



Revolutionary Activities against British: A Case Study of Aligarh and Muslim University

¹Dr. Aijaz Ahmad and ²Iram Aijaz

¹Associate Professor, History, Y.M.D. College, Nuh, Haryana

²Post Graduate Researcher, Modern Indian History, Y.M.D. College, Nuh, Haryana

ABSTRACT:

Aligarh, Mohammadan Anglo Oriental College and later Aligarh Muslim University played a very important role in building of the nation educationally, politically and economically. Almost all events of the world which affected India and its people raised the eyebrows of the Aligarh people. The Aligarh people also participated in all the national movements announced by their leaders and Indian National Congress. They also actively participated even in the revolutionary movements in association of the famous revolutionary leaders of India. The people of Aligarh including some students and low profile workers of the university played important role in assisting the revolutionaries and helping them with money and manpower. The lock industry and metal works including educational skill proved very helpful in carrying the revolutionary activities in Aligarh.

Keywords: Aligarh, Aligarh Muslim University, Railway Station, Bomb, Revolutionary, etc.

Introduction:

Aligarh played a very important role in the National Movement as well as in Revolutionary Movement against the British Government. Even during the last quarter of the eighteenth century and first quarter of nineteenth century Aligarh proved hard nut to the invaders and the Aligarh fort had special position gaining prosperity and political advantage. During the revolt of 1857, Aligarh and its people were actively involved against the British Government and the graves in the city Jama Masjid are the testimony of the sacrifice of its people. Sir Syed made Aligarh as an educational hub which in combination of lock industry and metal works made Aligarh almost a bastion of brain and muscle.

In 1885, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan established a school in Aligarh known as Madarsatul Uloom Musalmanane which later in 1887 elevated to a college known as Mohammadan Anglo Oriental College (MAO College). After death of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, his friends and colleagues started a movement to establish a university to fulfill the dream of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. In 1920, the dream of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was fulfilled and the MAO College was elevated to Aligarh Muslim University. Right from the establishment of this Muslim institution, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, his associates and the students of this almamater carried the mission of Muslim upliftment even at the cost of cooperation to the British Government. They established a special type of fraternity bond popularly known as "Aligarian" or "Alig". It must not be confused that the cooperation of the British was only to seek British help to develop this institution and educationally uplift the Muslim community. At the time when the mission of the Aligs was almost complete, the Aligs joined hands with political and revolutionary movements against the British Government in India.

Sir Syed was one of those dynamic, progressive and radical revolutionary personalities of history who have moulded the destinies of nations and changed the course of history. He began the work of regeneration of Muslims in the dreadful aftermath of 1857. The failure of the first war of India's independence not only resulted in putting an end to the political sway of the Muslim's in India but they being the bitter enemy were persecuted by the British in all walk of life. The Indian Muslims found themselves at the lowest ebb in the history of India. It was at this crucial turn of history that Sir Syed arose with courage, conviction, restlessness and burning passion to mould the destiny of the Indian Muslims. His MAO College and great luminaries of the age, Hali, Shibli, Zakaullah, Mohsinul Mulk, Viqarul Mulk, Nazir Ahmad etc. clustered round his magnetic personality extended their worthy help to the great reformer. They gradually and systematically began working towards his coveted goal.

After his restless efforts, Sir Syed succeeded in changing the opinion and attitude of the British government towards Muslim community. To materialize his efforts Sir Syed totally opposed the active participation of the Muslims in active politics. That's why Sir Syed declined to support Indian National Congress in 1885 and National Mohammadan Association in 1887. Sir Syed thought that the Muslim's entry in the active politics would create a hindrance in British help, cooperation and in his mission of Muslim's upliftment. By his opposition to these political organizations, it must not be confused that he was against India's freedom and nationalism because at that time there was no freedom movement in India and the political parties were gaining their rights by prayer and petition.

