



# **ASEER-E-MALTA SHEIKH-UL-HIND MAULANA MAHMUD-UL-HASAN ROLE IN INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT: 1857-1923**

Author(s): Sahina Parveen (Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, A.M.U, Aligarh),

Email Id: [sahina.parveen@yahoo.com](mailto:sahina.parveen@yahoo.com)

Contact: 8791124102

## **ABSTRACT**

The dawn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the Mughal decline after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 and simultaneously, East India Company emerging as a major political power in India. On the one hand Company shrewdly exploited the internal disunity and discord among the princes of India for their own nefarious ends by playing one prince against the other and by using their enemies against each other, increasing its power and influence in the Indian Sub-Continent. Through the Battle of Plassey 1757 and the Battle of Buxar 1759 the Company secured prestigious victory over the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam. By 1765 the company secured the Grant of Diwani of Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and major part of the United Provinces went into their clutches. Oudh was a British ally and Hyderabad was virtually ruled by a British resident. In the south Tipu Sultan 1799 was defeated and his territory was annexed. The Marathas, whose territories were spread deep into north, west, central and eastern India remained no more obstacle to British in their succession and expansion policy after 2<sup>nd</sup> Maratha War 1803-5. Meanwhile Indian witnessed the bloody revolution in the form of 1857 revolt. It was a prolonged period of armed uprising as well as rebellions against the British Empire particularly in Northern and Central Indian subcontinent. The consequences of the revolt had adverse and deep impact on both Hindu and Muslims in India. As on one hand the British policy of conquest and expansion as their colonial exploitation policy and on the other hand the new 'Enfield rifle' created strong animosities among Hindu and Muslims. The revolt of 1857, the partition of Bengal 1905-06, the end of Ottoman Empire through the Balkans and Tripoli 1911-1913 war created a deep impact on Indian Muslims. Circumstances compelled Mahmud-al-Hasan to devote himself for the cause of Islam and India. The British convinced Indians that they were the real rulers of India. Muslims in India considered the British rule as the conspiracy of converting Islam into Christendom. It was during this time when a particular set was emerging within the Indian masses trained in Waliullah tradition which resultantly gave birth to the Islamic politics in India followed by Shah Abdul Aziz (1746-1823) son of Shah Waliullah, the spiritual founder of Islamic Revivalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century known as the "Muhammedi Movement" in India issued landmarked fatwa in the history of India giving religious sanction to Indian Muslims to consider British rule as "Dar-al-Harb" and was difficult for Muslim's to live peacefully thus restoration of "Dar-al-

Islam” was an urgent necessity. The first expression in the movement was led by Saiyid Ahmad Bareilvi (1786-1831) which was later carried by his disciples Wilayat Ali and Inayat Ali (ulema of sadiqpur) from 1863-1865 as Wahabi Movement basically on the tenent of Shah Waliullah who championed the cause of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity much before the French Revolution, American Liberation and Soviet and even before Karl Marx and Hegal. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan founded Anglo-Oriental College in 1877 for imparting western education to Muslims at Aligarh while on the other hand, Maulna Qasim Nanautawi founded Deoband in 1867 to impart purely religious and spiritual education to Muslims. It was during this period when a prominent intellectual of Deoband became an icon of Indian national movement with the establishment of the Samar-al-Tabariya 1878 and later under new name of Jamiat-ul-Ansar (old boys association) 1909 organized by Mahmud-ul-Hasan and Obaidullah Sindhi, and later “Nizaratul-Maarif” (academy of quranic learning) 1913 by Obaidullah Sindhi in Delhi to promote the ideology of revolutionary ulema of that period. Injustice done to the Turkish and Ottoman Sultan and the division of Muslim countries on account of Tripolar and Balkan War (1911-1913) which not only had an impact on Indian Muslims but also upon Muslims in Spain, Portugal and destructions in the Balkans, Iraq, Syria, Armenia and Hijaz provided fuel to Mahmud-ul-Hasan movement in the form of Silk Letter Conspiracy to dethrone the British rule from India by gaining the support of Muslims from North-West Frontier. Mahmud-al-Hasan through Khilafat Congress program endorsed Mahatma Gandhi’s Non-Cooperation and Non-Violence method for achieving Independence immediately after his release from Malta prison in 1920 and continued to support every nationalist program which was intended to oust the British. It was during this time that Mahmud-al-Hasan was conferred upon with “Shaikhul Hind” title by the Khilafat Committee and popularly came to be known as Shaikhul Hind Maulana Mahmud-al-Hasan. The main objective of this paper is to acknowledge the contributions of Mahmud-al-Hasan to Indian National Movement by highlighting his political activities and role in the freedom movement of India by mobilizing Indians against the British rule and to awaken the Muslim Masses by giving Quranic verses in its support. The method here used is exploratory and descriptive in nature.

