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Role Of The Wahabis In 1857 Movement At Patna

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The news of the outbreak at Meerut had caused widespread disquiet in the outstations of Bihar. Bihar posed a tough problem for the company's authorities. Patna was fast assuming a mutinous garb at the instance of the Muhammadans of the Wahabi sect. The activities of Wahabism in Patna went a great way in preparing Bihar for the mutinous outbreak.¹ Wahabism, so called after its founder, Muhammad Wahab, who was born at Ayaina in Arab in 1703.²

Wahabism made its appearance in India in early nineteenth century as a religious movement and attacked the 'religious corruptions', which had crept into the Muslim society. In India it had a special appeal, as many of the converts from Hinduism had brought over their new faith, ideas and practices which were contrary to the spirit of Islam. Wahabism fiercely advocated a return of simplicity of faith and society of the Prophet's Arabia and rejected all accretions to and declensions from the Pure Islam.³

The movement, however, soon transferred itself into religious-political creed and it was ambition of its founder Syed Ahamad of Rai Bareilly to revive and restore Muslim power in India by overthrowing the Sikhs in Punjab and British in Bengal.⁴ It is essential to note, Wahabism as preached by Syed Ahmad was not a separate religion as has been insinuated by some of the English writers, especially Hunter who refers to Wahabi movement as the

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religion, to Syed Ahmad as the Prophet and the Sirat-I- Mustaqim as the new Quran of the sect.⁵

As far as the theory of the influence of Arabian Wahabism on its Indian counterpart there is no documentary evidence or authoritative proof. The fact is that there are certain similarities between the two movements owing to their, both being inspired by the common source of Quran and Hadis. But at the same time there are certain important points of difference between the two. The first was the markedly political aspect of movement in India, which was completely absent in Arabia. Another distinctive feature of the Indian Wahabism was its identification, at one stage, with the Mahdavi movement, which was also never in evidence in Arabia.⁶

By 1820 the Wahabi Movement was widely prevalent in Bengal, the North-West frontier, United provinces and it spread even in the Southern India up to Madras.⁷ The anti- British attitude of Syed Ahamad was clear as early as 1817 when he gave up the service of the Nawab of Tonk as the latter became a feudatory of the British. Beside this, his collection of letters, preserved in the British Museum, throws some light on the relations with the Hindus. In its political aspect the movement of Syed Ahamad had a definite anti-British bias, and he was seen to elicit Hindu support and co-operation in his struggle.⁸

It is also important to know about the military position of British at Bihar before discussing the movement of Wahabi. The waterline between Calcutta and Allahabad, about 664 miles in length, had one weak middle point at Danapur and Patna, two places only twelve miles apart. Danapur was approximately situated in between Calcutta and Allahabad. It was 344 miles from Calcutta. At Danapur there was three native regiments, the 7th, 8th, 40th N.I., One Company of European, one of native artillery and 10th foot.⁹ It was certain that should the three native regiments break

away, as their comrades in other places had broken away during the movement of 1857, a great danger would be consisted for Bihar itself, and possibly for Calcutta.¹⁰

The political importance of the location of Bihar lay in the fact that different parts of it had more or less easy access to the Ganges, and the Grand Trunk Road ran through a large part of the province, so that any untoward incidents endangering the safety of the province which have cut off the two great highways to the Upper Provinces.

The strategic importance of Bihar from the point of view lay in its immense opium cultivation, the quantity of manufactured and partially manufactured opium in the go-downs at Patna and in the large and scattered treasuries, almost unprotected, so that in case of mutiny all such Government property in Bihar was likely to fall in the hands of mutineers." G.B. Malleson writes: "The Province, Western Bihar of which Patna was the capital, was one of the richest province in India. It contained a considerable number of native landowners, men of large estates and ancient lineage. English merchants, too, had invested large sum in the province in the cultivation of indigo, one of its staple exports. It touched on the one side the North-West, the revolted district of Ghazipur, Azamgarh, Jaunpur and Mirzapur; the North, it touched Nepal; to the East, the division of Eastern Bihar, not only combustible itself, but open to invasion by the Sipahis in Eastern Bengal, then in a state of incipient mutiny."¹²

