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Transformation in Political Approach of Deoband for Freedom Movement (1920–1947) and its Reasons

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Abstract: This paper aims to explore the transformation that took place in the strategy of the Deoband School of thought in its struggle for independence from India. A descriptive role of the Deoband school of thought for the freedom of India was analyzed from its formation till 1947. Failure at the war of 1857, its founders, who were the heirs of Hazrat Shah Waliullah, upheld the spirit of freedom by establishing Darul Uloom Deoband. Deoband School of thought, under the leadership of Maulana Mahmud-ul-Hasan, moved a struggle to overthrow the British by force during the outbreak of the First World War. In the changing situation after the world war, the Deoband School of thought brought about a transformation in its political approach in its struggle for independence. This was the discarding of the violent method and adoption of the peaceful and constitutional struggle for achieving independence and securing the religious rights of the Muslims. The formation of Jamaitul Ulama-i-Islam was basically the beginning of the peaceful and constitutional struggle of Deoband. The peaceful and constitutional struggle of JUH in collaboration with the Indian National Congress testifies to the transformation.

Introduction

The main objective of the present study is to explain the transformation that took place in the strategy of the Deoband School of thought in its struggle for independence in India. In reality, the name of Darul Uloom Deoband presents itself with the movement of freedom struggle from Britain. Its formation, besides the preservation of religious thought and spreading of religious education, aimed to devise measures for the freedom struggle in the situation after the failure of the 1857 upheaval. Deoband instilled the spirit of freedom and organized personnel for embarking on the movement of freedom struggle. Its founders, who were the heirs of Hazrat Shah Waliullah, contributed to the militant freedom struggle of 1857 against the British. Failure in the war did not cease the idea of freedom from their

minds, but it was upheld by establishing Darul Uloom Deoband.

Devoted to its cause, the Deoband School of thought established several institutions for preparing personnel for accomplishing independence under the leadership of Maulana Mahmud-ul-Hasan. In the changing situation of Britain's hostility towards Turkey after 1910, Maulana Mahmud-ul-Hasan thought it right to overthrow the British by force and militant struggle. The situation with the outbreak of the First World War provided an opportunity for the freedom lovers of Deoband to be materialized for liberating India. The plan was to start an uprising against Britain in the whole of India with the support of Turkey and other countries. Owing to various reasons, this violent struggle of Deoband failed in ousting Britain by force.

In the changing situation after the world war, the Deoband School of thought brought transformation in its political approach in its struggle for independence. This was discarding the violent method and the struggle adoption of the peaceful and constitutional struggle for achieving independence and securing the religious rights of the Muslims. This research paper basically aims to discuss the transformation of the Deoband School of thought from violent to non-violent struggle and its reasons. The formation of Jamaitul Ulama-i-Hind was basically the beginning of the peaceful and constitutional struggle of Deoband. JUH's political and constitutional struggle and role in collaboration with the Indian National Congress testify to its transformation.

The Deoband School: Transformation in Political Approach (1920–1947)

The Deoband School of thought is known for its religious services and its role in the liberation movement of India. It is basically its role in the freedom movement that makes it a distinguished School of thought among other contemporary religious institutions. The founders of the Deoband School derived its religious creed and political ideals from Hazrat Shah Waliullah and, later, the party established by his son, Shah Abdul Aziz, to liberate India from the occupation of the British East India Company. The heirs of Shah Waliullah spread the spirit of freedom in the people, and they themselves participated in the war of independence of 1857. In 1857 leaders of Darul Uloom Deoband, particularly Haji Imdadullah Mahajar Maki, Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanotvi, and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, rendered great efforts for the liberation of India from the occupation of Britain (Razvi, 2005)

