

The Impact of the Missionary Activities of British Rule in 19th Century India

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Abstract—The fall of the Mughal Empire and the advent of British colonial rule marked a turning point in India's history, profoundly reshaping its socio-political landscape. The decline of Muslim political dominance, coupled with British policies and aggressive missionary activities, led to widespread resentment and ideological resistance among the Muslim community. This paper focuses the detrimental effect of the invasion of British on the Muslim society, the transmission of India from 'land of peace' to land of war and the causes of the origin of the India's freedom struggle.

Index Terms—Christian missionary, Decline of Muslim Rule, Muslim attitude towards British, British attitude towards Muslims, Muslim freedom struggle, Indian freedom struggle.

I. INTRODUCTION

The decline of Muslim political dominance in India following Aurangzeb's death and the subsequent rise of British rule profoundly altered the socio-political landscape of the subcontinent. The loss of power led to deep resentment among the Muslim community, who had long enjoyed privileges under the Mughal Empire. This resentment was further fueled by the British administration's policies, which gradually eroded Islamic legal traditions and replaced them with colonial laws. The introduction of British legal and educational reforms marginalized the Muslim elite and disrupted their traditional socio-political structures. A significant factor contributing to Muslim discontent was the aggressive promotion of Christianity by European missionaries. The British government not only facilitated missionary activities but also provided financial and institutional support for their expansion. Missionary schools, orphanages, and conversion campaigns targeted both Hindus and Muslims, heightening suspicions that British rule aimed at religious transformation. Muslim communities

perceived these efforts as a direct attack on their faith and identity.

The loss of Muslim political dominance and the rise of British rule led to deep resentment among the Muslim community, culminating in discontent due to political marginalization, religious interference, and cultural imposition, setting the stage for future conflicts and shaping the trajectory of India's freedom struggle.

The relevance of this study lies in its exploration of the complex socio-political dynamics that shaped India's history during the transition from Mughal to British rule. By examining the decline of Muslim political dominance and the impact of British policies and missionary activities, the study provides insights into the roots of religious and cultural tensions that influenced India's independence movement.

Objectives of the study:

Understand the impact of British colonial policies: To investigate how British administrative, legal, and educational reforms affected the Muslim community.

Assess the role of missionary activities: To evaluate the influence of European missionaries and their efforts to promote Christianity in India.

Explore Muslim resistance and discontent: To study the forms of ideological and religious resistance that emerged in response to British policies and missionary activities.

Examine the socio-political consequences: To analyze the long-term effects of British rule on the Muslim community and its impact on India's freedom struggle.

Methodology of the Study

Conduct a thorough review of existing scholarly articles, books, and historical documents related to the decline of Muslim political dominance in India, British colonial policies, and missionary activities. Analyze primary and secondary sources to gather historical context and perspectives. Examine historical records, government documents, and personal accounts from the period to understand the socio-political landscape. Investigate the administrative, legal, and educational reforms introduced by the British and their impact on the Muslim community.

Analyze the collected data using qualitative research methods to identify patterns, themes, and key factors contributing to Muslim discontent and resistance. Synthesize findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of the socio-political dynamics during the period. Interpret the findings in the context of the broader historical narrative of India's struggle for independence.

Hypotheses of the Study

Missionary Activities and Cultural Imperialism: The aggressive promotion of Christianity by European missionaries, supported by the British government, intensified Muslim discontent and fostered resistance against colonial rule.

Communal Tensions: The British policy of divide and rule exacerbated communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims, contributing to long-term socio-political divisions in Indian society.

Religious and Cultural Resistance: Muslim resistance to British policies and missionary activities was rooted in the perceived threat to their religious and cultural identity, leading to ideological and theological opposition.

II. THE MENTAL ATTITUDES OF INDIAN MUSLIMS

Before the death of Aurangzeb, the Mughal Empire occupied most of the subcontinent of India. When Aurangzeb died, this unifying symbol was removed. A

series of wars of succession broke out. In the midst of this general disorder, India became a prey to foreign aggressors. Between 1740 and 1760, European wars in which France and England were opponents brought them into conflict in India as well. When the fights and diplomatic strategies were over, the French had virtually been driven from the country. In the process, the British gained a territorial foothold in Bengal from which they would stride victoriously across India.