Militarily speaking Bihar stood defenceless in the sense that the province was garrisoned mainly by native regiments with an almost negligible percentage of European forces to exercise any effective control over them.¹³ Before the arrival of reinforcement from Persia, Ceylon and Burma, the European regiment at Danapur was the only English regiment in the long line between Calcutta and Lucknow.¹⁴ Having in view the extent of the country it

had to guard- the area of Western Bihar alone comprehending 2101 square miles, with a population of upwards of a million and a half, its proximity to the influential city of Patna, to the fact that many of the native landowners of Bihar were commanding a large following. Kaye and Malleon writes: "It still seems strange that the expedient, so successfully adopted at Lahore and other places-the expedient of disarming the native troops- was not at once resorted to here. The postponement of such a measure necessarily chained the European troops to the station of Danapur, leaving all the other districts in the Patna division to shift for themselves".¹⁵

Long before the actual outbreak of revolt of 1857, conspiracies had been systematically and extensively carried on in Patna and the neighbouring territories; men were engaged and regularly paid; subscriptions to finance mutinous preparations were raised and the collections distributed; and communications maintained with the evident and obvious purpose of declaring a general crusade against the British in India and helping the restoration of the Mohammadan Sovereignty.¹⁶

At the commencement of the mutiny such Wahabi leaders of Patna as Peer Ali, Warris Ali, Ali Kareem, Luft Ali Khan and the three Maulvis-Mohammad Hussain, Ahamadullah and Waizul Haq kept the city in readiness for mutiny at the slightest provocation.¹⁷

The great aim of Pir Ali in accordance with the instructions of his collaborator, Masihuzzaman of Lucknow, was to affect a co-ordination of the activities of their distinct groups to harmonize the comparatively diffused feeling of discontent into a powerful and homogenous movement against the government. The letters of Masihuzzaman to Pir Ali, many of which were seized after the suppression of the rising bear ample testimony to his efforts for achieving this object.¹⁸

The Wahabis were said to be engaged in a general

conspiracy against the government. On the 12th June a Najib was found spreading sedition among Rattary's Sikhs. He was tried, found guilty and hanged.¹⁹ Taylor tell that he could wait no longer. He could not bring the Wahabi leaders to court, for "the actual evidence of their direct complicity in any of the conspiracies that have lately taken place is not such, at present, as to warrant any legal proceedings against them".²⁰

In these circumstances Mr. William Taylor, Commissioner of Patna determined to strike at the root of disaffection by arresting the three Maulvis who were as the head of the Patna branch of Wahabis. He was, however, afraid of arresting them openly for it might have led to resistance, which Mr. Taylor was careful to avoid.²¹ Along with a few respectable citizens of Patna, the Maulvis were invited by Taylor to his house for consultation on the state of affairs on 18th June.²² The next morning (June 19th) the honourable citizens presented themselves including Ahamadullah, Muhammad Hussain and Waizul Haq. When they had assembled Taylor himself entered, accompanied by the collector, Capt Rattray, Soobadar Hidayat Ali and a few others.²³ When the conference was over he allowed the others to depart, the Maulvis were detained as hostages for the good behaviour of their followers and were handed over to the custody of Captain Rattray. Soon after they were dispatched under an escort of the Sikh regiment to the then circuit house where they were put under detention.²⁴ About detention of the Maulvis, Taylor Comments: "To this day I look at the detention of these men as the one of the most successful strokes of policy which I was able to carry into execution".²⁵ Malleon found nothing wrong in this proceeding. Taylor, he argues, "represented the governing power of the land; the Maulvis were the avowed subjects of that power; they were not Mr. Taylor's guests; they went to his house to hear the voice of the Government they served; and the voice ordered them to remain in honorary

confinement so long as the crisis might last".²⁶

Taylor's own justification was, "I took possession of these leading men, therefore, more for the purpose of holding them as hostages for the good conduct of their whole brotherhood, than with the expectation of having sufficient evidence to punish them; and though it was a bold, and perhaps a dangerous stroke, and several of the more timid thought it might led to resistance, I counted the cost, and am thankful to say that the result has more than answered my expectations."²⁷ S.N. Sen rightly remarks about the whole episode and expresses his view "It was no doubt a dangerous stroke, but bold it was not. It needed no courage to invite unsuspecting men to one's residence and put them under arrest when they were not in a position to resist... the apologists of Taylor including Malleson triumphantly point out that there was a Wahabi conspiracy eight years later and Maulvi Ahamadullah, one of the three Wahabi leaders arrested by Taylor on the 20th June, was convicted of treason on that occasion. The Maharaja of Dumraon was a suspect at one time and so was the Rani of Tikari. The rich Zamindars had as anxious a time as their British rulers and had to provide for the safety of their lives and property, but if they dug out rusty guns or recruited armed retainers they were suspected of treasonable designs".²⁸