In the scenario that changed after the defeat in the war, they were the ones engrossed in the thought of devising plans and schemes for preserving religious thought and liberating India from the occupation of Britain. They established a Madrasa at Deoband in 1866 in order not only

to save the religious faith of Muslims in British India but also to empower the Muslims to throw the British yoke out off Indians' shoulders. The Muslims had to face two problems; one was to protect the religious ideas and thoughts of the Muslims, and the other was to abolish the occupation of the British. The founders of the Deobandi School sought to resolve these miseries of the Muslims by imparting a religious education; independent from British influence and by instilling the idea of freedom. Its graduates not only participated in various movements but remained the originator and source of many movements which guided the Muslims and led India to its liberation. (Rizvi, 2005)

In the preliminary period, Deoband was seemingly busy with educational activities and was indifferent to politics and the freedom struggle. Its practical freedom struggle and politics appeared at the beginning of the 20th century when Maulana Mahmud-ul-Hasan started a confrontational move for the liberation of India. However, in the preceding period, in the light of the objectives of Darul Uloom Deoband, they were its founders who initiated the groundwork for resistance which was spearheaded by the zealous followers. The practical and political effect of the education and training of Maulana Nanotvi, Maulana Rashid Gangohi and other leaders was manifested at the beginning of the 20th century in the form of the Shaikhul Hind movement and Jamiatul Ulama-i-Hind, that's why although the Deobandi Ulama did not participate in politics, their mind was not free from politics (Akbarabadi, 2007).

On the formation of the Indian National Congress, the Deobandi Ulema extended their support to it when they observed its role as beneficial for the whole Indians and opposed the view of Sir Syed about Congress. The view of Sir Syed and others about Congress was greatly opposed by Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi and Maulana Mahmud-ul-Hasan, who issued Fatwas

in favor of Congress and in opposition to the Indian Patriotic Association (Madani, 1956).

Various institutions were established to propagate the spirit of freedom and train the personnel for the withdrawal of the British. Perceiving the internal and external situation, the well-guided pupil of Hazrat Qasim Nanotvi, Maulana Mahmud-ul-Hasan, prepared a scheme of violent confrontation with the British in order to set free India from the British occupation with the support of the Turkish Caliphate, Afghanistan and Germany. Further, the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 also stirred him to act upon his plan for ousting the British from India by force and violent measures. The British, at the exposure of this freedom struggle movement, named it as “silk letters movement”, but in reality, it was a part of the persistent struggle of the Deoband School of thought. The Silk Letter Movement was a well-organized plan for complete freedom of India which was leaked before implementation and resulted in the arrest of hundreds of Muslim scholars and freedom fighters, including Shaikhul Hind. (Miyan, 2012)

The aftermath of the First World War changed the internal and international situation that led the Deoband School of thought to discard violent confrontation for freedom struggle. Non-violence was the new political strategy adopted by Deoband School to continue its struggle for independence. This was a transformation in the political approach of the Deobandi School of thought in its struggle for independence against the British as the circumstances changed. The formation of Jamiatul Ulama-i-Hind in 1919 was a practical start of the strategy of non-violence and peaceful struggle adopted by Deoband. We make a covenant of God as a presence in this sacred place that we would maintain unity for the common national cause and would not create differences by indulging in minor issues and would bear the miseries and violence of government with patience, and would stand firm, they also took a promise to keep the secrecy and would remain honest to party. (Khan, 2017)

Passive resistance and non-violence was the political approach, Deoband adopted for the preservation of the rights of Muslims and the liberation of India against the British. For this purpose, they considered it necessary to set a united struggle with other communities against the British occupation of India. JUH associated its political struggle with the Indian National Congress in order to combat the British unitedly. The pragmatists in their political approach, the Deoband School of thought, adhered in their future politics to the policy of peaceful and passive resistance to achieve their objectives. The participation of Shaikhul Hind in the Indian National Congress and the policy of non-violence would lead to dominion status. (Sindhi, 2016)

Its political association with the Indian National Congress and the concept of Indian nationalism on the basis of commonalities, geography, language, history, culture etc., came under severe criticism generally by the All India Muslim League and a number of Deobandi Ulama as well. After the adoption of the Lahore resolution by the Muslim League in 1940, it led to a split in the Deobandi School when Jamaitul Ulam-i-Islam was founded by Shabir Ahmad Usmani in 1945. JUI supported the partition demand of the Muslim League and rejected the association of JUH with Congress and its stance of united India based on its concept of composite nationalism. JUH considered the communal politics and partition demand of the Muslim League detrimental to the liberation movement and the Muslims as well. United nationalism is considered a heretic by critics because it could throw out the British occupation of India (Mian, 2005).