Sir Syed's opposition to the Indian National Congress was based upon his personal experiences keeping in view of the ultimate good of the Muslims as understood by him. He had seen the unprecedented loss of life and property of the Indian Muslims as a consequence of their active participation in the revolt of 1857. The ruling class hated the Muslims and called them conspirators, rebels and untrustworthy. Hence the rulers did not trust the Muslim community. Sir Syed wished to bridge the gap. He therefore began to work ceaselessly in bringing the British ruling class and the Muslim closer to one another through his writings, speeches and actions. It however does not mean that he was totally against the nationalist movement and spirit of nationalism. He was of the view that the participation of the Muslims at this stage in political activities would be premature. They should first acquire education attain perfection in various worldly affairs and decide their own political course.

Anti-British Feelings in Aligarh:

Even before the existence of the Aligarh Muslim University, the national feelings began to grow in the MAO College, students and staff. The main cause of this change was the Tripoli War of 1911, which caused great concern among Indian Muslims. The Aligarh Institute Gazette, a mouthpiece of MAO College published an appeal to the British Government it should put a stop to this brutal war, giving proof of their being the traditional supporter of Turkey.¹ Aligarh students responding to the call, contributed to the funds raised for Tripoli victims and began to boycott the Italian goods. Even petty shopkeepers and servants followed the same.²

The Tripoli war thus had a great impact on the educated Muslims especially of Aligarh. Most of the Aligarh Muslims had very much expectation from England. But British Government's announcement of neutrality in the war and directives to subjects to remain neutral; warning them to desist from its violation was an eye opener to the Muslims of Aligarh. Turkey was finally defeated but the British Government did not help the Turkey on the repeated request of the Indian Muslims. It frustrated particularly Aligarh Muslims because they had much expectations from the British Government.

Soon after the Tripoli war, Balkan war began from October 1912. During the progress of this war, anti-British feelings gained ground among educated young Muslims especially at Aligarh. On 17th October 1912, after the Friday prayer at the MAO College mosque the Muslims prayed for Turkish betterment. On 27th October 1912, even non-Muslims gathered at Aligarh and expressed their sympathy with Turkey while demanding the release of Bal Gangadhar Tilak.³ Maulana Shaikat Ali proposed volunteers to fight against Balkans and asked for government's help.⁴ But the British Government, pleaded and advised neutrality. Most of the Aligarh teachers, students and other Muslims felt that the Balkan war was not merely a political but a religious war. This consideration was based upon the fact that the Austrians and Russians were supporting and helping the Balkan states.⁵

The MAO College students became very much emotional due to the war and the British diplomacy. To raise money for Turkey they decided not to eat meat and rice.⁶ They also demanded that the total of the fund collected for the establishment of the Muslim University should be given to Turkey. But trustees of the college ignored their proposal.⁷ A medical mission led by Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari accompanied by Chaudhary Khaliquzzaman, Abdur Rahman Siddiqui, Shoaib Peshawari from MAO School was sent to Turkey in December 1912.⁸

The nationalists of Aligarh taking advantage of the situation held a series of secret meetings of students exposing the role of British government in India and tanned their sentiments by citing the fate of Islam in Morocco, Persia and Turkey. Political agitation in Aligarh thus reached on peak, causing great concern to the British high officials.⁹ Sir Valentine Chirol remarked that a new generation of young Mohammadans had nevertheless been growing up who knew not Syed Ahmad and regarded his teachings as obsolete.¹⁰ Ali brothers backed by Maulana Abdul Bari of Farangi Mahal organized *Anjuman-i-Khuddam-i-Kaaba* in 1913 to raise funds to protect religious places of Muslims and to provide whatever assistance they could to Turkey.¹¹ Most of the Aligarh Muslims openly advocated pursuance of a policy of joint struggle against the British by joining hands with the Congress.