The arrest of these leaders certainly upset the Wahabi arrangement for transmission of money to frontier where as a result, acute privations prevailed. But Taylor was wrong in his assertion that this act withheld the Wahabis from joining in the movement of 1857. Taylor seems to have been obsessed with the idea that it was his preventive detention of the Wahabi leaders, coupled with the unconcealed threat of Elahi Bux, which held the Wahabi group in check during those crucial days.²⁹

The arrest of three Maulvis was followed up by the arrest of Maulvi Mehdi, the patrolling magistrate of Patna, strongly

suspected of connivance with the disaffected.³⁰ On 20th June, Mr. Taylor issued a proclamation calling upon all citizens to deliver up their arms, within twenty four hours and another forbidding all citizens to remain indoor after 9 p.m.³¹ These measures were to a great extent successful. The disaffected were deprived for their most trusted leaders; several thousands strands of arms were peaceably delivered up and nightly meetings of conspirators ceased. But crisis was not over. Three days after proclamation a corporal of the Native police, Warris Ali was arrested in Tirhut. Upon his person was found a bundle of letters implicating in the rebellions movement one Ali Karim, an influential Muslim residing nine miles from Patna. Mr. Taylor dispatched the Magistrate of Patna; Mr. Lowis to arrest him but Ali Karim was successful to escape.³²

Patna was not destined to remain tranquil. On the evening of the 3rd July, some two hundred Muslims led by Pir Ali, a bookseller, noted for his enthusiasm for his religion, paraded the streets with the green flags and music.³³ They marched towards the Roman Catholic church situated in the heart of the city. Mr. Taylor immediately directed Captain Rattray, attended by the magistrate, Mr. J.M. Lowis, to march down with 150 Sikhs for the protection of residents. But before they could reach the scene Dr. R. Lyell, the principal assistant to the opium agent of Bihar, was shut down and beheaded.³⁴ After this incident, Kaye and Malleson mentions that they moved towards with renewed enthusiasm, their numbers being augmented at every stop and after some time they found themselves face to face with Rattray's 150 Sikhs.³⁵ The Wahabi followers were then dispersed and one of them killed and another severely wounded. Consequent on the failure of the attempted rising the ringleaders were sought to be arrested and the city underwent a complete search. Thirty one³⁶ were apprehended. Amongst them were Peer Ali, the actual leader, Sheikh Ghuseeta, Jamadar of Looft Ali khan, the richest banker of Patna and Looft Ali Khan himself.³⁷

The arrested persons were not sent to an ordinary court of law but produced before a commission consisting of Taylor and Lewis, magistrate of Patna.³⁸ Taylor indirectly admits that the "niceties of cross examination" and 'the Punctilios of judicial ceremony were not permitted.'³⁹ Of the thirty one who were seized fourteen were hanged in company with a man named Waris Ali, Jamadar of Mr. Ali Kareem, a man of great wealth, large estates and corresponding influence.⁴⁰

The sentence was signed by Taylor alone. Samuells, Taylor's successor suspected that the sentences were passed on insufficient evidence and the papers were referred to the Nizamat Adalat. The judges confined their enquiry to cases of imprisonment and flogging only, and their finding was against Taylor.⁴¹ Lewis disavowed in writing his responsibility for most of the sentences. The Governor-General recorded in his minute of the 4th March 1859, "I believe that in the course of Mr. Taylor's proceedings men were condemned and executed upon insufficient evidence", but in view of Taylor's intended resignation he was unwilling to order a public enquiry, unless Taylor himself wanted it.⁴² But Taylor's policy of constant arrests and 'continued hangings was warmly supported by the mercantile community of Calcutta whose commercial interests had every chance of being jeopardized in case of rising in the district of Tirhut for which Patna and Danapur were the two important stations.⁴³

Many historians hold the view that the Wahabi movement was confined to dissatisfied Muslim masses and it had no popular basis. Edward Lockwood holds the view that it would be unjust to hold that the district of Patna as a whole had been mutiny-minded and up in arms. The rural population of the district did not share in the mutinous spirit of the sepoys.⁴⁴

The total failure of the attempted rising of 3rd July 1857

signified the un-willingness or inability of mass of the people of Patna to join the movement against the Government. The movement of Patna was mainly the work of Wahabi leaders and they failed to gain support of their own community and people like soobadar Hidayat Ali and others helped the British authorities to suppress the movement.