The transformation in the political approach of Deoband from violent confrontation to peaceful and constitutional struggle after 1920 and its collaboration with the Indian National Congress greatly obstructed the colonial rule of the British in India. Therefore, to understand the role of Deoband in the struggle for independence,

an analytical descriptive research study is required.

Reasons for Transformation in Political Approach

To examine the past role of Deoband, it certainly comes true that the reason for the transformation in their approach from violent to non-violent method was neither due to ignorance nor due to any fear and terror. It is of certain importance to mention here that at that time, Deoband, on passive resistance in collaboration with their countrymen against the British, was criticized by many Ulama, who alleged them to have overlooked Jihad. In this respect, if examining the past, there could be seen no one but only Deoband and its predecessors, from the movement of Syed Ahmad Shaheed till 1915, who did four times a revolutionary struggle. (Mian, 2005)

Transformation in the political approach of Deoband must be observed in the changing circumstances of that period. The reasons and factors that led to the transformation that took place in the political approach of Deoband for the liberation of India are discussed as under:

Loss of Patronage

The Usmani caliphate of Turkey was considered patronage for the Muslims in the world, and the Muslims in India had the right to seek support from its patron under international law. Therefore Deobandis, under the leadership of Maulana Mahmud-ul-Hasan, took revolutionary and violent measures against the British for the liberation of India. The outbreak of the First World War changed the scenario of the power in the world: Turkey and German were defeated, and the power of the English increased several times. Maulana Ubaidullah, in his work titled, “Shah Waliullah awr un ki Siasi Tehrik” also says that the beginning of this period started with the association with Turkey; when the Turkish

caliphate ended, the old program also became useless. (Sindhi, 2016)

Detriments of Russian Support

After the defeat of Turkey and Germany, Iran and Afghanistan could not dare to support the revolutionary movement in India against the British. In the then situation, the only country which could support Indians against the British was Soviet Russia. But Maulana Syed Muhammad Mian disregards this option on these grounds. (i) The Indians do not admit the thoughts of Lenin and Stalin. (ii) At that time, Soviet Russia was not capable of extending help to Indians. (iii) The first priority of Soviet Russia was to reconstruct its own country, and their policy was not to attack a country and bring revolution but to support the spreading of socialism and communism in a country and enable the revolutionaries to bring revolution and get freedom. (iv) The most important question was that had Soviet Russia supported the Indian revolution, there would be no freedom but the change of masters.

The Repressive Ruling of the British

After the triumph of Britain in the First World War, it ruled India in a more despotic and tyrant manner. Montagu-Chelmsford reforms left all powers in British Hands, and the Rowlett Act in 1919 conferred the British viceroy in India to suppress rebellion against the Empire by controlling the press, detaining political activists without trial and arresting without a warrant any individuals suspected of treason against the Empire. It was resented by non-violence and peaceful protest. The worst incident was the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of hundreds of people in 1919, which had enraged the people but was resented by non-violence, a peaceful protest. The incident of Jalyanwala Bagh and martial law in Punjab gave a lesson to Indians that despotic power could easily crush uprisings and rebellion. Now the power of the British was greatly increased, and the dream of revolution by

violence was not going to be achieved. (Adravi, 1982)

The success of a violent and militant movement against a despotic occupier requires as many military and financial resources as the occupier owns. It was evident that the revolutionary movement of Shaikhul Hind did not have this after the defeat of Turkey; there was none to support them in their cause. There was no foreign military and financial support for a militant movement, so how could it succeed? (Miyan, 2005)

Lack of Modern Weapons

In the 20th century, the availability of modern weapons and their prices also contributed to the transformation in the political approach of Deoband because there was no possibility to make arrangements for the availability of modern weapons in order to counter the mighty British militantly. In the era in which the independence war of 1857 was fought, there was the use of rifles and ordinary cannons. The changing circumstances it was hazardous for the Indian movement to be militant and violent and would adversely affect the movement for independence.