In the First World War (1914-18) Turkey had been defeated badly by the Allied powers and the Sultan (Khalifa) became a puppet in their hands. It caused much resentment all over the Muslim world. The Indian Muslims wanted an assurance to the safeguard of the Holy places of Islam in Mesopotamia and Arabia against Christian Allied powers.¹² On 17th October 1919, on Friday the first Khilafat day was observed. Gandhiji was also invited by the Khilafat leaders. He appealed to the Hindus to cooperate with the Muslim brethren at this hour of their grave concern. Gandhiji approved the idea given by the Khilafat leaders not to participate in the forthcoming peace celebration. On 16th November 1919, Gandhiji presided over a meeting of 10,000 persons held at Delhi. In this meeting an Anti-Peace Celebration Propaganda Committee was formed.¹³

On 23rd November 1919, an All India Khilafat Conference was held. It was organized by Hakim Ajmal Khan and Dr. M.A. Ansari and presided over by Gandhiji in which it was officially declared not to participate in the peace celebration and if Khilafat question was not settled then it would be the duty of all the Muslims to withdraw cooperation from the British government.¹⁴ Between November 1919 and May 1920, the Indian Muslims held a series of meetings under the Khilafat Committee. The Aligarh nationalists group took leading part in all the meetings.

Peace terms of the treaty of the Sevres were announced on 16th May 1920. The treaty of Sevres made Turkey to renounce all rights in her former African possessions as well as Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia and Arabia. Nothing remained with Turkey except Constantinople and mountainous Anatolia. Gandhiji spontaneously reacted over the treaty of Sevres that it was a staggering blow to the Indian Muslims and non-cooperation is the only effective remedy in regard to honorary office titles and civil employment under the government.¹⁵

In the special session of Indian National Congress held at Calcutta on 4th September, 1920 to launch the Non-Cooperation Movement, Ali Brothers succeeded in persuading Gandhiji to visit Aligarh. Accordingly accompanied with Swami Satyadeva, Maulana Azad Subhani, Jan Mohammad and others, Gandhiji reached Aligarh on 11th October 1920.¹⁶ Despite opposition to the loyalists, the nationalists led by Maulana Mohammad Ali organised meeting in the afternoon of the 12th October 1920. The nationalist students of the MAO College gave memorable reception to Gandhiji. Gandhiji was given the honorary membership of the Union Club.¹⁷

On 23 October 1920, Mohammad Ali, Hakim Ajam Khan, Dr. M.A. Ansari, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Azad Subhani, Maulvi Abdul Majid of Meerut and Abdul Ghaffar came Aligarh from Delhi. They were accorded warm reception by the students despite the ban. They declared to lay the foundation of a national university, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad as Head of the Religious Instructions of the new institution. A list of the college staff was also announced. Initially the name of the new institution was suggested "National Muslim University" to be established on 29 October, 1920.¹⁸ Soon after the foundation of National Muslim University later known as Jamia Millia Islamia, MAO College was also elevated to the status of Aligarh Muslim University in December 1920.

Revolutionary Activities in Aligarh:

Right from the very beginning, the national feeling and activities were always dominant in MAO College and later in Aligarh Muslim University with association of the nationalist leaders of Aligarh and Delhi. Undoubtedly, Muslim League tried its level best to influence the students and staff of Aligarh but with a very little success. Its separatist policy was always challenged by the secular leaders of the Muslim community in AMU. Whenever any large meeting or gathering was convened, the lesson of secularism was always taught to the students.¹⁹ These lessons of unity and secularism very much affected the youths and it bound them to work for India and Muslims. They carried their national work sometimes themselves or by joining with Aligarh city nationalists who were both Hindus and Muslims.²⁰

Like the other nationalist activities, the Aligarians were also active in revolutionary activities because in Aligarh city the nationalistic activities were mostly revolutionary and the city worked as a workshop for making arms for revolutionary elements generally known as "Krantikari". Aligarh was the source of supplying bombs to the All India Revolutionary Organization with headquarters at Delhi and generally bomb action was avoided in Aligarh itself for the fear of defection of the supply.²¹

The revolutionary activities in Aligarh and supply of bombs to different parts of the country were become possible due to the lock industry of Aligarh and Government Metal Working School at Aligarh. Aligarh. The Engineering College workshop of Muslim University was also became helpful in bomb making process for the revolutionaries of Aligarh.²²

