



FREEDOM FIGHTER AND POET HASRAT MOHAANI

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ABSTRACT

Maulana Fazal-ul-Hasan, better known as Hasrat Mohaani was a dedicated freedom-fighter, a consummate national politician, an active socialist-Muslim, a devoted sufi and a fearless and outspoken journalist. An acclaimed poet and critic of his own 'Oriental' sensibility, Mohaani also held his own as an expert in poetics and as a critical commentator on Ghalib. In short, Mohaani in his time exemplified the multi-faceted, many-sided 'complete man'. His political activities and feats, the daring and courage shown by him in the course of the Indian freedom struggle are matters lauded by all time greats of the Indian National Movement Mahatma Gandhi, Maulana Mohammed Ali Johar, Pandit Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Dr. Zakir Hussain, among others. This research paper is an attempt to deal with the vivid faces of Hasrat Mohaanis personality as a poet and a freedom fighter.

Keywords : *Hasrat Mohaani, Journalist, Freedom Fighter, Urdu Adab, Nigar, Aaj-Kal, Urdu-e-Moalla, National Movement.*

Early Life :

Is that he was born in the 1881 (1298 of the *Hijri* calendar). Born in his maternal grandmother's home in 1881 (1298 of the *Hijri* Calender) he was named Sayyed-Fazal-ul-Hasan. Among the many children in the family, Hasrat was decidedly his mother and grandmother's favourite.

Azhar Hasan's frequent absence meant that Mohaani's childhood was spent under the care of these two women. Defining feminine influence was generally a rare thing for growing boys in those days, but fortunately for Mohaani a lot of emphasis was laid on women's education in this unusual household. Not just Hasrat's mother but his grandmother too had a fine command of the Urdu and Persian language, they were also well versed in literature and

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poetry, narrating dramatic stories to Mohaani who nursed a special fondness for tales of war and heroism.

In keeping with the prevalent tradition of the Muslim gentry of the period. Mohaani received his early education from a tutor at home. Among the tutors who left a strong impression on the young Hasrat's mind at this time, the names of Ghulam Ali, Maulvi Asghar Ali and Abdur Rehman alias "Mianji" Bulaqi come especially to mind. When the Swadeshi movement had not even been heard of, Bulaqi wore only khadi and considered it a sin to wear clothes stitched from foreign fabric. Besides the decidedly 'oriental' bent of his taste and temper there was the mystical inclination towards Sufism, the deep absorption in literature and poetry, and the distaste for imported commodities as also and above all, the unswerving commitment to living life on one's own terms, in strict accordance with his particular code of ethics and beliefs. In the course of this first stage in his early writings. His own family could boast of having produced such significant names in poetry as Hakim Mohammed Ayub Sabir Mohaani. His teacher Lachhmi Narain too was a cultivated aficionado of literature in general and verse in particular. With this rich literary background to give him inspiration, Mohaani had put a versifierly pen to paper by the time he reached middle school, producing his maiden couplet in 'Purbi', the spoken dialect of eastern U.P.

By the close of his middle school years, Hasrat was already developing a mature grasp of the nuances of poetry and was writing in right earnest. At this time Hasrat's literary efforts were usually revised and edited by Sayyed Fakhru Hasan. In the introduction to his first collection of poems, Mohaani had revealed that his experiments with writing poetry went back to 1893, the year in which the earliest of the *ghazals* included in this collection had supposedly been composed, when Hasrat was just about twelve. The opening couplet goes thus.

It was the end of the world thought I, But soon the exchange of greetings started anew!

Having passed middle school with distinction Mohaani earned scholarship and continued his education in Government High School of Fatehpur where he was most impressed by the personality of the well known reformer and educationist of those times, Maulana Shah Zahoor-ul-Islam who founded an Islamic School in 1883 on the pattern of Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College of Aligarh.

He emphasized on the use of indigenous goods and boycott foreign products. During his High School education Mohaani was blessed with the guidance of his learned teachers. Who taught Mohaani Arabic and Persian language. With their guidance and inspiration Mohaani could develop his poetic sensibility in later years.



Afterwards he joined M.A.O. college of Aligarh where he finished his intermediate and B.A. in flying colors. An active member of the students union, Mohaani gained popularity as a poet too.

