emerged victorious. Meanwhile, the delicate relation of British government with the various ethnic and religious communities got deteriorated and the later decades witnessed grave battle between the oppressive administration and the people.

The Faraizi movement was founded by Pir Shariatullah(1781-1840) of Faridpur who preached a revolutionary religious dogma against the British in 1804. The Faraizi Movement of Bengal was the first organized Islamic movement in British India.<sup>3</sup> It would seem that initially this movement was a purely religious reform movement. As far the teachings of Haji Shariatullaah and his disciples are concerned, they did not deviate from the accepted beliefs of Islam and that could not be even imagined that they established a new creed by any stretch of imagination. They vociferously advocated the purging of unislamic practices that were inducted into the code of religious worship due to the internalization of indigenous customs.

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<sup>2</sup>Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama In Contemporary Islam Custodians Of Change*, Princeton University Press, p 57

<sup>3</sup>Shan Muhammed, *Muslims and India's Freedom Movement*, Institute of Objective Studies, Delhi, p 6-8

But, the Faraizis could not remain indifferent to the economic exploitation and miserable plight of the people among whom they were working and whom they sought to reform. As a result, they found themselves entangled in combating the economic exploitation of the helpless peasantry by the Zamindars and indigo-planters and this imparted to their movement an-anti-British character and ultimately it become one of the distinctive features of the movement.<sup>4</sup>

Those spearheaded the movement had outstanding mastery over Islamic disciplines and hence they wielded unrivalled esteem the rank and file. They tactically invoked the Qur'anic interpretation to mobilize the people into rebellion against British and in the unmatched authority of divine book they perceived the potential to consolidate the fragmented *umma* on a common course.<sup>5</sup> People were instilled with the craze to fight against the tyrannical administration and unequivocally stated their political pursuits were apparently the replacement of British hegemony by the establishment of an Islamic state rooted in the revelations of Holy Qur'an. The revolutionary interpretation of Qur'an was conveyed through the rabble-rousing speeches that were delivered by eminent Faraizi leaders. Thanks to the tradition of oral transmission, the compilations of these interpretations are non-existent to the date, save some historical documents of British official correspondence.

That the Faraizis were patriots and made matchless sacrifices for their motherland is undisputed. Inspired by the Qur'anic clarion calls thousands of oppressed peasants rose like a man against feudallords and British planters and for many successive years jeopardized the very existence of British establishment in north-eastern parts of India. They were passive freedom fighters.<sup>6</sup> After initial emphatic success, British harshly repelled the fighters, leaving a massive trail of destruction behind. British army, benevolently aided by feudal lords,

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<sup>4</sup> Narendra Krishna Sinha, (ed) *History of Bengal (1757-1905)*, Calcutta University, Calcutta, 1967, pp 188-200, W C Smith, *On Understanding Islam, Selected Studies*, Harvard University, 1981, Delhi, Reprint-1085, p 209. The writer termed it as an "Islamic Movement"

<sup>5</sup> James Wise, *Notes on the Races, castes and Trades of Eastern Bengal*, London, 1883, p20; James Wise, *The Mohammanadan of Eastern Bengal. Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Calcutta. 1894, pp.46-47

<sup>6</sup> Qeyamuddin, *Wahabi Movement in India*, Calcutta, pp.90-96

conducted serial military raids in Faraizi dens which eventually expedited the premature death of the movement.

### **Khilafat Movement And The Willingness To Restore Islamic State**

As an offshoot to the British deception of Muslims when they mischievously disbanded the ottoman Khilafat after the overwhelming success in world war first, the Khilafat movement came into being. In the First World War, Britain and its allied groups won the war. During the War, Muslims supported the government with an understanding that the sacred places of Ottoman Empire would be in the hands of Khalipha. But after the War, a new treaty was imposed on the Turkish Sultan and Ottoman Empire was divided. This angered the Muslims who took it as an insult to the Khalipha. Shoukat Ali and Mohammad Ali started the Khilafat Movement against the British government. Later in an attempt to outreach to the Muslims congress under Gandhi took up the cause and kick started the non-cooperation movement along with it demanding the ouster of British *raj*.