The group of revolutionaries of Aligarh mostly included a high class technician and electrician. They were of the good heart and brain and having zeal and enthusiasm to do a lot for their country. Most famous among them were Krishna Lal Verma, Deo Datta, Panna Lal, Bhagwat Deo Mishra, Satya Murti, Mahendra Pal Singh, Durga Prasad, Rajendra Kumar, Kailash Ram Singh of Harduaganj, etc.²³

The above mentioned revolutionaries were all belonged to the Aligarh city. Only Kishan Lal was the student of the Muslim University in the War Technician's Course. He used to bring some cast iron from the university workshop and also had a few friend in AMU who were engaged in his work but their active role was not very clear.²⁴ Most of the revolutionaries styled themselves with the name of revolutionaries and politicians of all India level e.g. Deo Datt was styled as Allama Mashriqi and Krishan Lal as Jinnah and other revolutionaries also styled like that.²⁵

The organization of the revolutionaries was very disciplined, systematic, accustomed and well-administered. These revolutionaries formed themselves into three committees (1) Finance Committee, (2) Secret Committee or Bomb Party (3) Propaganda Committee. The first committee was to get money for their revolutionary organization by fair or foul means such as robbery, dacoity, cheating or securing voluntary financial help from the public. The chief function of the second committee was to arrange all possible anti-government and anti-British actions, influence Bank officials or private servants of government officers so that they might prove useful in party actions. The third one the Propaganda Committee was to enlist as many youth for the party as possible who should all be ready to sacrifice not only their lives but also that they possess for the party work.²⁶

These revolutionaries were very cautious in enlisting the new members in their organizations or core committees. They enlisted new members only after being fully satisfied with their courage and patriotic feelings. One of the methods was cutting a portion of their body (especially finger tip) and saying: "*Jaisa Main Ab Khun Baha Raha Hun, Bharat Mata Ke Liye Waise Hi Bahata Rahunga.*"²⁷

When the Cripps Mission arrived in India, it naturally frustrated almost all Indians including the Aligarh revolutionary groups. The Aligarh revolutionaries expressed their frustration by singing a Hindi poetry copied from the Daily Hindi *Milap* published from Lahore on 25 September 1942. The poem was entitled as "*Cripps Ke Chane*" and was something as

follows:²⁸

"Chana Zor Garam Ghana Zor Garam,

Gandhi Main Laya Mazedar,

..... Charh Na Saka Gandhi Pe Rang."

There was another Urdu poem by Josh Malihabadi which was being sung by the revolutionaries as:²⁹

"Kis Zuhan Se Kah Rahe Ho Ai Saudagaron,

Dakar Men Insaniat Ke Nam Ko Uncha Karo,

Ek Kahani Waqt Likhega Naye Mazmun Ki,

Jiski Surkhi Ko Zarurat Hai Tumhare Khun Ki,..."

As for Quit India Movement, the Aligarh revolutionaries actively participated on the call of Mahatma Gandhi.³⁰ When this movement became violent in the absence of Gandhiji, the Aligarh revolutionaries took responsibility for providing bombs to the revolutionaries of other cities also. Qayyum Lohar of the Aligarh Muslim University was also active in moulding the shells to prepare the bomb. Aruna Asaf Ali came to Aligarh in the middle of September 1942. She met the Aligarh revolutionaries and told that bomb should be made in plenty. She was pleased to note that the Aligarh revolutionaries were working with zeal for the country and was quite satisfied by the work done by them.³¹

For the purpose of bomb making readymade iron and tin containers were purchased from Sufi Kabari, Abdul Majeed and Abdul Hameed motor mechanic. Motor brake drums were also purchased for the purpose and out of these bomb prepared with the help of Amir Baksh Lohar and Mullah Naimullah. All the bombs prepared in Aligarh were distributed to Delhi, Kanpur and Muzaffarpur.³²

When the repression was started by the British Government, the revolutionaries decided for a bomb action in Aligarh. Kishan Lal took a shell to the University Engineering College workshop and did the needful with the permission of Mr. Aziz turner instructor on the pretence that it was the work of Allanur an A.R.P. Mistri who was known to him. Deo Datta and Satya Murti filled the shell with explosive and watch was also fitted to serve as a time bomb.³³ At the railway station near the post box the bomb was planted and it exploded when the Bareilly Passenger had gone. Krishan Lal, Bhura Singh, Sheo Das and Ghanshyam fled to the university, a safest place for the shelter.³⁴