*Keyword(s): Shaikhul Hind Maulana Mahmud-al-Hasan, Indian National Movement, British Rule, Decline of Mughal Dynasty, 1857 Rebellion, Tripoli and Balkan War, Deoband, Anglo-Oriental College Aligarh, Shah Waliullah, Silk Letter Conspiracy, 1920 Malta Prison, Khilafat committee and Non-Cooperation.*

## Introduction

Eighteenth century marked by the decline of Mughal Empire was a turning point in the History of India. The East India Company initially being a trading company, changes its stature with the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and with the annexation of the Punjab in 1849<sup>1</sup> followed by consecutive control over the three major provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa<sup>2</sup>. The Rebellion of 1857 begins with the onset of direct British Colonial rule over India which continued until India’s Independence in 1947. With British establishment, Indian realized that she not only had been conquered but also had been enslaved<sup>3</sup>. Indian subjection to foreign authority was strongly condemned by Indian people which was evident from the disturbance in most of the Upper Provinces during 1824 and outbreak of 1857 was the consequence of the dissatisfaction among the

<sup>1</sup> V.P.S. Raghuvanshi, *The Indian Nationalist Movement and Thought*, L. N. Agarwal Educational Publishers Agra, 1959, p-15.

<sup>2</sup> Zia-ul-Hasan Faruqi, *The Deoband School and The Demand for Pakistan*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1963, p-1.

<sup>3</sup> V.P.S. Raghuvanshi, *The Indian Nationalist Movement and Thought*, L. N. Agarwal Educational Publishers Agra, 1959, p-16.

people of India which they demonstrated but were finally defeated by the British.<sup>4</sup> This set about the episode of conflicts emerging within and outside Indian Territory.

Kaye and Malleeson says, “The Native newspapers teemed with vague hints of a something coming that was to produce great changes, resulting in the subversion of the power of the English.” Exaggerated stories of the Persian war were freely circulated and continuously discussed. On one occasion it was said that the Persians had come to attack while at another instance that they were in full march through Polar Pass. But the real history of the war was that time had come for Shah of Persia who had been accumulating munitions of war and heaping up treasure for five generation to conquer India.<sup>5</sup> It was declared in Native newspaper, “Most People,” rejoicing in the name of the “Authentic News,” “say that the King of France and the Emperor of Turkey will both side with the Persians.” And it was added that the Russians were the real cause of the war; for, “using the Persians as a cloak, they intend to consummate their own designs by the conquest of Hindustan.”<sup>6</sup> While other writers had their opinion that, “although Amir of Kabul, Dost Mohammad who pretended to be the friend of the English, took their money and arms, and was prepared to turn both against the infidels and to cast in his lot with Persia”.<sup>7</sup>

Even stories surfaced in markets and streets strengthened by the prophecy that the English rule would disappear after a hundred years of the battle of Plassey 1757. Hasan Askari, a Muhammadan Priest, who lived near the Delhi Gate of the Royal Palace, had convinced the King that he had learned through divine revelation, that the dominion of the King of Persia would extend to Delhi or whole of Hindustan and the sovereign of Persia will bestow the crown upon the Mughal King.<sup>8</sup>

