

THE POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION OF MAULANA UBAIDULLAH SINDHI: FROM PAN-ISLAMISM TO INDIAN NATIONALISM

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the political transformation of Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi from Pan-Islamism to Indian nationalism in the light of his political experience in Kabul from 1915 till 1922. Existing studies have focused on his revolutionary activities, the Silk Letter Movement, and his political ideas, but very few studies have examined the factors in historical context which led him to abandon his Pan-Islamist ideology for Indian nationalism. This study examined Sindhi's ideas about the political situation in Afghanistan, his proposed Provisional Government plan of Free India, Islamic solidarity and collaboration with non-Muslims that revolutionized his political thoughts. The study is based on a qualitative historical approach, drawing on primary and secondary sources, including the autobiographical writings of Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi, his letters, contemporary accounts, and British intelligence reports. The results indicate that Sindhi's ideological transformation was not a sudden activity but slowly transformation influenced by practical political practice. The study discusses that his transformation represented a significant intellectual role to the Indian freedom movement by reconciling Islamic identity with inclusive territorial nationalism. It also ensures that Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi vision is relevant to the ongoing discussions of nationalism and religious identity, interfaith relations and anti-colonial political thinking about religious issues in South Asia.

KEYWORDS: Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi, Silk Letter Movement, Pan-Islamism, Indian Nationalism, Sheikh al-Hind, Provisional Government of Free India, Deoband Movement

1. INTRODUCTION

The role of religious scholars (Ulema) was found significantly important in Indian freedom movement. Moulana Ubaidullah Sindhi (1872-1944) was one of the most remarkable figure among these revolutionary scholars eminent by his scholarly depth and political engagement spreading multiple continents. His transformation from a zealous pan-Islamist to a dedicated Indian nationalist represents not only a personal ideological development but reveals the broader revolution of anti-colonial thought in early twentieth-century India (Abadi, 2016).

Born into a Sikh family in Punjab as Boota Singh, Maulana Sindhi's alteration to Islam and later religious education at Darul Uloom Deoband positioned him at the core of Islamic scholars in India. Under the supervision of Sheikh al-Hind Maulana Mahmood Hasan, he became deeply engrossed in the pan-Islamic currents that swept through Muslim intellectual circles in response to the weakening of the Ottoman Empire and European colonial extension. Though, seven-year residence of Moulana Sindhi in Kabul (1915-1922) in World War I verified transformative, leading him to reconsider the practical feasibility of pan-Islamism and hold a Indian nationalism inclusive of all Indian communities (Sindhi, 2014).

This paper attempts to answer several interrelated questions i-e what issues triggered Maulana Sindhi's ideological alteration? How did his stay in Kabul shape his political thinking? What was the association between the Silk Letter Movement and his evolving nationalist perception? And finally, how did his conversion from pan-Islamism to Indian nationalism effect the broader freedom movement?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Current literature on Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi gives valuable intuitions into the progression of his political thought, revolutionary events, and conversion from Pan-Islamism to Indian nationalism.

Sindhi's *Khutbat wa Maqalat* (Sindhi 2020) makes an important primary source covering his speeches and literatures on Pan-Islamism, Indian nationalism, national political organization, and India's position in local and international politics. Likewise, Muhammad Sarwar's *Halat, Talimat aur Siyasi Afkar* (Sindhi, 1943) studies Sindhi's life, his political work, and scholarly development from his participation in the Pan-Islamist movement

to his involvement in the wider Indian national movement, while also emphasizing his thoughts concerning human unity, jihad, Sufism, and Islamic political thought.

Additionally Sarwar's *Afadat wa Malfuzat* (Sarwar, 2014) also contributes to the understanding of Sindhi's intellectual progression by recording his political discussions in Saudi Arabia (Makkah) and India, his involvement in political assemblies, his thoughts on international political movements, and his valuation of the limitations and failure of the Pan-Islamist movement. The collection *Makateeb-e-Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi*, gathered by Abu Suleman Shah Jahanpuri (Shahjahanpuri, 1997), delivers important primary material through Sindhi's letters and documents, particularly regarding his Pan-Islamist ideas, the Silk Letter Movement, revolutionary strategies, and responses to change national and international political conditions.

