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THE WAHABI MOVEMENT IN THE DISTRICT OF MALDA (1818-1872)

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ABSTRACT:

Muslims in Bengal experienced a very deep change in their religious ideology and social mores during the second half of the 19th century. These changes vital to the rise of a new sense of identity, were largely induced by a series of religious reform movement. ¹ The Wahabi and the Faraizi were the two of the important among these.

KEYWORDS: Muslims, religious reform movement, religious ideology and social mores.



INTRODUCTION:-

Malda district is the district of Rebellion and Reform. It is one of the centers of Faraizi and Wahabi movement. According to Hunter's writing of 1876 most of the Muslim Population belong to either 'Faraizi' or 'Wahabi' sects. ²

The people, specially the Muslim people of Faraizi and Wahabi sects in the district of Malda played a vital role in the reform movement of Faraizi and Wahabi.

The Wahabi movement was one of the earliest, significant and the 'most remorselessly anti-British' movement, characterized the Political history of India in the second half of the 18th and the early 19th centuries. ³

The real name of 'Wahabi' movement is 'Tarik-i-Muhammadiya' and 'Wahabi' means Renaissance. ⁴

The Wahabi movement was founded by Abdul Wahab in Arab. ⁵ In India it was at first started by Shah Waliullah and his son Abdul Aziz made a shape in it. ⁶ It was really started in India at Delhi in A.D. 1818 by Sayyid Ahmad of Rai Bareilly and Shah Ismail Shahid. ⁷

The Wahabi movement had two significant aspect - one is socio - religious and another is Political - the former requiring the preaching of certain social and religious reforms and the next one the urging for the strive against the "alien people from distant lands" and "traders and vendors of goods". ⁸

Starting originally under a socio-religious impetus the Wahabi movement acquired a Political orientation, specially during the period of the leadership of the Ali brothers, and after wards. ⁹ One of the commonly prevalent misconceptions about the

agitation is that it was purely religious, and was directed singly against the sikhs. ¹⁰

Armed with a consistent anti-British ideology, and with the help of a network of organizational centers spread all over Northern India, the Wahabi leaders practices a moral influence on the Muslim intelligentsia through out the country and awakened the Muslim masses to free themselves both from the Political oppression of the British and the Muslim tyrant, as well as from the economic exploitation of India vested interests. ¹¹

Qeyamuddin Ahmed asserted that "The former type of country is known as Dar-ul-Harb and the latter as Dar-ul-Islam. It is also one's duty to fight for the restoration on one's rights in the Dar-ul-Harb. The struggle is to be guided and conducted by an Imam, who has to be man

possessed of high spiritual and administrative qualifications."¹²

In Bengal, Mir Nishar Ali who is known as 'Titumir' played an important role in the said movement. He fought, specially against the tyrant of the Zamindars. So the Zamindars resented him.¹³

One thing should be mentioned here that this movement was also against the sikhs and some big zamindars supported the Wahabi.¹⁴ In his childhood, Abul Mansur was reciting something when he was walking on the path. The recitation of few lines are as follows :-

"Allah Jodi Kore Bhai Lohore Jaibo
Hothai Sikher Sathe Jihad Koribo
Jitile Hoibo Gazi Morile Shahid
Janer bodole Jinda Rohibe Touhid".
(If god want I will go to Lahore
Where I will fight against the sikh.
If I win I will be Gazi. (here cousin brother of
Mansur who was also a Jehadi)
and if I die I will be Shahid [Martyr]
The Tauhid [monotheism] will be alive in lieu of life)¹⁵

From these lines it is clear that during the early decades of 20th century the Wahabis had deep impact in the village areas of East Bengal.¹⁶

This movement was organized and developed in Bengal primarily as the first step of the well known Patna caliphs, Maulanas Inayet Ali and Wilayat Ali.¹⁷

Inayet Ali did extensive missionary work in the rural districts of Bengal like 24-Parganahs, Jessore, Faridpur, Pabna, Rajshahi, Malda and Bogra and his efforts were largely answerable for the great enthusiasm produced in that region for the Jihad campaigns in the North-West.¹⁸

The Wahabi movement had great influence on the district of Maldah. The movement appeared very strong and organized in Malda that in 1868 the district magistrate realized it expedient to suggest the employ of orthodox 'Mullahs' against the reformist proclaimers as a counter-measure to contain their influence. "There can be no doubt" he wrote, "that the Wahabi movement in Maldah is at present very vigorous, and will so continue until we meet the Moulvies with their own weapons".¹⁹

In this movement the Muslims of this district (Malda) specially the Shershab Badiya sect played an important role. They propagated the sunnidoctrines and they were the followers of sunni Pathan Shershab.²⁰

The main leader of the Wahabi movement in the district of Malda was Rafik Mandal, a poor peasant himself.²¹ Owing to his efforts Wahabi organizations were set up in various parts of Malda.²² The main places of Wahabi movement in Malda were Sibganj, Kansat, Nababganj, Kaliachak, Harishchandrapur, Ratua and old Maldah.²³