The mental attitude and the agony of the Muslims at the loss of political power has been admirably summed up by R.M. Sayani, the Muslim President of the Indian National Congress held at Calcutta in 1896 (*Congress Presidential Addresses*, 1935, pp. 278-79) in the following words: "Before the advent of the British in India, the *Musalman*s were the rulers of the country. The *Musalman*s had therefore, all the advantages appertaining to the ruling class. The sovereigns and the chiefs were their co-religionists, and so were the great landlords and the great officials. The court language was their own. Every place of trust and responsibility, or carrying influence and high emoluments, was by birthright theirs. The Hindus did occupy some positions but the Hindu holders of positions were but the tenants-at-will of the *Musalman*s. The *Musalman*s had complete access to the sovereigns and to the chiefs. They could, and did, often eat at the same table with them. They could, also, and often did, intermarry. The Hindus stood in awe of them. Enjoyment and influence and all the good things of the world were theirs..... By a stroke of misfortune, the *Musalman*s had to abdicate their position and descend to the level of their Hindu fellow-countrymen. The Hindus who had before stood in awe of their *Musalman* masters, were thus raised a step by the fall of their said masters and with their former awe dropped their courtesy also. The *Musalman*s, who are a very sensitive race, naturally resented this treatment and would have nothing to do either with the rulers or with their fellow subjects."

III. ANTI-MUSLIM ATTITUDES OF BRITISH GOVERNMENT

Indeed the Indian *ulama* avoided direct clash with the British at first. Muslim scholars had been slow to react publicly to British rule, perhaps because the East India Company had only very gradually departed from the medieval *modus vivendi* between the religious and the political establishment. Until 1790, penal justice in

Bengal continued to be dispensed according to the revived *Sharia* norms of Aurangzeb's time, and Regulation II of 1772 had provided that 'in all suits regarding inheritance, succession, marriage and caste and other usages and institutions, the law of the *Quran* with respect to Muhammadans.....shall be invariably adhered to' (Hardy, P. 1972, p. 51). But in the last decade of the eighteenth century and in the first decade of the nineteenth, the East India Company began by legislation to substitute its own rules of evidence, definitions of offences and penalties for those of the *Sharia*. In the years that followed the British started interfering in the religious and cultural affairs of the people.

A. Christian Missionary Works

It is beyond the scope to go into a detailed narration of the activities of the Christian missionaries and the zeal of some of the Company's directors and administrators for the propagation of the Christian religion among the Indians. However, here depict some initial developments in this matter to realise the intensity of Muslim religious sentiments and to know why the Muslim scholars turned against the British rule and declared that India as *dar-al-harb*. They were shocked by the anti-Muslim ways of the foreigners and the activities of the Christian missionaries and over-zealous government officials. The establishment of British authority in India encouraged the Christian missions to intensify their missionary efforts. At times they received the support of British officers (Haq, M. A. 1972, p. 37).

The British Government sought to spread Christianity in India, as the orthodox Hindu and Muslims noticed with growing alarm, not only through legislative enactments but also through Christian missionaries. The missionaries systematically preached Christianity through missionary societies, missionary schools, native churches and through the Calcutta Bible Society, which was founded for the translation of the Biblical texts into Oriental languages and for the circulation of the translated texts among the native people (Chattopadhyaya, H. 1957, p. 36).

This zeal for missionary preaching can be traced as far back as the period of the Mughal ruler Jahangir. The first important book, which sums up the Christian attack against Islam was written in India in the reign of Jahangir by the Portuguese missionary Xavier, entitled *A'ina-i-Haq Numa* (The Truth-revealing Mirror). In it, the controversy ranged round the

following subjects: the mystery of Trinity, the divinity of Christ, the integrity of the Christian scriptures. His attack against Islam is on the following points: marriage, polygamy, divorce. An Indian Muslim, Ahmad ibn Zaynul Abidin, wrote a book in reply to this attack in 1621 C E. The argument is based on the usual grounds: (a) prophecies about the Prophet Muhammad are contained in the Christian scriptures which they misinterpret; (b) contradictions in the New and Old Testaments (Dar, B. A. 1957, p. 87).

The missionaries started their work in Madras and Bengal where the English had first gained political control, but gradually it was extended to the other parts of the country. Centres were opened in almost every important town of the Uttar Pradesh and after the second Sikh War; they were extended to the Punjab and the Frontier Provinces. In the Punjab, for instance, Sir Henry Lawrence, Lord Lawrence, Sir Robert Montgomery and several other Christian administrators openly encouraged the Christian missionaries with monetary and moral support to start their work in the area (Clark, R. R. 1885, pp. 4-9). In this set-up, the officials of the Company gave as much help as possible.

