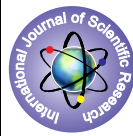


Contribution of Al-Hilal in India's Independence movement



Mass Communication

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ABSTRACT

Journalism has always been a ray of light for the people living in the darkness of unawareness. Journalism for a change is not confined to a cast, creed, religion or language; it can easily say there is something for everyone. Urdu language being one very important and probably most influential in its own way. The contribution of Urdu Journalism in freedom struggle is well marked with the fiercest slogan of our Freedom Struggle "Inquilab Zinadabad", unparalleled in the history of any other languages. Maulana Azad's Al-Hilal was powerful instrument to launch a campaign against the colonial and to dislodge the Muslims from the English camp. This weekly journal was played very significant and unpatrolled role for unity amongst Hindus and Muslims for the India's Independence. The dedicated services and tremendous sacrifices made for the national cause by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and his media Al-Hilal and Al-Balagh will always remain a source of inspiration to the younger generation of post-independence India.

Introduction:

When the erstwhile mighty and powerful Mogul empire of India fell apart, lost its control over different parts of the sub-continent and shrank into a puppet state virtually confined within the boundaries of the Red fort in Delhi, the British colonialists, who eyed India for a long time, and lurked for a suitable chance to consolidate its position in the subcontinent, grabbed this chance and seized the power in 1857 declaring India as its greatest colony in the world. After the Revolt of 1857, the British had patronaged and applied the most unscrupulous policy to divide the Indians in different castes and classes. The British used one class or caste against the other. The Muslims were made to fight with the Hindus and the high caste Hindus were excited against the low caste Hindus. Thus, there was deterioration in the whole country. With the failure of the Great rebellion, the era of British territorial conquest came to an end and a new era of systematic economic loot and plunder by the British was inaugurated. The English people ruthlessly exploited Indian economy without any fear.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's Al-Hilal (the Crescent) was a very famous and popular Urdu Journal in the first decade 20th century, which came out from Calcutta (now Kolkata) in 1st of June, 1912. Maulana Azad described in his autobiography, about the aims, objectives and the characteristic of Al-Hilal:

"There were a number of dailies, weeklies and monthlies published in Urdu from the Punjab and U.P. but their standard in not high. Their get up and printing were as poor as their contents. They produced by the lithographic process and could not, therefore, embody any feature of modern Journalism. Nor were they able to print half tone picture. I decided my journal should be attractive in get up and powerful in appeal it must be set up in type and reproduced by the lithographic process. Accordingly I established the Al-Hilal press and the first number of the journal Al-Hilal was published in June 1912"

Al-Hilal marked a turning point in the history of Urdu Journalism. It achieved unprecedented popularity within a short time. "The Public" wrote:

"Azad, were attracted not only by the superior printing and production of the paper but even more by the new note of nationalism preached by it"

Maulana Azad was thrown on the stage at the time when the colonials were at the zenith of their power. The British boasted the sun never set over their empire. His active life spanned over an era which herald the end of this western domination, and witnessed a new phase of free societies in the third world. Maulana Azad played a key role in bringing about this

great change. His Media, Al-Hilal was a powerful instrument to launch a campaign against the colonials and to dislodge the Muslim from English camp.

Al-Hilal, made its influence felt within a few weeks of its birth. Within six months its circulation had reached the figure of eleven thousand- a considerable figure if we remember that the annual subscription was Rs. 12 and bulks of its reader were Musalmans.

Al-Hilal, created a revolutionary stir among the masses. The demand for it was so great that within the first three months all the old issues had to be reprinted as every new subscriber wanted the entire set. Within two years Al-Hilal reached a circulation of 26,000 copies a week, a figure which was till then unheard of in Urdu Journalism. The government was rattled by the popularity of the journal and demanded a security of Rs. 2,000 under the press act from the publisher.

This deposit was forfeited and a fresh deposit of Rs. 10,000 was demanded within a few months. This was also forfeited after sometime and the Al-Hilal press was confiscated in 1915.

Jawaharlal Lal Nehru wrote:

"Abul Kalam Azad spoke in a new language to Muslim in his weekly Al-Hilal. It was not only a new language in thought and approach, even its texture was different for Azad's style was tense and virile, though sometimes a little difficult because of its Persian background. He used new phrases for new ideas and was a definite influence in giving shape to the Urdu language as it is today. The older conservative leaders among the Muslims did not react favorably to all this and criticized Azad's opinion and approach. Yet not even the most learned of them could easily match Azad in debate and argument even on the basis of scripture and old tradition, for Azad's knowledge of these happened to be greater than theirs. He was a strange mixture of medieval scholasticism, 18th century rationalism and the modern outlook..... This very youthful writer and journalist caused a sensation in Muslim intellectual circles and though the elders frowned upon him, his word created ferment in the minds of the younger generation"

Maulana Azad was so bitter against the colonials that he wrote:

"Oh, Europeans! How long are you going to pollute God's blessed land with your dirty hands! How long would oppression subdue justice! How would darkness overpower light; Your bloody hands hanged hundreds in Tabriz; made the sand of Tripoli red with blood; and left countless dead in Morocco"

Al-Hilal, had achieved during the war a circulation of twenty five thousand copies and it was being read in all parts of India.