Dr. R.C. Majumdar gave more importance to absence of the Wahabis as the opponent of the English as an important factor to the reckoned with. To say in the words of Dr. Majumdar: "This violently anti-British military organization (the Wahabis) practically kept aloof from the great revolutionary movement of 1857. It was obvious that the strong military organizations of the Wahabis at Sittana could have rendered great service to the cause of the mutiny by attacking the British in the North-West as that would have considerably hampered, if not altogether stopped, the constant flow of men and money from Punjab to Delhi."⁴⁵

Dr. Sen also expresses the same view. He comments: "like many of their countrymen individual Indian Wahabis might have participated in the revolt of 1857, but if the community as such had decided to cast in their lot with the sepoys leaders, Sir John Lawrence would have found it unsafe to denude the Punjab of European troops and recruit so many Punjabi Muslims to fight for the cause of the British".⁴⁶

But it is incorrect to maintain that the Wahabis did not fight against the English at all during the crucial years of 1857 revolt. Although it is true that they did not join hands with the leaders of the movement, but their frontier party, under Enayat Ali, constantly fought against the English during the period. But the superior and better organized resources of the English, which helped them to meet the challenge of so many scattered 'centres of revolt' all over Northern India, enabled them to meet this one additional source of trouble as well. Material and technological superiority was the one

crucial advantage possessed by the English over the Indian opponents and it could not have been materially affected by the action of the Wahabis. It is also true that whole of Punjab was not a Wahabi sphere of influence and the latter could in no way be held responsible for the attitude of the general people of the land.

It is thus true that the significance of the continuing process of the anti-English activities of the Wahabis has not been properly brought out. Prof. Irfan Habib has rightly remarks: "In northern India the 'Wahabis' were already spreading the net of propaganda about the English being the enemy of the faith, against whom Jihad or holy war was enjoined. They actually contributed warriors- called Jihadis to the revolt: Many of these, including persons from amongst 'Weavers, artisans and other wage earners', joined Bakht Khan, the rebel commander in Delhi".⁴⁷

The greatest contribution of the Wahabis to the movement was that they prepared ideological platform for the movement. Denying the contributions of the Wahabis in the national movement would be greatest injustice to all those Patna rebels and leaders, who had lost their hearths and homes, spent their days in prisons, and also to those persons who were executed for revolt.

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Sculptures Of Mahisasuramardini From Alampur Museum An Iconographical Study

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Alampur is the head quarters of a mandal of that name in Mahaboobnagar district of Andhra Pradesh. The town is at a distance of about 6 miles from the Railway Station, Alampur road, on the Secunderabad-Dronachalam section of the South Central Railway. Alampur is known variously as Halampura, Hatampura, Alampura, Hemalapura and Alpura¹. This place seems to have been well noted for its high religious sanctity as can be inferred from the several epigraphical records left by the kings of several dynasties that held sway over Andhra desa².

The several inscriptions³ and the many temples found in this town and its surroundings bear an eloquent testimony to the antiquity and the historical importance of the place. Most significant of the remains here is the group of temples known as the 'Nava Brahma temples' which stand within the fort in the town⁴. The archaeological Museum at Alampur has several interesting sculptures, stone and bronze images of Saivite and Vaishnavite gods and goddesses and minor deities. This museum has collected and preserved as many as eight Mahisasuramardini sculptures. These sculptures are found displayed in the Museum. From the point of view of iconography, there is every need to make a detailed study of the Mahisasuramardini sculptures of the Alampur Museum. Hitherto, no such study has been made. Therefore, an attempt is made here to study the iconographical features of Mahisasuramardini sculptures. An attempt is also made here to

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