Biographer Shan Muhammad, was of the opinion that “these vague talks took more solid form and the impression which these rumors had produced in the public minds were strengthened by the sight of the Proclamation, giving a clarison call to the Muslims to join the army sent by the Shah of Persia to restore the Mughals”.<sup>9</sup>

The Proclamation<sup>10</sup> was issued by the Emperor Bahadur Shah 25<sup>th</sup> August, 1857, which read, “it is incumbent on all to give up the hope of the continuation of the British sway, side with me, and deserve the consideration of Badshahi, or imperial government, by their individual exertion in promoting this common good, and thus attain their respective ends, otherwise if this golden opportunity slips away, they will have to repent for their folly.”<sup>11</sup> Similar proclamation was issued in Awadh under the seal of Birjees Kudur, Walee of Awadh, and his appeal to all the Muslims residing in his state urging them to unite against the British.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>4</sup> V.P.S. Raghuvanshi, *The Indian Nationalist Movement and Thought*, L. N. Agarwal Educational Publishers Agra, 1959, p-17.

<sup>5</sup> Kaye's and Melleeson's, *History of the Indian Mutiny of 1857-58* (ed) by Colonel Malleeson, C.S.I, Vol. 2, London, 1897, p.26

<sup>6</sup> Ibid,p.27

<sup>7</sup> Ibid,p.27

<sup>8</sup> Ibid,pp.27-28

<sup>9</sup> Shan Muhammad, *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan: A Political Biography*, published by Meenakshi Prakashan,Meerut, 1960,pp.24-25

<sup>10</sup> Shan Muhammad, *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan: A Political Biography*, published by Meenakshi Prakashan, Meerut, 1960,pp.24-25

<sup>11</sup> Freedom struggle in Uttar Pradesh, source material Vol.1, 1857-58: Nature and Origin, (e.d) by S.A.A. Rizvi and M.L. Bhargava, Publication Bureau, Information Dept., Uttar Pradesh 1957-61, p.454.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, pp.447-449 All the Hindus and Mohammedans are aware that four things are dear to every man. Firstly, Religion secondly, Honour, thirdly, Life and last Property. These four things are safe under native Government. No one under that Government interfere with religion. Everyone is allowed to continue steadfast in his religion and persuasion, and to possess his honor according to his worth and capacity, be he a person of good descent or of any caste or denomination. The life of any person of either class is not taken under that Government, nor his property confiscated except for crime and grave offences. The English are enemies of the four things above named. They wish to deprive the Hindu and Mohammadans of their religion, and wish them



At Allahabad, proclamation was issued urging people of different persuasions and tribes to prepare for Jihad in overthrowing the Christian rule.<sup>13</sup> The proclamation was addressed to Muhammadans generally, urging a war of extension against the English was posted on the Jama Masjid in the Middle of the March month 1857, this proclamation which have been issued by the King of Persia, set forth the belief that Persian army was coming to release India from the graps of the English and therefore urged to unanimously fight against the Britishers.

This paper aims to highlight how the British expansionist policy of confiscating territories through treaties or conspiracy against one another ruler resulted in the Decline of Mughal power and the rise of British domain over Indian Territory. This paper seek to bring to one notice the consequences of the British over the Indian Muslims who not only contributed to Indian National Movement struggle but also championed for United Nationalism. After the failure of 1857 marked the beginning of new Jihad. The difference here lies only in use of weapons. As now the sword and spear were replaced by the pen and tongue with the establishment of Islamic seminary Darul-uloom-Deoband<sup>14</sup>. Mahmud-al-Hasan role in Silk Letter Conspiracy 1919-1920 is popularly acknowledge and his efforts to free Indian Muslims from British Shackles remained his top most priority. To attain his goal he emphasized on Unity among Indians and support from North-West Frontier to overthrow British from India. He was also in favour of Hindu-Muslim unity and preferred non-interference in religious affairs of one another<sup>15</sup>

### SHAIKHUL HIND MAULANA MAHMOOD-AL-HASAN (1851-1920)

Maulana Mahmud-al-Hasan, popularly known as “Shaikh-ul-Hind”<sup>16</sup> was born in Bareilly. He was among the first batch students who completed his education from Deoband in 1867<sup>17</sup>. After completing his education he was appointed as a teacher at Darul-Uloom-Deoband and later was promoted as Principal in 1890<sup>18</sup>.