This movement was deeply grounded in pan-Islamic ideals that stood for the reinstatement of Khilafat as a binding force of Muslim *umma*. Aggrieved over the maltreatment of Muslim's political supreme authority, the leaders of the community channelized the plights of trauma into an effective political tool to combat the evangelist nature of British. Muhammed Ali Jouhar, Shoukath Ali Jouhar, Abul Abul Kalam Azad, Deobandi scholars and Congress leadership threw their weight behind the movement, whereas All India Muslim League opposed it tooth and nail citing it may undermine the interests of Muslims in relation with the authority.<sup>7</sup> The agitation by Indian Muslims, allied with the nationalist movements is of paramount importance in Indian history because of its inter-religious hues and the debut performance of passive resistance<sup>8</sup> by national leaders, despite the fact that in some places the movement assumed violent character like in Malabar.

The scholars Of Jamiat-ul-Ulema, a body of ulama constituted to safeguard the religious interests of Muslims, were very instrumental behind the movement as they cited the

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<sup>7</sup> P.C.Bomford, *History of Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movements* (Delhi: Government of India Press, 1925), pp.110-121

<sup>8</sup> S.R Bakshi, *Gandhi And The Non-Cooperation Movement* (1920-1922) New Delhi, pp.148-150

Qur'anic verses and its political dimensions to drive home the importance of mass rebellion against perpetrators of betraying the global Muslims.<sup>9</sup> Its Bareilly session on March 28, 1921 and the resolutions moved helped the framing of the aims and the scope of the movement. On the basis of Qur'anic exegesis, it declared complete independence of India for the integrity and the immunity of Islamic Sharia'. Fifty leading Ulama belonging to all schools of thought attended it. The general trend of the speeches delivered was to foster the impression that the Christian powers had united against Islam and it was futile looking to the British government to protect the Islamic interests.

Certain passages of the Qur'an were quoted in corroboration of this approach. They were repeated in Shaukat Ali's statement on behalf of the Central Khilafat Committee in August 1920 when he wanted to clarify the position of the committee *vis-à-vis* the Hijrat movement<sup>10</sup>. In support of co-operation with Hindus, the following verses were quoted: 'Allah does not forbid you respecting those who have not made war against you on account of (your) religion, and have not driven you forth - from your homes, that you show them kindness and deal with them justly; surely Allah loves the doers of justice.'<sup>11</sup> In a similar vein, Ansari, in December 1920, quoted the Sura-i-Mumtahanah (60: 8-9) from the Qur'an to argue that Indian Muslims should behave righteously, affectionately and in a friendly manner towards all those non-Muslims who are neither at war with Muslims nor are they assailants intending to invade or occupy their territories<sup>12</sup>

These Qur'anic references had a profound impact on Muslim audiences. People felt compelled to join in non-co-operation under the sway of religious arguments which effectively silenced opposition to Hijrat. In his diary of 24 October 1920, Dr. Mohammad Shafi, a prominent Muslim politician from Lahore, noted a telling description of a meeting of local Muslim leaders which was convened at the Islamia College to pass a resolution of non-

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<sup>9</sup>Shan Muhammed, *Muslims and India's Freedom Movement*, Institute of Objective Studies, New Delhi, pp.136-138

<sup>10</sup> Many a scholars argued the migration from India into the neighboring Afghanistan, because the former ceased to be Darul Islam, for more information *Hijrat: The Flight of the Faithful A British File on the Exodus of Muslim Peasants from North India to Afghanistan in 1920* by Dietrich Reetz

<sup>11</sup>*The Muslim Outlook*, 12 August 1920, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

co-operation, to stop government grants to the local college and demand its disaffiliation from the government-founded university. Twin Ali brothers, Abul Kalam Aiaz and Gandhi had arrived to press for the meeting. Muhammad Ali made a speech and Azad delivered a sermon quoting references from the Qur'an, apparently similar to the ones mentioned above. He asserted that 'in the face of Qur'anic text, no Muslim could co-operate with British Government'. Shafi quoted participants saying that 'in the presence of the fatwa based on text of Qur'an nothing could be said by any one'.<sup>13</sup>

The contribution rendered by the *Shaykh al-Hind* Mahmud al-Hasan deserves special attention. He was a Deobandi scholar who enunciated firm position against the British and fervently active in encouraging Muslim students to join the movement. Hasan organised efforts to start an armed revolution against British rule from both within and outside India. He launched a programme to train volunteers from among his disciples in India and abroad who joined this movement in a large number.<sup>14</sup> As an erudite scholar in Islamic disciplines he co-authored called *Tafsir-e-USmani*, with Shabbir Ahmad Usmani in which he explicitly put forward the political concepts of Qur'an and exhorted the Muslims to garner under the hoist of Khilafat movement. Written in elegant Urdu language, he tried to popularize the jihad in vernacular language.<sup>15</sup> However, in the due course of the movement, it lost its public appeal and, importantly, communal tensions within the congress over supporting the Muslims came into the fore; eventually led to the fissures in Hindu Muslim unity. The movement was short-lived and the later on fierce entrance of nationalistic politics shoved it into the oblivion.