Political life in College :

Mohaani's inclination towards politics also developed during the college days. His patriotism, fearlessness and devotion for the freedom of his mother land irked the Principal to such an extent that the latter rusticated him from the college thrice. Soon after his graduation, Mohaani filed a declaration for an Urdu monthly Urdu-e-Moalla to be published from Aligarh. First issue of the journal hit the stalls in 1903. Mohaani not only had refined literary taste, but also had deep devotion for and a strong desire to serve the nation, publishing his journalists. Writings in his magazine, he succeeded in inspiring patriotic feelings, as well as passion for justice amongst the Indian Muslims of that period.

Awakening among Muslims :

Mohaani not only had refined literary taste, but also had deep devotion for and strong desire to serve the nation. Publishing his journalistic writings in his magazine, he succeeded in inspiring patriotic feelings, as well as passion for justice amongst the Indian Muslims of that period. He also succeeded in awakening political consciousness amongst the Indians in general and Indian Muslims in particular. This was the period when not only the orthodox Muslims, but even the educated and enlightened one, influenced by the Aligarh Movement, were distrustful of and wary of the congress.

These ideological differences and the political confusion on national level, in fact, helped the British authorities. Mohaani openly criticized the Muslims, more so the ones who were the supporters of the Aligarh Movement for their efforts to appease the ruling. Authorities. Heavily objecting to it, he helped the Muslims overcome their reservations about the National Congress. Due to Mohanis above activities, college authority tried their level best even to get Urdu-e-Moalla banned. But he kept publishing the journal for years, inspite of all difficulties.

Active participation in Freedom Struggle :

Within ten to fifteen years of the setting up of the Indian National Congress, some of its leaders rose to pre-eminence by virtue of their fervent commitment to the Nation's cause. Revolutionary figures like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Sri Aurobindo Ghosh and Hasrat Mohaani, and those allied to the Garam Dal, topped the list of such devoted leaders. From the very beginning these leaders refused to accept mere dominion status for the country, making it clear that they would settle for nothing short of complete independence without any strings



attached. As early as the first decade of the twentieth century, Mohaani through his writings and speeches started pressing for India's full liberation, continuing to uphold this slogan to the very end. Mohaani joined Indian National Congress soon after graduation, attending all its sessions from 1904 to 1907. The 1906 Calcutta session of the Congress witnessed sharpening of differences between Bal Gangadhar Tilak and those leaders of the Congress who had opted for the middle path. Tilak totally disagreed with the prudence and the soft attitude of these moderates. Mohaani, too shared Tilak's views. In 1907, during the Surat session of the National Congress, the left-wing leaders put forward the suggestion to give up the peaceful constitutional path and turn to subversive activities in the course of struggle for national freedom. This widened the rift between the two wings to such an extent that Bal Gangadhar Tilak left the Congress.¹ Mohaani, along with a number of other left-wing revolutionary leaders shared Tilak's views.

Political parties like Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha had already come into existence by then. Not inclined towards either of the two or towards Congress' soft-wing, Mohaani became closer to the extremist groups and established close links with a revolutionary leader Ram Prasad 'Bismil'.

According to Gopi Nath Aman, the well-known poem,

*'Sarfaroshi ki tamanna ab hamaree dil mein hai,
Dekhna hei zor kitna bazoo-e-qatil mein hei'*

that has been often attributed to 'Bismil', was, infact not written by 'Bismil', but was Mohaani's gift to the national movement.

Mohaani established close links and regular correspondence with the famed revolutionary Ubaid-Ullah Sindhi and with Burkat Ullah Bhopali, the Prime Minister of the rebel Indian Government-in-exile. Angered by such activities, the college authorities banned Mohaani's entry into the college premises.