Maulana's old connection with the revolutionary party in Bengal had already attracted the attention of the Criminal Intelligence Department, and Sir Charles Cleveland, its head had always been on the lookout for material calculated to implicate him. As early as November 1914, the Maulana knew that the fate of his paper and along with it his own was hanging in the balance. For, at the instance of Sir James Meston, Governor of the United Provinces, the Pioneer of Allahabad had published in November an editorial entitled "Pro-Germanism in Calcutta", in which it charged the Maulana with pro-German tendencies. It is a long article and throws a flood of light on the close attention with which the paper was being watched. This how the paper is introduced to the reader:

"Al-Hilal is a weekly illustrated newspaper published in the Urdu language in Calcutta, and is edited by a Delhi Musalman named Abul Kalam. It has a large circulation among Musalmans in these provinces, and probably in other parts of India. Ever since the war broke out, its attitude has been so strikingly pro-German that it must be a matter of amazement to all who read the paper that the Government has managed to tolerate its writings. Possibly this may be accounted for by the fact that the paper attracts little or no attention in Calcutta itself owing to its being published in Urdu, and there can be little doubt that this was one of the main cause which led the editor to choose Calcutta as the place of publication. Another reason may be that style of the most mischievous articles is very allusive and full of veiled sneers and sarcasm and innuendoes, most of which either disappear or lose their effect when translated in to English, and it is not likely that many European officials read the paper in the original"

It is quite clear that the purpose of Al-Hilal was the resurgence of Muslims. Deliberately this task was based on Quran and Sunnah. The intention was to remind the Quranic Lessons which had been forgotten by the Muslims and also to make these lessons his own guiding principles. He quoted profusely from the Quran which says:

"Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong: They are the ones to attain felicity."

Al-Hilal played a remarkable role in changing the mind of Muslims. Azad used this powerful medium to touch the conscience of the Muslims. He assumed the leadership of a very difficult sort of people. Of all the Indians Muslim were the most rigid folks. They attempted always to sail against the current. When the British were invincible, they made the futile attempts to overpower them. They would become desperate and desolate but would not change their stand.

Azad preferred the immediate gains to long time benefits. The nation was wide-awake to win liberty, and they had forgotten their own old lesson which Tipu Sultan had taught the life of a lion for a day was far better than the life of a jackal for a hundred years. When they disliked the Britishers, they regarded them worse than Satan, and when they liked the British they took be angels.

In short the services of Al-Hilal were memorable. It annulled the policy of loyalism. It advocated Hindu-Muslim unity. It brought the Muslim closer to the main stream of national struggle. When a few opposed this policy on the ground that Hindus were in majority and that in a democracy where majority rule would prevail, Muslims would be ruled by Hindu, Azad quoted the Quran:

"God forbids you not with regard to those who fight you not for (your) faith, no drive you out of your homes from dealing kindly and justly with them; for God loves those who are just. God only forbids you with regard to those who fight you for (your) faith, and drive you out of your homes, and support (others) in driving you out, from turning to them (for friendship and protection). It is such as turn to them (in those circumstances) that do wrong"

The implications of these verses were clear. The Hindus and Muslims have lived together as brother for centuries. They belong to the same country, the same race, the same language and culture. The aliens, who had come from seven seas across who had enslaved the whole population, and had reduced the people to utter poverty and ignorance, had no right to deserve sympathy. Again it was strange how short was the Muslim memory when all that the English had done to them in 1857 and before 1857 was totally forgotten.

The very first issue of Al-Hilal stated very clearly that the Hindu-Muslim unity was the only way to solve the Indian problem. He quoted Quran to point out that it was permissible for Muslims to join Non-Muslims if it was beneficial to both.

Azad made it a mission of his life to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity. He would invite the attention of all Muslims to know that spirit of the Quran, which was in favor of such a unity. It was Aligarh, which wanted to keep the Muslim politically away from Hindus. Azad vehemently opposed this policy. If Muslims wanted to lead a dignified life it was essential for them to cooperate with Hindus. This was the message of Al-Hilal to free the country from British clutches.

The only weapon the government had to deal with such excitable situations was to excite Hindu-Muslims riot over sensitive issues. The first riot took place at Ajodhya. The government passed order prohibiting cow-slaughter to please the Hindus. Al-Hilal started blasting the policy of government; even Shibli Nomani contributed fiery articles and poems to Al-Hilal.

In short his moral fibre within promoted his keen intellect to bring his people to national path and right conduct. Political awakening and social change were his two main objects. He wielded a powerful pen and an effective tongue, both of which were well used to win his objectives. Whatever he wrote or said carried lofty thoughts. He would say all history is nothing but unfolding the drama of human freedom, political freedom, social freedom, cultural freedom, freedom from want, hunger, ignorance and superstition. Reality of life was nothing but service and sacrifices. Some of his sayings and writing would touch and stir the heart. British Colonialism had treated the Muslim in such a manner that we could as well feed the scorpion on our palm, and make peace with snakes, but it is impossible to make any compromise with the English.

Al-Hilal had other purpose than mere technical improvement of Urdu Journalism. It was bubbling in his mind at the condition of Islamic world. The colonials had gone on imposing uninterruptedly their political will on the Muslim world.

Here I conclude by saying, words seem inadequate, expression fail to explain the beauty and charisma of THE URDU LANGUAGE, this is the language which added charm to poetry, meaning to prose and indeed LIFE to the great freedom struggle of India. It might have passed the zenith of its splendour but even today we doubtlessly remain indebted to this language in different way.

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