During Mahmud-al-Hasan stewardship Darul-uloom-Deoband achieved national and international fame and students from different countries were attracted towards Mahmud-al-Hasan profound knowledge on Hadith such as Afghanistan, Central Asia Hijaz<sup>19</sup>.

The Indian Muslims at that time particularly the students and teachers of Darul-uloom-Deoband felt that the expansion of the British from India was not only their fundamental but religious duty. Although Deoband Madarsa was established with the sole objective of inculcating religious education among Muslims by its founding fathers Haji Abid Hussain and Maulana Mehtab Ali but Maulana Nanatawi changed the aim of Darul-Uloom-Deoband when he joined it. This can be best put in the words of Mahmud-al-Hasan as, “the aim of the establishment of Darul-uloom-Deoband was to produce the students who could compensate the loss of 1857”<sup>20</sup>.

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to become Christians and Nazarenes. Under their Government thousands of people have embraced Christianity and are continuing to do so.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.446

<sup>14</sup> Zia-ul-Hasan Farooqi, *The Deoband School and the Demand for Pakistan*, Asian Publishing House, New Delhi, 1963, pp.20-25.

<sup>15</sup> Mohammad Mian, *The Prisoners of Malta (Asira'n-E-Malta)* English translation of Maulana Syed Mohammad Main by Mohammad Anwar Hussain and Hasan Imam, Manak Publication PVT LTD, New Delhi, 2005, P.23.

<sup>16</sup> The Title of Sheikh-ul-Hind was given to by Indian Muslims particularly by the prominent leaders of Khilafat Committee at Bombay in June, 8, 1920, after his return from Malta incarnation, (See Husain Ahmad Madani, *Naksh-e-Hayat*, Vol-2, P. 248)

<sup>17</sup> Mohammad Mian, *Ulema-e-Haq*, Vol-1, Pp. 76-77.

<sup>18</sup> Mushirul Haq, *Modern Politics in Modern India (1857-1947)*, Meenakshi Prakashan, Meerut, 1970, P.84.

<sup>19</sup> S. Abid Hussain, *The Destiny of Indian Muslims*, Delhi, 1965, P.74.

<sup>20</sup> Mohammad Mian, *Asir-e-Malta*, Al-Jamiyat Book Depot Delhi, 1976, P.9.

## ROLE OF SHAIKH-UL-HIND IN FREEDOM MOVEMENT

In the year 1878, Maulana Mahmood Hasan formed an organization of his students and disciples called Samratut Tarbiah ( the fruit of training) to introduce them with revolutionary ideas.

According to Mohammad Mian its main objective was to get financial aid from its followers and to remain in contact with old boys of Dar-ul-Uloom<sup>21</sup>. After the death of Maulana Qasim Nanautawi the whole responsibility of organization fallen on the shoulders of Shaikhul- Hind<sup>22</sup>. Since activities of the organization was kept in secret no material is available for the references but one can conclude from the Presidential speche given by Maulana Ahmad Hasan Amrohawi( close associate of Shaikhul Hind and illustrioud disciple of Maulana Mohammad Nanautavi) in 1911 at Moradabad. “The movement of Jamiat-ul Ansar had begun almost 30 years ago. The need was felt and the association (Samartut Tarbiah) was revived in the year 1909 and named Jamiat-ul Ansar”<sup>23</sup>