Mohaani's political activities and his close links with that extreme left group were totally disapproved by the British authorities. Besides, his fiery writings, regularly appearing in *Urdu-e-Moalla*, inspiring patriotism and passion for freedom of India amongst Indian Muslims, also met with the disapproval of British rulers. The publication in his journal of an article. *British Educational Policy in Egypt* further irked the authorities. The article had no dateline. Refusing to expose the name of the author, Mohaani shouldered the responsibility himself. This angered the British authorities to such an extent that on 22 June 1908, they filed a suit against him in the Aligarh Magistrate's court for rebellion against the British rule. The court passed the judgement on 4 August 1908 imposing a penalty of five hundred rupees on



him, along with two-years' rigorous imprisonment. This was the highest punishment within the jurisdiction of a Magistrate. It was a known fact in Aligarh that the editor of *Urdu-e-Moalla* lived in poverty and could not arrange this penalty of five hundred rupees. It was precisely the reason why the fine was imposed on him. On the pretext of the non-payment of the fine the police was authorised to raid and carry out a search of his library treasuring valuable books, rare manuscripts and correspondence of historic value, worth thousands of rupees, even at that time. That library was savagely plundered and auctioned for a paltry sum of sixty rupees. Mohaani could never reconcile to this loss.

Those were the days when political imprisonment was not considered a matter of honour, hence many powerful and famous people of Aligarh had turned against Mohaani. *Urdu-e-Molla* had closed down in Mohaani's absence, and started a regular column called *Mushahadat-e-Zindaan*, carrying details of the horrifying experiences of life behind the bars. Not many people are aware that the concept of civil disobedience and peaceful non-cooperation were originally Mohaani's brainchild, a fact that Gandhiji acknowledged in his own autobiography. It was he only who initiated the boycott of foreign goods, emphasizing the importance of relying on indigenous 'swadeshi' products. He had even established a swadeshi store as early as 1913, well before the movement had gripped the popular imagination. One can say that after the national movement picked up in the last decades of the twentieth century Hasrat Mohaani was the first important Muslim leader and the second Indian leader in general—the first being Bal Gangadhar Tilak—to have been arrested and put behind bars by the British authorities for his subversive political activities. The formal demand for complete independence was incorporated in the congress agenda of 1929, while Mohaani had already put forward this demand as early as in 1921 session of the Indian National Congress. Dr. Rajendra Prasad, first president of the nation, has written :

The Congress Party session took place in Ahmedabad on a grand scale. Deshbandhu Dasgupta was elected its President, but since Deshbandhu was in jail at the time the presidential duties were shouldered by Hakim Ajmal Khan.....It was the first session of the Congress to be held in Ahmedabad. The resolution for the most decisive step, one that triggered many discussions and debates, was placed before the house by Hasrat Mohaani, where Hasrat insisted on the Congress severing all ties with the British empire and pressed for the aim of total independence as the primary objective. With Mahatmaji strongly opposing this resolution it could not be adopted...

Hasrat Mohaani presented this resolution at the Khilafat Committee and also at the session of the Muslim League. So fiery and sharp were his speeches in defence of the proposed resolution for full independence that the British authorities were forced to arrest him once again and punish him with rigorous imprisonment. Attempting unity among major nationalist

political groupings on the question of complete independence by legitimate means, Hasrat Mohaani put forward a resolution in pursuance of this goal for consideration at the plenums of each of the three major participating organizations of the independence movement. On this count alone, his name will be embossed in gilded letters in the annals of India's freedom struggle.

CONCLUSION :

Indeed, Mohaan's life truly personified and modeled the struggle for the freedom of the motherland, just as he in his own life endured all manner of hardships and tortures in the pursuit of his beliefs. He was among the founder members of a number of religious and political units, including the Indian National Congress, Majlis-e-Kharo, Khilafat Conference, Jamiat-ul- Ulama-e-Hind, Anjuman-e-Khuddam-ul-Ahramin and the Azad Party. Having been an activist of the Indian National Congress, Muslim League, as well as the Communist Party, Hasrat raised from every available platform his cherished slogans of Hindu-Muslim unity and freedom sans compromises. There are few parallels to the courage and, one may say, audacity displayed by Mohaani in the propagation of his politico-ideological persuasions.

On account of his uncompromising positions, Mohaani, naturally enough, fell foul of the colonial power. Sometimes he could even find himself crossing swords with the like of Gandhiji and Jinnah. But he was never one to waver in his convictions. Mohaani, besides, comes first in the long line of illustrious Urdu scribes who fearlessly confronted the risks that came their way, thus proving the pen to be no less a mighty weapon than the word in the battle against the British Raj.

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