Moreover, Mufti Abdul Khaliq Azad's translated *Sar Guzasht-e-Hayat Ubaidullah Sindhi* traces the scholarly basics of Sindhi's believe from Shah Waliullah and Sheikh al-Hind Maulana Mahmood Hasan to his understandings in Kabul, revolutionary Russia, and the advent of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's nationalist government in Turkey. Together, these works provide considerable information about Sindhi's political activities, intellectual effects, and altering political ideas; though, they widely discuss various phases and directions of his thought discretely and do not analytically analyze the reasons, process, and historical situations of his ideological conversion from Pan-Islamism to Indian nationalism. The present study tries to address this gap by analyzing how Sindhi's political experiences, communication with international revolutionary movements, and altering understanding of colonial India contributed to the slowly conversion of his political thinking (Sindhi, 2014). Hussain Ahmad Madani, in his book *Naqsh-e-Hayat*, gives a comprehensive details of the ideological and political basics of the Deoband movement and its significance in the struggle for Indian freedom. The book explains the Pan-Islamist orientation of Deobandi intellectuals, specifically their revolutionary events against British colonial rule and the Silk Letter Movement.

It also analyses the steady development of nationalist politics among Deobandi leaders and their involvement in wider anti-colonial movements. Moreover, the book highlights their later political collaboration with the Indian National Congress and pledge to the struggle for independence of Indian (Madani, 1953). The multi volumes book of Syed Muhammad Mian's on the Silk Letter Movement gives all-inclusive documentation of Deobandi involvement in armed opposition against British rule, emphasizing the organizational networks recognized by Sheikh al-Hind across the subcontinent (Mian, 2012).

The following sections examine how Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi's political thought gradually changed from Pan-Islamism to Indian nationalism. This transformation did not happen abruptly. It developed gradually through his political experiences and struggles. His stay in Kabul, his role in the Provisional Government of Free India, and his engagement in the anti-colonial struggle played an important role in shaping his political views. These experiences helped him understand the practical challenges of the freedom movement and slowly influenced his ideas about Indian nationalism.

3.1 The Ideological Foundation: Pan-Islamism and Sheikh al-Hind's Vision

Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi's political awareness was molded within the crucible of pan-Islamic sentiment that permeated Deoband in the early twentieth century. Sheikh al-Hind Maulana Mahmood Hasan had established a all-inclusive revolutionary policy that pooled religious inspiration with practical preparation for armed struggle. The sheikh's response to the Tripoli and Balkan Wars established the emotional intensity of pan-Islamic identification, he individually gathered funds, dispatched medical tasks, and provisionally closed Darul Uloom in protest (Madani, 1953).

Sheikh al-Hind's revolutionary strategy envisioned many centers of activity across India, corresponding through clandestine systems. The foundation of Jamiat al-Ansar and Nazarat al-Ma'arif al-Qur'aniyyah provided organizational outlines for activating scholars and students. Significantly, his vision stretched beyond mere anti-colonialism to incorporate the defense of Muslim lands worldwide. This pan-Islamic orientation organized the ideological inheritance that Maulana Sindhi carried with him when he got orders to progress to Kabul in 1915 (Sindhi, 2020). This ideological basis molded Maulana Sindhi's hopes when he embarked on his task to Kabul in 1915, where these ideals would soon be confirmed against political realities.

The Journey to Kabul: Expectations and Realities

Departure of Maulana Sindhi's for Kabul in April 1915 was kept in remarkable secrecy. His own writings reveal that he started this mission without complete familiarity of Sheikh al-Hind's comprehensive strategy, trusting solely on belief in his mentor's decision (Sindhi, 1995). The voyage itself, passing through Sindh, Baluchistan, and across the Afghan border, exposed him to varied communities and verified his resolve (Sindhi, 1955).

On reaching Kabul in October 1915, Maulana Sindhi faced a political landscape far more complex than expected. Afghanistan under the leadership of Amir Habibullah Khan retained a faint neutrality, formally friendly to British India while hosting elements against British. The Amir's harmonizing act accepting a British support while allowing Turkish, German and Indian revolutionaries to work within his territory shaped an environment of uncertainty and intrigue. (Sindhi, 1955).