When the Charter of the East India Company was renewed in 1813, full facilities were given to the Christian missionaries. They provided facilities to the Christian missionaries for the 'moral improvement' of the Indian people (Clark, R. R. 1885, p. 9 & Richter, J. 1908, pp. 137-8). In another clause, a provision for a lakh of rupees was made for the purpose of improving Indian literature, supporting Indian scholars and introducing Western knowledge among the people. As this provision worked in actual practice, the bulk of this money flowed to enrich the coffers of the missionaries who took the first opportunity to open schools and orphanages in all parts of the growing British Empire.

In 1793 William Carey, a Baptist missionary, came from England to India with a mission to preach Christianity among the natives there. Carey settled at Serampur in Bengal. Serampur became a busy centre of missionary activity. Carey and his co-adjustors, Marshman and Ward, proved untiring in their efforts to popularise the teachings of Christianity among the natives both from platform and through press (Chattopadhyaya, H. 1957, p. 36). The Lutheran missionaries in the like manner were actively engaged

in spreading Christianity in South India in the 18th century.

The Missionary was, therefore very often more hated than an English political official, because of Cornwallis real or supposed designs to convert or evangelise the people of India. The missionary schools, the missionary preaching roused the wrath of the entire orthodox Indian society. Sir Syed Ahmed wrote; "They believed that Government intended to force the Christian religion and foreign customs upon Hindus and Mussulmans alike. It has been commonly believed that Government and the officers of Government throughout the country were in the habit of giving large sums of money to these missionaries, with the intention of covering their expenses, enabling them to distribute books, and in every way aiding them" (Dar, B. A, 1957, p.55).

"The missionaries, moreover, introduced a new System of preaching. They took to printing and circulating controversial tracts in a most offensive and irritating way. They used to attend places of public resort, markets, for instance, and fairs, where men of different creeds were collected together, and used to begin preaching there. It was only from fear of the authorities that no one bade them be off on their business. In some districts, the missionaries were attended by policemen from the station..... In violent and unmeasured language, they attacked the followers, and the holy places, of other creeds, annoying and insulting beyond expression the feelings of those who listened to them..." (Dar, B. A, 1957, p. 55).

The British government was universally suspected of designs to convert the people to Christianity. The question of the future religion of the sub-continent was freely discussed in English magazines...and missionaries occupied a position of privilege, especially in the educational structure of the government" (Ikram, S. M. 1962, pp. 414-15).

"The missionary schools were started in which the principles of Christian faith were taught. Lads who attended the school used to be asked such questions as the following: "Who is your God? Who is your Redeemer? And those questions they were obliged to answer agreeably to the Christian belief- prizes being given accordingly... People believed that if their children were entered at the school, they might have employment given them by Government, and be enabled to find some means of subsistence" (Much, M. A. 1940, pp. 3-5). The British government utilized this

attitude of the people and they propagated their religion in the tender hearts through this manner. It is said that Lord Wellesley, the Governor General of India (1798-1805), appointed a Christian Missionary as a professor of Sanskrit in the Fort William College, Calcutta. Whatever be the judgment of an impartial student of Indian history regarding the pious intentions of the Christian preachers, there is no doubt that the loss of the political power had made the Indians suspicious of and sensitive to all British moves in the fields of education, commerce or politics.

The Charter of 1833 had opened up the gates of India to missions from countries other than England and so within a very short period the whole country was invaded by the new missionary societies. Though it may be argued that the government of the East India Company had functioned on the whole as a secular state the impression grew in India that its aim, slow but sure, was the Christianization of the land. This impression was confirmed by such measures as the official encouragement of the conversion of orphaned and destitute children to Christianity during the famine of 1837. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that Christian missionary denunciations of other religions still continued in the mid-nineteenth century in the medieval tradition of virulence and abuse (Khan, S. A. 1858, pp. 21-22), which was directed especially against the Prophet of Islam. Another sphere of activity presented itself before missionaries during the great famine of 1837-38, when thousands of people suffered by this scourge. The Government took up relief measures and the result was that Christians founded orphanages in Benares and Agra to receive orphans who were later brought up as Christians. As a result of this activity during 1838-40, around 5,000 Hindus and Muslims joined the new faith. This was indeed a serious situation (Dar, B. A. 1957, p. 24). After 1849 the Punjab and the Frontier lay open before them. The local officers in the Punjab openly professed to be Christians first and "supported the work of the missionaries with self-sacrifice and energy of personal initiative such as have hardly been equalled in the history of Indian missions" (Richter, J. 1908, p. 194).