Shaikhul Hind's independence movement, which is termed by the British as the Silk Letter movement, was the last militant movement for overthrowing the British. Till that time, no other method of warfare had been devised. In the changing circumstances, they approached the non-violent method practised by Holy Prophet in his Maki life to bring revolution. They believed that through the weapon of non-violence, they would defeat British imperialism and would get freedom. Discussing the changing scenario Maulana Ubaidullah says, “from the participation of Shaikhul Hind in the Indian National Congress, we drew this conclusion that a policy of non-violence would lead to dominion status (Sindhi, 2016)”.

India's Unique Position

Another argument in opposition to taking the support of a foreign country for militant struggle, Maulana Syed Muhammad Mian, says that had India gotten independence with the support of a foreign country, it could not retain it. India, being rich in resources, has attracted foreigners and has been subjugated. The reason for its subjugation was the lack of patriotism in its people. As India is a multi-racial and multi-religious country, the only way out to get independence and retain it could be sought in patriotism, irrespective of religious differentiation. He adds that united nationalism, which is considered heretic by the critics, could throw out the British occupation of India.

Conclusion

The most important fact through this research paper was discerned is that the Deoband School of thought has not adopted violent measures in its entire struggle for the freedom movement in India. Being pragmatist in their approach and perceiving the changing conditions, the Deoband School of thought has brought transformation in their political approach in the period after 1912. It is an obvious fact that the aggressive strategy of Deoband against the British was associated with the support of Turkey, Germany, Afghanistan and other countries. The proceeding changes as a result of the First World War in the Muslim world, its impacts on India and some other changes were a momentum in the changing role of Deoband in the period followed.

The triumph of Britain in the First World War made it more despotic and tyrant in its rule over Indians. Now the power of the British was greatly increased, and the dream of revolution by violence was not going to be achieved (Adravi, 1982). The beginning of violent confrontation against the British started with the association of Turkey when the Turkish caliphate ended; the old program also became useless (Sindhi, 2016). Seeking support of foreign countries in the then

prevailing situation of a militant struggle against the British, the Deobandi Ulama believed detrimental to Indian society. A joint venture in collaboration with their non-Muslim countrymen on the basis of a passive and peaceful strategy was the only remedy they devised for the accomplishment of their goal.

Deoband successfully emerged on the scene and flourished with a breakthrough and radical change in its strategy for the freedom movement. In the period after 1920, the role of Deoband in the independence struggle might be seen as different from its previous role.

This change and transformation in the Deoband school of thought were in its political approach towards its struggle for independence; from militant struggle which it undertook against the British, now transformed to passive political resistance in collaboration with their non-Muslim countrymen. Leaving a militant struggle and adoption of a non-violent strategy by the Deoband School of thought must be observed in the changing circumstances of that period. This certainly can be termed as a transformation in the political approach of Deoband.

The study and analytical assessment of the role and politics of JUH: a political forum of Ulama largely consisted of Deobandi Ulama, testify to the transformed role of Deoband. Its political role and struggle in collaboration with the Indian National Congress for independence and fulfilment of other demands in the period from 1920–1947 reveals the adherence of Deobandi Ulama to the policy of non-violence. Despite much criticism of their adopted policy of non-violence, their collaboration with Indian National Congress and the troubles they faced in their cause, they always believed and held it true and never approached to violent method until the British left India.

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