These primary political experiences in Kabul shortly brought Sindhi into communication with the Indo-German-Turkish Mission, an encounter that further reshaped his understanding of revolutionary politics.

3.3 Encounters with the Indo-German-Turkish Mission

The advent of the Indo-German-Turkish mission in Kabul shortly before Maulana Sindhi's own entrance presented new measurements to the revolutionary project. Led by Raja Mahendra Pratap, Maulana Barkatullah Bhopali, and German diplomat Werner Otto von Hentig, this mission represented international backing for Indian independence. Though, Maulana Sindhi's relations with the mission exposed fundamental deviations in perspective. His valuation of the mission's limitations proved prescient. The German members, he observed, lacked understanding of Indian circumstances and continued unrealistic prospects about Afghan cooperation. Maulana Barkatullah, despite his revolutionary identifications, proven partial knowledge of the geographical and political territory separating Afghanistan from India. Internal disagreement weakened the mission. Germans blame Indians for not keeping promises, while Indians criticizing German for their weaknesses and lack of support (Sindhi, 1955).

More importantly, Maulana Sindhi acknowledged that only pan-Islamic solidarity could not assure practical support. Amir Habibullah's unwillingness to commit Afghanistan to war counter to Britain stemmed from accurate valuation of German-Turkish distance and British closeness. The recognition that Muslim rulers ranked state welfares over religious unity planted seeds of doubt concerning pan-Islamism's practical feasibility (Sindhi, 1955).

The Provisional Government of Free India: A Crucible of Transformation

The establishment of the Provisional Government of Free India in Kabul on December 1, 1915, was an important turning point in the Maulana Ubaid Allah Sindhi political thinking. This government-in-exile, with Raja Mahendra Pratap (a Hindu) as President and Maulana Barkatullah as Prime Minister, signified unparalleled Hindu-Muslim alliance in the revolutionary struggle. Maulana Sindhi's reception of the Interior Ministry portfolio showed his inclination to work in a irreligious nationalist outline. The Provisional Government's alignment mirrored the radicalization of Indian nationalism beyond common lines. Its secretariat working twenty-two secretaries from diverse backgrounds, and its manifesto called upon Muslims and Hindus to stay united while influence princes and soldiers to dissident against British imperialism. For Maulana Sindhi, contribution in this multi-religious revolutionary form provided practical experience of Hindu-Muslim collaboration at the highest level of political society (Pratap, 1947).

The Silk Letter Movement: Pan-Islamic Dreams and Nationalist Realities

The *Tehrik-e-Reshmi Rumal* (Silk Letter Movement) epitomized the culmination of revolutionary design originating from Kabul. Over letters composed on cloth of silk and hidden in clothing, Maulana Sindhi and his companions wanted to manage anti-British deeds across India, the Hijaz and Afghanistan. The movement planned founding an "Army of God" (Junood Allah al-Rabbaniyyah) with Medina as head office and divisions in Kabul, Tehran, and Constantinople (Sedition Committee Report, 1918).

Though, the movement's exposure in August 1916, when British intelligence interrupted silk letters over the unintentional cooperation of Abdul Haq, established the susceptibility of even the most sensibly planned plans. The succeeding arrests of key revolutionaries, including Sheikh Abdur Rahim in Sindh, badly weakened the network built over many years. (Sindhi, 2014).

However the movement's failure shown intelligently fruitful for Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi. The experience shown that pan-Islamic pleas, however emotionally influential, could not overwhelmed practical hindrances: British intelligence dominance, Afghan uncertainty, German-Turkish undependability, and the absenteeism of mass mobilization within India. These recognitions pushed him to reassessing basic assumptions about revolutionary plan (Sarwar, 2014).

The Afghan Crucible: Amir Habibullah's Balancing Act

Seven years stay of Maulana Sindhi's in Kabul provided prolonged observation of international relations and Afghan politics. Amir Habibullah's cautious navigation between British pressure and anti-British sentiment established the limits of relying on Muslim rulers for revolutionary purposes. Despite personal kindness from Crown Prince Sardar Nasrullah Khan and pan-Islamic intellectuals like Sardar Mahmood Tarzi, the Amir reliably ordered Afghan state interests over religious unity (Sindhi, 2014).