Bentinck's legislation in another province with a Muslim majority, Bengal, had no doubt extended the right of conversion and reconversion to all religions, but it also provided a special safeguard for converts to Christianity from Islam by protecting their right of

inheritance, contrary to the *Sharia* law. In 1853 Sir Herbert Edwardes, agent to the Governor General for the Muslim Northwestern Frontier Areas declared that the 'Divine plan' of entrusting the rule of India to the British was that 'England had made the greatest efforts to preserve the Christian religion in its purest Apostolic form Our mission, then, is to do for other nations what we have done for our own' (Clark, R. R. 1885, pp. 162-4).

The activities of the missionaries for the spread of education among native boys and girls and for preaching Christianity to the native population produced not a little discontent and disaffection in the country. In the agricultural district, specially the missionaries earned the reproach of godlessness and were looked upon as Government agent commissioned to destroy peoples' faith. The disaffection caused by the missionary propaganda, prevailed in the North rather than in the South. In the North, the Muslims looked upon the British people as a ruling race that had unjustly deprived them of their sovereignty over India. Since the missionaries were preaching the religion of the British people, they fell into disfavour of the Muslims in the North. To them the idea of embracing the religion of their sup planters was repugnant and revolting. The Hindus of the North being extremely caste-conscious opposed what the missionaries preached. The Sepoy Army of the North was of high-caste composition and was greatly agitated over the missionary propaganda for the spread of Christianity in the country. Consequently, much disaffection was caused by the activities of the missionaries in the northern India (Chattopadhyaya, H. 1957, p. 37). His financial anxieties and religious provocations thus inclined the Sepoy to believe the stories circulated regarding British intentions to convert Indians to Christianity. Sir Henry Lawrence reported to Lord Canning that a Jamadar of the Oudh artillery who was a man of good character, was convinced that "for ten years past Government has been engaged in measures for the forcible or rather fraudulent conversion of all the natives" (Edwardes, H. B., Merivale, H. 1872 pp. 322-23).

Their preachers were seen in the market places and at the fairs often with police escort. So wrote Sir Syed: "The missionaries too had introduced a new mode of preaching the Gospel. Religious tracts containing questions and answers now began to be printed and distributed among the people. ... Of their own accord,

they used to frequent Mohammedan mosques and Hindu temples, as well as fairs, for the purpose of preaching, to which no one dared object for fear of the authorities. In certain districts, moreover, they were even allowed a *chaprasi* or police officer from the *thanah* (police station) to attend them. These persons did not content themselves with merely preaching the Gospel, but used to allude to pious men and sacred places of other religions in a highly disrespectful manner, which gave much offence and pain to their hearers, and served to sow in the hearts of the people the seeds of disaffection to the Government" (Khan, S. A. 1858, p. 18).

Vigorous efforts were made to convert the Muslims of important Muslim cultural centres and early in 19th century, about 200 Muslims were brought into the fold of Christianity from Delhi and Amritsar alone. In polemical literature, the Missionary usually held up the person of the Prophet and the Holy *Quran* to ridicule which only stiffened the Muslim attitude towards the British rulers in general and towards their educational institutions in particular. Muslims, in fact, began to suspect that the whole machinery of new education was only designed to undermine the cultural values of Islam and the integrity of the Muslim community by inculcating heterodox ideas among the Muslim youth (Ashraf, K. M. 2005, p. 12).

Thus, political, economic and religious factors continued to promote unrest among the Muslims. It took many forms. They interfered in the day-to-day affairs of the Hindus and the Muslims and it was widely thought that Lord Canning had been appointed to convert India to Christianity (Nezami, T. A. 1969, p. 90). Other evidences show that the Christian missionaries even dared to go to *Musalman* and Hindu religious gatherings and openly denounce Islam and Hinduism (Khan, M. A. Dr. 1983, p. 35). The preaching of many a missionary in the streets was even more tactless. But while the missionaries openly ridiculed and denounced the Hindu and Muslim religions and evoked anger which could not find expression under the government of Christian rulers, many civil and military officers exerted themselves on behalf of what they deemed to be the higher and purer teachings of Jesus, and acted as evangelists.