Mahmud-al-Hasan inherited from his two Predecessors, Maulana Gangohi and Rashid Nanatawi not only their learning skills but also their nationalistic ideas and for this Jamiat-ul-Ansar was established by Mahmud-al-Hasan. However this stance of Jamiat-ul-Ansar founded by Mahmud-al-Hasan remain controversial<sup>24</sup>. Even “Shaikhul-Hind had nothing to do with such revolutionary organizations; he was neither the founder nor a member of the one. It is however, possible and it did happen in some cases that some of these revolutionaries were attached to those who were near or close to Shaikhul Hind Maulana Mahmood Hasan”<sup>25</sup> Prominent among them were Maulana Obaidullah Sindhi, Dr. Mukhtar Ansari, Abdul Razzaque and the young fighters from Frontier region, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan Maulana Aul Kalam Azad, Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, Hakim Ajmal Khan and Mohammad Ali and some Sikhs and Bengali Hindu were among the followers of Mahmood-al-Hasan<sup>26</sup>. There meetings were held in seclusion and also discuss affairs confronting the nations. They were emotionally and ideologically ready to aid and assist his mission and even many personally participated in extending financial support to his course.

Shaikhul-Hind even supported Indian National Congress through his Fatwa (Islamic decree) of Hazrat Maulana Rasheed Ahmad Gongohi, “It is permissible for a Muslim to become business partner of a Hindu if the partnership does not violate the tenets of Islam, does not involve any provision that has to do with the interest.”<sup>27</sup> There was an atmosphere of fear and pain among Muslim particularly after the 1906 Bengal partition, the British injustice to Ottoman Empire and with the division of several countries after the Tripoli and Balkan wars<sup>28</sup>. These events created huge agitation among Indian Muslims and filled Shaikhul Hind heart with grief and pain.

Obaidullah Sindhi statement as “when I reached Kabul. I was informed about the mission. The achievement of fifty years of labour of an organization of which Shaikhul-Hind was the founder lay scattered before me.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, Mohammad Mian, *Asir-e-Malta*, P.9.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, Mohammad Mian, *Asir-e-Malta*, P. 25.

<sup>23</sup> Mohammad Mian, *Ulam-e-Haq*, Vol-1, Pp. 133-134.

<sup>24</sup> For detail see Zia-Ul-Hasan Farooqi, The Deoband School and the Demand for Pakistan, Asian Publishing House, New Delhi, Pp.57-58, Home Political, July,1918,Pp.92-101, Peter Hardy, *The Muslim Of British India*, Cambridge University Press, 1972, P-181.

<sup>25</sup> For Detail see Mohammad Mian, *The Prisoners Of Malta( Asira'n-e-Malta)*, English translation by Mohammad Anwer Hussain and Hasan Imam, Manak Publication PVT. LTD, New Delhi,2005, Pp. 21-22.

<sup>26</sup> *Naqsh-e-Hayat*, Vol.2, P.209 ( The records of communication with such people were kept by his Secretary Maulana Mohammad Jalil. When the news of Shaikhul Hind's imprisonment reached, he burnt out a great number such letters.)

<sup>27</sup> Mohammad Mian, *Ulema-e-Haq*, Vol.1, P.101, for details.

<sup>28</sup> Husain Ahmad Madani, *Naqsh-e-Hayat*, Vol.2,P.135

It needed a sincere organizer who could shape them into a powerful movement. I felt happy on the migration now and also felt proud that Shaikhul Hind's choice had fallen upon me to accomplish this noble task"<sup>29</sup>

Mohammad Mian in his *Ulema-e-Haq* says:

"Kabul was part of India during the Muslim rule. The British government thought of annexing it too. However, they failed. The Spiritual movement of Syed Ahmad Shaheed brought the Mujahideen of the Frontier region and India closer. The span of cooperation and coordination that began in the year 1864 and stretched from Ambala to Patna continued till Samratut Tarbiah was founded almost fifteen years later. Though the exchange of logistic support came to an end, the close cooperation between the Mujahideen of Frontier region and India continued for several years. Darul-uloom-Deoband further cemented the existing relationship between the Mujahideen of India and the Frontier region. It was turned into the bond of the teacher and the taught that proved to be stronger than the existing relations among the Mujahideen- especially when the presence of a political stalwart, religious guide and Sheikh, Maulana Mahmood Hasan, inspired people to take allegiance for both spiritual guidance as well as jihad."<sup>30</sup>

On the bases of above one can say that hundreds of the students who came to Deoband and studied under him carried with them a spirit of struggle and sacrifice and when the need arose to unite the scattered Mujahideen to participate in the First World War, for this Obaidullah Sindhi was sent to Kabul<sup>31</sup>.