### **Muslim Participation In Anti-British Politics**

After the failure of Khilafat movement, the imperial slavery continued to haunt the Muslims. In their attempt to eliminate the colonialism Muslims stood divided mainly in two poles: one communal alliance under the Muslim League and another socialist movement under congress and Gandhi. Followers of Aligarh movement and the *Samastha Kerala*

<sup>13</sup> Sir Shafi's diary, dated 24 October 1920, quoted in *Iqbal, the Life and Times of Mohamed Ali*, pp. 239-240.

<sup>14</sup> Tabassum, Farhat (2006). *Deoband Ulema's Movement for the Freedom of India* (1st ed.).

New Delhi: Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind in association with Manak Publications. p. 98.

<sup>15</sup> Online version of *Tafsir-e-USmani* is available

*Jamliathul Ulama*, a vibrant clerical body established to defend the onslaughts against Islam, constitute the exception. Muslim leaders from various strata aligned with different movements for India attain her freedom. Muslims wholeheartedly participated in Quit India Movement, Civil Disobedience Movements, Salt *Satragraha* and many more, earnestly burying the hatchet with the Hindu society. The rise of educated Muslim middle class helped the reviving of the lost grandeur of Islamic education and began the interpretation of Islam and Qur'an afresh.

Ulema and leaders owing allegiance to both parties used the Qur'anic injunctions and teachings to garner the support of the masses. League leaders unleashed fierce verbal attack against the congress and supporters of nationalistic course by allegedly invoking the Qur'anic concept of *vala' wal bara'*. The verses that bar the faithful from forming the alliance with the pagans were cited to justify League's anti-Congress stance and coming to terms with the Book of People rather than submitting to the hegemony of idol worshippers. Jinna Sahib, a lawyer by profession and the staunchest believer in the efficacy of Islamic state in the post-colonial era, perceived Qur'an as the postulate of Muslim League and the arbitrary supreme manual of move; thus the movement exuded the character of pan-Islamic credentials. That the Qur'anic verses were misconstrued by partisan leaders to advance their communal ideology and the politics of hatred is a contested issue and, however, Muslims of the subcontinent were made and will be made to bear the brunt of vilification campaign that spoilt the delicate religious harmony.

On the other hand, Muslim leaders who supported the nationalist movement and Congress were articulate in their position and eschewed the communal politics outright by copiously referring to the Qur'an and prophetic approach to non-Muslims. They found the resemblances of their pathetic political degeneration in the Makkan life the prophet (P.B.U.H) when he was dwarfed by mighty adversaries. As a matter of political expediency, these scholars made a strong pitch for the united movement with non-Muslims and reckoned with the leadership of Gandhi. Scholars of Deobandi school of thought, Abul Kalam Azad, Khan Abdul Gaffer Khan and M.A. Ansari were the prominent Muslim scholars in the

nationalistic alliance and passionately collaborated with and even staged a number of demonstrations for the freedom of nation. When compared to the mass appeal of Muslim League had among Muslim denominations, the congress lagged very behind in securing the backing of non-educated Muslims. These scholars also drew inspiration from the pluralistic concepts of Qur'an, a fact substantiated by the harmonious life prophet (P.B.U.H).