The Muslim leaders launched an ideological resistance movement against the Christian missionary attacks. In the campaign against Christianity, Maulavi Muhammad Qasim and Mansur Ali of Delhi took the

leading roles. The latter was a specialist in this field. He knew the New Testament by heart and had trained several of his pupils for the purpose of debating with the Christian missionaries. Another scholar who won renown in these debates was Maulavi Rahmatullah of Kerana who defeated Dr. Pfandar, a famous Christian missionary, in an open historical debate in Agra in 1854 (Dar, B. A, 1957, p. 55). In 1836 Dr. Pfandar came to India. He was a missionary of great renown and had previously worked in Iran. His well known work *Mizan al-Haq* was originally written in Persian and later translated into Urdu. It created a stir in Muslim circles. When Dr. Pfandar later on went to Constantinople, the Ottoman king invited Maulavi Rahmat Ali to fight against him there (Dar, B. A, 1957, p. 87).

B) Muslim Resistance and Divide and Rule Policy

In contrast, the Muslims had resisted British imperialist expansion from Plassey to Sittana. The Muslims, in their eagerness to preserve their religion and religious views, rejected English education. The hostility of the Muslims to the British was so insistent and so marked that Lord Ellenborough warned the Home Government in 1843 to adopt the policy of 'Divide and Rule'. "I cannot", he wrote, "close my eyes to the belief that the race (Muslims) is fundamentally hostile to us and our true policy is to reconcile the Hindus" (Khan, S. 1989, p. 144). The Muslims nursed with passion their injured pride at being ousted from their position of pre-eminence and, with their hatred of the usurper and embittered by their socio-economic grievances; they fought desperately for their ideals. They were defeated but in the history of the movements for liberation in the subcontinent, the courageous struggle of the Muslims to break the British fetters in their early days must be gratefully recorded. This phase of Muslim insurgence is in strange contrast with the mild and cooperative policy pursued by the Hindus towards the foreign government. The active and overt policy of resistance to the British Raj earned the Muslims the hostility of the British and the Hindus also did not look upon their efforts with favour. We find the leading Hindu paper, the *Hindu Patriot*, warning the government and the Hindus against the disloyal Muslims in August 1870. It wrote: "Such sects as the *Faraizis* and the *Wahhabis*... are dangerous as the ever ready nucleus round which may gather all the discontents and hates and ambitions which must under the most favourable

circumstances be inseparable from such a large and heterogeneous empire of many and conflicting elements..... They may bring the foreigner into the country or pave his way to it by a variety of offices quietly performed" (Qureshi, I. H. 1967. p. 201).

On the other hand, the new rulers also followed for a considerable time the policy of breaking the Muslims up and keeping them down. Mohammad Neman says, "the British had decided that for the expansion of the new Power and its continuance the only course was to crush the Muslims and had deliberately adopted policies which had for their aim the economic ruin of Muslims, and their intellectual stagnation and general degeneration. The Permanent Settlement of Bengal elevated the Hindu collectors who up to that time had held but unimportant posts, to the position of landholders, gave them proprietary rights in the soil, and allowed them to accumulate wealth which would have gone to the *Musalman*s under their own rule" (Lewis, D. 2011, p. 50). The educational policy was responsible for the increase of unemployment and the closing of the other avenue for the Muslims. The economic policy impoverished the Indian Muslims. In the army, their recruitment was limited; in arts and crafts they were crippled and rendered helpless.

As a result, the *fatwas* of the *ulama* of those years explicitly mentioned India as a *dar-al-harb*, and the successors of Shah Abdul Aziz had no hesitation about clashing directly with the British. The establishment of the British rule in India was looked upon by the followers of the Prophet fundamentally as the challenge of Christianity to Islam. Consequently the call for *Jihad* given by the followers of Shah Waliullah was religiously inspired, revivalist in character and was motivated by an anti-British sentiment. The Muslim religious leaders or the *ulama* looked upon western penetration as a challenge of Christianity to Islam. They 'represented the rebellious spirit of the disgruntled Muslims' and refused to surrender to 'a policy of compromise and appeasement' (Maitra, J. 1984, p. 100).

Muslim reaction to British domination was conditioned by religion, while the Hindu response was largely motivated by secular considerations. The British rulers with the active collaboration of the Hindus adopted a number of measures and calculated to deprive the Muslims of all avenues of a self-respecting life and reducing them to the position of hewers of wood and drawers of water. Briefly, these

measures were the Law of Resumption which divested the Muslims of their lands bringing down the percentage of Muslim landlords from 95 to 5; misapplication and misappropriation of Muslim religious and educational trusts, sudden replacement of the Muslim educational system and Persian language with the new English system and English language, closing the doors of civilian employment to the Muslims.