This experience verified disillusioning for Maulana Sindhi. His early belief that a Muslim country would naturally favor the liberation of companion Muslims from Christian rule collapsed earlier the truth of statecraft. The Amir's recognition of British subsidies, his unwillingness to mobilize tribes of Afghan, and his ultimate drift toward Entente powers as the war proceeded established that pan-Islamic sentiment could not override geopolitical calculation (Sarwar, 2014).

Intellectual Evolution: From Pan-Islamism to Territorial Nationalism

The collective influence of these experiences changed Maulana Sindhi's political philosophy. In his own words, he recognized that "pan-Islamism was an illusion and a fantasy" in the situation of practical politics (Sindhi, 1995). This consciousness did not characterize relinquishment of Islamic individuality but rather its reconfiguration in a nationalist framework. The following are the basic reasons:

First practical experience in the Provisional Government confirmed the likelihood and necessity of Hindu-Muslim alliance. Working with Raja Mahendra Pratap and other non-Muslim revolutionaries, Maulana Sindhi practiced nationalism as a uniting force exceeding religious limitations (Sindhi, 1955).

Second the failure of exterior powers i- e Imperial Germany, Ottoman Turkey and Afghanistan to offer significant support exposed the borders of international pan-Islamic solidarity. Even with announcements of empathy, these powers followed their own benefits, leaving Indian revolutionaries to tolerate the consequences (Sindhi, 1995).

Third Amir Habibullah's instruct that revolutionary activities should be carried "in association with non-Muslim nationals" (Sindhi, 1995) carried understood wisdom about the nature of Indian civilization and the necessities for positive anti-colonial struggle.

Fourth observation of worldwide political movements, specifically the beginning of national democracies, persuaded Maulana Sindhi that the time of religious empires had gone. The modern era demands new systems of political organization founded on regional nationality rather than religious affiliation (Sindhi, 2020).

Post-Kabul Trajectory: Consolidation of Nationalist Perspective

Following his exit from Kabul in 1922, intellectual journey of Maulana Sindhi's remains through travels in the Soviet Union, Turkey and Arabia. His long stay in Mecca made his contact with Ibn Saud's emergent state, where he openly identified himself as an "Indian nationalist". This self-identification made the accomplishment of his ideological alteration (Sindhi, 1995).

His later writings methodically criticized pan-Islamism while articulating a nationalist dream for India. He claimed that Muslims must contribute fully in India's regional nationalism, knowing that their future lay in India instead of extra-territorial loyalties. The idea was similar to the later congress Muslim views of composite nationalism. (Sarwar, 2014).

3.9 Contemporary Relevance

Maulana Sindhi's transformation from pan-Islamism to Indian nationalism presents teachings for existing debates around religious uniqueness and citizenship in South Asia. His insistence that Muslims must root their political devotions in Indian Region rather than extra-territorial associations resonates with continuing discussions about minority citizenship and national belonging. His recognition that religious harmony alone could not sustain operative anti-colonial tussle speaks to broader questions about political activation in multiple societies. The necessity of making alliances across religious lines, demonstrated through his effort with Hindu revolutionaries in Kabul, remains related for democratic politics in existing India (Shakir, 2021).

CONCLUSION

The political transformation of Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi was a gradual process. He was influenced from the political situation in Afghanistan, his own observations, practical political experience especially in the Silk Letter Movement and his idea about Hindu-Muslim cooperation. One of the major shift in his ideas was due to Amir Habibullah Khan. He influenced Maulana Sindhi to cooperate with non-Muslims Indians. He studied the Russian Revolution and it directly influenced his political ideas. His ideas of nation states emerged during his visit to Turkey. This led him to conclude that, in the modern era, political systems founded on territorial and national principles were more practical and effective than those based on religious empires. These cumulative experiences, observations, and political realities redirected his intellectual outlook, gradually leading him from Pan-Islamism toward Indian nationalism.

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