Khan Abdul Gaffer Khan, a formidable Pashtoon leader and the revivalist of Pashtoon nationalism, adored the Gandhian way of passive resistance very much and became the ardent proponent of non-violence, a political philosophy he extracted from the interpretation of Qur'an.<sup>16</sup> While the British colonial authorities decried Abdul Ghaffar Khan as another trouble-making Indian nationalist dreaming of freedom, Mahatma Gandhi found in him a paragon of non-violence and one who drew his *ahimsa* (non-violence) from the Holy Qur'an.<sup>17</sup> He formed a voluntary organization named *Khudai Khidmatgarto* to address the needs of the destitute and people in rebellion-ravaged areas as part of his nationalistic pursuits. Their motto was that the service of humanity was the best worship of God. They succeeded in creating at the local level a culture of *khidmat-o-qurbani* (service and sacrifice) through two Qur'anic means: *sabr-o-salath* (patience and prayers). The *Khudai Khidmatgars* summarized their mission in the Qur'anic injunction of stopping evil and spreading virtue.<sup>18</sup>

Born in Makka, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad is considered a unique modern Muslim scholar of India having mastery over the traditional and the progressive Islam which helped him carve out a distinct niche in the history of Islamic progressivism. He served the Indian National Congress as president in two terms and the independent India as the first educational minister, a post he held till his death in 1956. His political acumen won the Muslims hearts in joining hands with the Congress to a great extent. Hardly he had supported the communal politics of Muslim League nor demanded a separate state exclusively for Muslims; instead theoretically and logically he countered the hollow arguments raised by spokesmen of dual nation theory. Azad wrote a voluminous Qur'anic interpretation in Urdu language named

<sup>16</sup> Khan, Abdul Ghaffar (1981), *Zama Jwand au Jehdojehad*. Kabul: Afghan State Publications, pp .3 - 8.

<sup>17</sup> Gandhi, M. K. (1942), *Non-Violence in Peace and War*. Ahmadabad: Navajivan Publishing House, Vol. 1, p. 298.

<sup>18</sup> Tendulkar, D. G. (1967), *Abdul Ghaffar Khan*. New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, pp. 59-60.

*Tharjuman-e-Qur'a'n*, in which he tried to explain Islam according to the modern sciences and the pluralistic political concepts of Qur'an.

What is remarkable about Azad's political practice is that it is grounded in his interpretation of the Qur'an and the Sharia. <sup>19</sup>The Qur'an according to him revealed a universal religion—*din*—which is shared by all those who believe in God. *Din* consisted in “devotion to God and balanced, righteous action”. The Qur'an, in his interpretation, did not ask the followers of other religions to accept Islam as an altogether new religion. “On the contrary, it asks them to return to the true form of their own religion”. That is to say, Azad saw Islam as recognizing the *de jure* legitimacy of all institutional religions. Since a spiritual bond unites all believers regardless of their institutional differences, the practice of Muslims regarding themselves as members of a metaphysically closed religion has only historical, but no doctrinal, foundation. Azad went further. There should therefore be no doctrinal or juristic objection against Muslims forming an *ummah al-wahidah*, or unitary body, with the Hindus. He claimed that his interpretation was based on the practice of the Prophet (P.B.U.H)—the settlement that he had reached with the non-Muslim tribes of Medina.<sup>20</sup>

Azad sought the basis of his political alliance with Indian National Congress, on the basis of the following Qur'anic verses and the Mithaq-i Madinah: “Serve Allah, my people for you have no god but Him”. <sup>21</sup>The Mithaq-i Madinah contains the following clause, i.e., the Jews of Bani Araf will be a part of the Muslim *umma*. The Prophet said, due to an agreement between the Jews and the Muslims, they will be considered as one *umma* and therefore, there will be no discrimination between them. According to Maulana Mawdudi, it was a time bound agreement for the sake of a military alliance. Therefore, it will be improper to refer to it as composite culture as it is used in the present day political terminology.

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<sup>19</sup> Mujeeb, Mohammad. 1993. “The Partition of India in Retrospect.” In Mushirul Hasan, ed., *India's Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilization*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. P 367.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid*, p 421

<sup>21</sup> Aziz Ahmed, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan*, pp.186-189.

## CONCLUSION

It is unfair to assess the freedom fervour of Muslims as a trivial instance of religious fanaticism for which Muslim freedom fighters were rebuked by colonial historians. Unlike others, the ultimate subservience to the religious cause was the major trigger behind Muslim upheaval against the British. This fact is evident from the lengthy religious discussions took place between various Muslim scholars of the time who disputed many issues that pertained to the Muslims rebellion against the British. Qur'an and its interpretation eminent scholars proved vital in getting the religious and the moral backing of the community for the mobilization against British and their henchmen. As was the case in other forms of literary works, the oral tradition of transmission and the wanton destruction from the part of government caused the gradual obscurity of these contributions. An all-out effort could be made to ensure the exploration of these rich assets of heritage.

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