Even a distinguished British civilian officer, Sir William Hunter (1871, p. 171), in his book, *The Indian Musalmans*, has to admit, “The truth is that when the country passed under our rule, the Musalmans were the superior race and superior not only in stoutness of heart and strength of arm but in power of political organisation and the science of practical Government. Yet the Musalmans are now shut out equally from Government employment and from the higher occupations of non-official life.” The English government had gradually become convinced that the Indian Muslims were the only enemies both of the English rule and the spread of Christianity in India. Therefore, Muslims suffered repression in a long and sometimes violent process. Punishment took the form of physical, political, economic, social, cultural, educational and religious harassment. Muslim leaders were executed. The doors of government services were closed to them. On the other hand, the Hindus were encouraged to assume greater responsibility. In their interest, the British, promoted Hindu revivalism, and sought to depress the Muslims in the process of development, in order to keep them in a state of subservience. The British policy was pro-Hindu and generally anti-Muslim. This would explain the time lag in the emergence of Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) and Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-98) as leaders of their respective communities. Muslims followed a different course of development (Abbasi, M. Y. 1987, p. 13). Actually the Hindus looked upon British rule as a deliverance from the Muslim yoke and considered English education as a blessing: “Under the oppressive rule of the Muhammadans we lost all our ancient wealth, glory, learning.....” (Abbasi, M. Y. 1987, p. 13). In reality it was the victory of British policy of divide and rule.

This approach reached a climax when Lord Ellenborough became Governor General in 1842. He had not only a soft corner for the Hindus; he made no secret of his contempt for the Muslims. For instance,

while restoring the gates of the Temple of Somanath, which was sacked by Mahmud of Ghazna, he proclaimed to the Hindu princes and chiefs that “the insult of eight hundred years is at last avenged” (Thompson, E. J & Garratt, G. T. 1962, p. 353). Many of its foremost administrators regarded the Muslims as dangerous to British imperial possessions; while some of them had even developed repulsion towards them. “These *Musalman*s,” wrote Robert Clive in a letter to Lawrence Sullivan on December 30, 1758, “gratitude they have none; base men of very narrow conceptions . . . (they) have adopted a system of politics more peculiar to this country than any other, viz. to attempt anything by treachery rather than force” (Forrest, G. S. 1918, p. 120).

From Clive to Lord Hastings is a far cry, the period covering no less than fifty years. All through that time, British rule went on expanding and strengthening; and still the old fears and suspicions against the Muslims continued. Even Heber, who had such admiration for the culture and character of the Muslims (Heber, D. D. R. 1829, p. 177), believed that “if a fair opportunity offered, the *Musalman*s, more particularly, would gladly avail themselves (of it) to rise against us” (Heber, D. D. R. 1829, p. 298). Even Macaulay once revealed that Clive was deadly against the Muslims and was not willing to give them any post of responsibility (Lambrick, H. T. 1952, p. 28).

The deliberate policy of the British rulers during the post-mutiny period was to initiate policy of history writing to generate more acrimony and strife amongst various communities and groups (Beg, Aziz. (1986, p. 66). to perpetuate the British rule on the model of the Romans (Strachy’s letter to secretary of state, 1874). Accordingly, some of British ex-servicemen with required intellectual ability were entrusted with this task of history writing. Elliot, Dawson (*The History of India, as Told by Its Own Historians*, published as a set of eight volumes between 1867-1877 in London) initiated a new move in history writing on the framework drawn by James Mill (*The History of British India*, 1817). Depiction of Muslim tyranny over the Hindus and the resistance of Rajputs and Marathas became their favourite themes.