Conclusion:

Aligarh and Muslim University are generally defamed by certain scholars as pro-Pakistani and pro-Muslim League but these elements were present in Aligarh in microscopic minority as these type people were also present in many other cities of the Indian union. The majority of the Aligarh people were nationalist and actively participated in almost all movements waged by the nationalist leaders or Indian National Congress. The testimony of the nationalist feelings and activities may be proved by involvement of the people in revolutionary activities in Aligarh. Not only these people involved in revolutionary activities in Aligarh but also supplied the revolutionary materials to other revolutionaries of Delhi and many other cities of northern India. Almost all revolutionaries of Aligarh were having close connections with the nationalist students of Aligarh Muslim University.

References:

1. *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, 11 October, 1911.
2. *Ibid.*, 11 November, 1911.
3. *Ibid.*, 30 October, 1912.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.* (Maulana Shibli on the commencement of the Balkan war in October 1912 was very much grieved and wrote a poetry entitled “*Shahr-Ashoob-i-Islam*.” In this poem Maulana Shibli described that how Islam is being attacked by combined European forces. see also *Naqoosh*, Lahore, January, 1955, p. 4.)
6. Khan, Habibullah (1947). *Hayat-i-Afiab*, Allahabad, pp, 92-93.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, 26 June 1912.
9. Harding's letter to Butler dated 29th October 1912, cited in Mohammad, Shan (1980). *The Indian Muslims: A Documentary Record, 1900-1947*, Vol.5, p. 121.
10. Mohammad, Shan (1981). *Successors of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan*, Delhi, p. 109.
11. Sarkar Sumit (1983). *Modern India 1885-1947*, Madras, p. 144.
12. Neimeijer (1972). *Khilafat Movement in India, 1919-1924*, Nejeff, p 89.
13. *File No. 6*, p. 1. (Uttar Pradesh State Archive Lucknow).
14. *Young India*, 10th December 1919; see also Gopal, Ram (1959). *Indian Muslims*, Bombay, p. 137.
15. Shaw Stanford, J and Ezel Kural Shaw (1977). *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, Cambridge, p.332; see also Manglori, Syed Turfail Ahmad (1945). *Musalmanon Ka Roshan Mistaqbil*, Delhi, p. 481; and *File No. 6*, p. 6. (Uttar Pradesh State Archive Lucknow).
16. *Bombay Chronicle*, 16 October, 1920.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *The Pioneer*, 25 October, 1920.

19. *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, 1st Jan 1941, (In the convocational address of 1st January 1941 Sultan Ahmad addressed, “there is no gainsaying the fact that racially and politically we (Hindu & Muslim) are all Indian, we breathe in the same atmosphere and till the same land. We are inheritors of the same proud civilization and whatever we may privately think and aspire after, our destinies are linked together. Our political and social salvation can only lie in both Hindu and Muslim pooling their energies together for the reconstruction of a better India. However much you try there is no other road of salvation. Any other road will lead India to chaos, anarchy, bloodshed and perpetual subjection And I conjure you earnestly, all young men both Hindus and Muslims, to remember this hard, sane and incontrovertible fact when you enter a larger sphere of life.”)
20. In 1946 more than 32000 primary members were enrolled by the Aligarh District Congress Committee. It was understood that about 1000 Muslim also get themselves enrolled as members of the Congress. (*The Hindustan Times*, 11 January 1946.)
21. *Deptt. of Police, File No. RR 26*, p. 50. (Uttar Pradesh State Archive Lucknow)
22. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 143-44.
30. *Aligarh Gazette*, pp. 42-43.
31. *Deptt. of Police, File No RR 26, P. 46-47*. (Uttar Pradesh State Archive Lucknow)
32. *Ibid.*, p. 47-48.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-52.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 54.