About 1841 one Abdur Rahaman, an inhabitant of Lucknow and one of the Khalifas Wilayat Ali, reached to Malda during the course of his preaching tours and having married and taken up a job as school teacher settled there permanently.²⁴ He carried on the double duty of raising men and money from his circumference and forwarding them to Patna and in this work he was skillfully assisted by Rafik Mandal who was originally a cultivator but had been appointed as a 'tax-collector' by Abdur Rahaman.²⁵

At the direction of Rafik Mandal, the Wahabi of Malda, had maintained contact with the Wahabi centres of Patna, Sittana, Nadia and Murshidabad.²⁶

Some Madrasahs in Malda and Murshidabad played a contributory role to train the Wahabis.²⁷

Rafik Mandal's work continued undisturbed for a long time until the authorities become suspicious in 1853. Rafik Mandal's house was investigated and some papers providing "the seditious character of his trade" were discovered and he was arrested.²⁸

Ashim Kumar Sarkar mentioned in his book 'Nationalism' communalism and partition in Bengal-Maldah that "the administration decided to take action against the Wahabis and Rafik Mandal was imprisoned in 1853".²⁹

Rafik Mandal was, however, released. After his release Rafik Mandal gave over his work to his son, Amiruddin.³⁰ Amiruddin was undoubtedly the worthy successor of Rafik Mandal. Under him, the Malda centre grew in importance and become the favourite rendezvous of practically all the District heads in Bengal and served as a suitable halting region for many of the Patna leaders (Enayet Ali, Fayyaz Ali and Maqsad Ali) during their tours of Bengal.³¹

There were many sub-collectors in the district of Malda namely Sardar Masoom, Enayetullah, Amanat Mandal and Saifulla collected small sums of money in their villages and send it to Amiruddin of Sandipa Narrainpore.³²

Amiruddin's activities had continued for a pretty long time and were not unknown to the authorities. Nobokishto Ghosh, an extra Assistant of the Police Department, to village Kaliachak in the district of Malda arrested Amiruddin on the 30th March, 1869.³³

In the year of 1870 in the judgement of Malda litigation Amiruddin, the son of Rafik Mandal was sent to Andaman Island in exile and his all property was confiscated.³⁴ Hearing the judgment of Malda litigation about his son, old father Rafik Mandal told with emotiobnal voice that "Amar chhele tar biswas theke bichchuto hoini, Amar chhele jodi tar Notun adorshe Abichal thake tobe harateo prostut Achhi." (My son did not fall from his confidence (belief). If my son stands by with his new ideal so I am ready to lost him).³⁵

Amiruddin actually arrived in the Andaman Island in March, 1872 and he had to suffer many hardship for the next few years. He was later appointed as a teacher in the local Madrasah.³⁶

Amiruddin, however, was discharged in 1883 along with the other Wahabi prisoners. Pending government's permission to let him live in his native city he stayed with Abdul Rahim at Patna.³⁷

Q.Ahmed also asserted that "like a few others he (Amiruddin) too had to report to the local superintendent of Police once every month and could not go out any where without informing the Police".³⁸

Ibrahim Mandal was one of the worthy leaders of Tariqah movement. Ibrahim Mandal, as the 'head centre' to whom all the collected money was forwarded by Nazir Sardar of village Qazigram.³⁹ Ibrahim which was close to the Deputy Magistrate's court at Pakur, and not far from the railway line. The Magistrate of Malda was requested to issue a warrant against Ibrahim.⁴⁰ Ibrahim was instantly arrested with the help of two constables who were closely following Ghosh.⁴¹

Ibrahim Mandal was, however, put in the Ralmahal Jail and later transferred from the Rajmahal to the Monghyr Jail.⁴² In the year of 1870 in the judgment of Rajmahal litigation he has sent to Andaman in expulsion for life and all property was confiscated.⁴³

In the year of 1864 in the Ambala litigation many of the Wahabi leaders were imprisoned for life.⁴⁴

Ibrahim Mandal was, however, involved to organize the movement and collect money for making fund in the places of Malda, Rajshahi, Bogura, Rangpur and Dinajpur.⁴⁵

It was very difficult to prove the complaint against Ibrahim, so Lord Liton was compelled to release him in 1878.⁴⁶ A writer says that Ibrahim was not really sent to the Andaman. He was released along with Amir Khan in 1873.⁴⁷

However, even after Amiruddin's arrest, collection for Jihad continued in the said district (Malda), especially at Narainpur, Hanspookur, Shahaban chuck and Mojampur. The Sardars who took a great part in it were Habelash Mandal of Shahaban chuck and Amanat Mandal of Hanspookur.⁴⁸ However, after the arrest of the leaders in 1872, the Wahabi activities in Malda were restrained.⁴⁹

Lastly, it must be remembered that the Indian Wahabi's are only a small fragment of a great sect. The unsuccessful proclaimer is the representative of many thousand earnest men at this movement wandering over Asia, some times acknowledged, some times ignored, at the mosques; speaking various tongues, but all devoted to the one great deed of purifying the creed of Muhammad, as Hilder brands monks purged the church of Rome.⁵⁰

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