This was the beginning of Indian historiography which had been well looked after by many British and Indian celebrities like Mountstuart Elphinstone (*History of India*, 1841), Charles Stewart (*The History of Bengal: From the First Mohammedan Invasion Until the*

Virtual Conquest of that Country by the English, A.D. 1757, 1813), James Tod (*Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan, or the Central and Western Rajpoot States of India*, 1829), Vincent Smith (*The Oxford History of India, from the Earliest Times to the End of 1911*, 1919), etc. and after a long gap, by Dr Jadunath Sarkar who earned knighthood in 1921 by writing four volumes, on the most sensitive phase of Indian history- *The Fall of Mughal Empire*. This singularly grand exploit was undertaken at a time when India witnessed the stirring phases of Hindu-Muslim unity under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Dr Sarkar's greatness lies in his methodology. But his culling of facts and its placement to carry some ideas served the cause of British imperialism to divide the people more and more. In all this he had the touch of a genius. This imperialist-motivated historiography left deep and abiding influence upon the generation of Indian intelligentsia of the thirties and forties- whose worthy and ablest representative is our eminent historian Dr R. C. Majumdar. He has a charming magnetic personality which attracts young scholars who serve him as his aides; he has the capacity to produce the magnum opus which is generously patronised by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. He has thus become the chief patriarch of the conservative school of history with distinction in communal bias. In 1969, he elaborated his philosophy in the light of his research that all the Muslims should go to Pakistan to solve the knotty problem of communalism (Ray, S. 1979. p. viii). Actually these are the results of British policies for achieve their aims and many historians blindly followed their ideas.

IV. LEGAL POSITION OF BRITISH INDIA TO THE MUSLIMS

Tipu Sultan's martyrdom has been a source of inspiration for the *ulama* who fought tooth and nail against imperialist designs in India. They, however, later took realistic view of the situation and came to conclusion that after Tipu Sultan's death there was no ruler who could challenge the British power. And rightly so, later on history proved that the British occupied the whole of India in a short span of time after Tipu Sultan was martyred.

A section of the Muslim religious scholars that had been trained by Waliullahi School of orthodoxy had seen a rapid decline of Islamic values. They had seen the Islamic laws being replaced by un-Islamic laws

(Mukerjee, H. 1946, pp. 51-52). They saw Persian being demoted from its position as the official language of the Court and of general administration. Then came removal of the *Qazi* who during Muslim rule, administered the Islamic law (Mukerjee, H. 1946, p. 52). The introduction of common penal laws and separate judicial courts greatly reduced the social authority of the *ulama*. Thus the establishment of the new order was a disaster to the Muslim ruling class. The religious leaders of Delhi were not blind to what was happening in the country.

The entire political structure of northern India crumbled during this period. The Mughal emperors became not only pensioners but prisoners in the hands of the East India Company, which soon passed from dividends to dominion, with a real government, pursuing an ambitious policy of annexation. Shah Abdul Aziz inaugurated a movement to endeavour in overt action to reverse the wordily decline of Islam in India.

After the British conquest of Delhi, Shah Abdul Aziz (1746-1824), the illustrious son of Shah Waliullah Dihlawi (1703-62), issued the famous *fatwa* in 1803 declaring that India had ceased to be a *dar-al-Islam* (Land of Peace). Now this *fatwa* has a significance of its own in the history of Muslim political thought of the 19th century. It was the first determined expression of Muslim attitude towards the establishment of British rule in India. That in 1857 people often referred to this *fatwa* shows the extent to which it had influenced the contemporary Muslim thought (Hunter W. W. 1871, p. 134).

Shah Abdul Aziz had been at the helm of academic life in Delhi since 1763 when his father breathed his last. From 1763 to 1803 he saw Delhi being subjected to frequent depredations and plunders by the Jats, the Sikhs and the Maratha. In his Arabic Poems, he has referred to the atrocities committed by them. In 1771 he had seen the Marathas occupy the city of Delhi and appointed the collectors of the revenue of Delhi and the districts, around the capital (Sarkar, S. N. 1938, pp. 21-22). In 1784 Mahadji Sindhia was the regent at Delhi (Sarkar, S. N. 1938, p. 203). In spite of all this, Shah Abdul Aziz did not declare India as *dar-al-harb*. With the gradual consolidation of the British power the "decisions of the Doctors became more and more distinct as to India being *dar-al-harb*" (Hunter W. W. 1871, p. 134). The followers of Shah Waliullah stepped in to fill the void. After analyzing the existing

situation and referring to the established legal position on the point and instances from the early period of Islamic history, Shah Abdul Aziz issued the historic *fatwa*, or a decree declaring the lands controlled by the British as *dar-al-harb* or zone of war, no more a land of peace and security for the Muslims and sponsored the cause of *jihad* or holy war as a measure to defend Islam. The *fatwa* gives a clear picture of the working of the orthodox mind. The original *fatwa* which is in Persian, says:

“...In this city (of Delhi) the *Imam-ul Muslimin* wields no authority. The real power rests with the Christian officers. There is no check on them; and the promulgation of the commands of *Kufr* means that in the matter of administration and justice, in matters of law and order, in the domain of trade, finance and collection of revenues- everywhere the *kuffar* (infidels) are in power. There are, indeed, certain Islamic rituals as, e.g., Friday and *Id* (festival) prayers, *adhan* (call for prayer), and cow slaughter, with which they do not interfere. But the very root of all these rituals is of no value to them, for they demolish mosques without the least hesitation, and no Muslim or any *dhimmi* can enter the city or its suburbs but with their permission. It is in their own interests if they do not object to the travellers and traders to visit the city. On the other hand, distinguished persons like Shuja-ul Mulk and Wilayati Begum cannot dare visit the city without their permission. From here (Delhi) to Calcutta the Christians are in complete control. There is no doubt that there are Muslim principalities like Hyderabad, Rampur, Lucknow, etc., they have left the administration in the hands of the local authorities; but it is because they have accepted their lordship and have submitted to their authority....” (Aziz, S. A. 1904, n. 7, p. 17).

This *fatwa*, from the religio-political point of view, is a landmark in the history of India in general and in that of Muslim India in particular. It amounted to a call to religiously conscientious Muslims to mobilize themselves, in the absence of any powerful Muslim warlord, under popular leadership and rise in defiance of the foreign power. W. W. Hunter (1871, p. 134) summarized this *fatwa* in his own words when he quoted Shah Abdul Aziz declaring:

“When infidels get hold of a Muslim country, and it becomes impossible for the Muslims of the country and the people of the neighbouring districts to drive them away or to retain reasonable hope of ever doing

so, and the power of the infidels increases to such an extent that they can abolish or retain the ordinances of Islam according to their pleasure, and no one is strong enough to realize the revenues of that country without the permission of the infidels and the (Muslim) inhabitants no longer live as secure as before; such a country is politically a country of the enemy (*dar-al-harb*).”

According to the Europeans this verdict is not purely a legal one, they argued that its overtones are broadly political. Actually it is purely a religious one and also political. A ruling by his disciple, Shah Abdul Hayy, is even more explicit: ‘Calcutta and its dependencies are Country of the Enemy’ (Hunter W. W. 1871, p. 140).

This ruling was of great importance, because it prepared the way for an armed struggle or armed *jihad*. And, yet, it was obvious that mere rulings could not create a movement which had to be initiated and organized. Shah Abdul Aziz created a nucleus in Delhi, at first working in close cooperation with his brothers, Shah Rafiuddin and Shah Abdul Qadir. After issuing the *fatwa*, Shah Abdul Aziz took up the work of establishing a network of centres in Rohilkhand, Doab, Oudh and Bihar for raising funds and volunteers for an armed *jihad*, at some future date, against the British (Karandikar, M. A. 1968, p. 131). He thus took the lead in the organization of the first resistance movement against alien rule. This movement, commonly known as the *Tahrik-e-Mujahidin* or the Movement of the Holy Warriors (Muztar, A. D. 1979, p. 195), marks the practical culmination of the religio-political thought of Shah Waliullah.

Ultimately, an armed struggle had to be organized, because no government could be dislodged merely by dreaming or widespread disaffection, unless that disaffection was channelled into active armed rebellion. For this purpose, it was first necessary to canvas support on a much wider scale and to find a good military leader. Indeed the discovery of a good fighter must have been considered to be an immediate necessity. The leader must not only be a good fighter, but a man of impeccable character and likely to command the loyalty of the people at large and in particular of those who were to be his comrades in arms. In those days when *Sufism* was so much in vogue, it was almost essential to fix upon a person of spiritual and mystic eminence. It must have been felt

that Sayyid Ahmad was very well suited to be trained for this purpose.

V. CONCLUSION

The aggressive British policies and missionary activities in 19th century India deepened Muslim resentment and fueled ideological resistance, ultimately contributing to the long-term socio-political exclusion of Muslims and shaping India's independence movement. These tensions underscore the complex, divisive impact of colonial rule on Indian society.

A new phenomenon made its appearance in the Indian history. The political leadership of men of sword and crowned heads, ceased with the occupation of Delhi by the British and the men of pen and priests began to play the role. Politics tend to be dominated again by religious dogma with this change. Muslims played a very significant role in the national struggle for freedom. Moreover, no doubtedly they were the forerunners of the freedom struggle of India. They have been the vanguards of freedom struggles of India. It was, after all, from their hands that the British had wrested power in India.

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