Maulana Mohammad Mian says, "The name of this organization also shows that Ulema had established the organization for political purpose through his religious teachings. The proposal of Shaikh-ul-Hind was to unite Iran and Afghanistan for one single cause. Syed Ahmad Shaheed succeeded in bringing Indian and Frontier Mujahideen close to one another. This relation was although constant before the foundation of Samart-ul Tarbiyat"<sup>32</sup>.

It is however strange that actual program of Jamiat-ul-Ansar is still unknown. Only causal references were given by Maulana Obaidullah Sindhi and Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani who were considered to be the most authentic reporters of this movement<sup>33</sup>.

In order to popularize the programme of Jamiat-ul-Ansar, Shaikh-ul-Hind called Jalsa-e-Dastar Bandi (Convocation) in 1910, attended by more than thirty thousand people. Obaidullah Sindhi in his speech emphasis on the importance of unity among Muslims and aim of Darul-uloom Deoband <sup>34</sup>.

Emphasis were laid on uniting graduates of Islamic Institution of all over the world under the common banner of Jamiat-ul-Anasar. Obaidullah Sindhi was its Nizam for four years. It was belived that within Jamiat there was a secret body working against British interests, though its aims and objective were not known. Revolutionary and anti- British articles were distributed within and outside India<sup>35</sup>.

The Italy and Turkey war 1911-1912 in Tripoli followed by the Balkan wars 1912-1913 demonstrate the evil side of British policy. The Muslims in India resented the anti-Turkish policy of the British Government and

<sup>29</sup> Maulana Obaidullah Sindhi, *Kabul Mein Saat Saal*, Sindh Sahar Academy, Lahore.

<sup>30</sup> Mohammad Mian, *Ulema-e-Haq*, Vol.1, P. 129.

<sup>31</sup> Rawllat Committee Report, P.13 (C.I.D. Report under the title "The petition of the British Queen v/s Maulana Obaidullah Sindhi).

<sup>32</sup> Mohammad Mian, *Ulema-e-Haq*, Vol. 1, Pp. 128-129.

<sup>33</sup> Zia-ul-Hasan Faruqi, *The Deoband School and the Demand for Pakistan*, Asian Publication House, New Delhi, P. 57

<sup>34</sup> For Details on Aims and objective of Jamiat-ul-Ansar see Mohammad Mian, *Ulema-e-Haq*, Vol. 1, P. 131.

<sup>35</sup> Mohammad Mian (ed) *Tehrik Shaikh-ul-Hind, Reshmi Khutoot Sazish Case*, Delhi, 1957, P.48.



had full sympathy with the Turks. Money was collected by the students of Deoband seminary and sent to Turkey<sup>36</sup>.

The activities of Jamiyat-ul-Ansar were under close vigilance of British Government and therefore it was decided to shift its headquarter from Deoband to Delhi<sup>37</sup>. Mohammad Mian in his book *Tehrik Sheikh-ul-Hind*, Reshmi Khutoot Sazish Case give detail description of this and call it a “fine show”<sup>38</sup>. This organization changed its name from Jamiyat-ul-Ansar to Nizarat-ul-Ma’arif (the academy of Quranic Learning) in 1913<sup>39</sup>. The main function of the organization was to interpret the Quran and its teachings, but it was also a secret meeting place for the conspirators<sup>40</sup>. Through Nizaratul Maarif in Delhi, Muslim youth were trained to work in political field to liberate India from Foreign rule. Nawab Viqar-ul-Mulk, Hakim Ajmal Khan. Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari, Maulana Shaukat Ali, Maulana Mohammad Ali, Maulana Zafar Ali Khan and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad were sympathizers of Nizaratul Maarif<sup>41</sup>.

Shams-ul-Ulema Maulana Mohammad Ahmad who was a government informer says, “Nizarat-ul-Ma’arif according to him is the field of Obaidullah’s subversive activities which now lay in the Fatehpuri Mosque at Delhi. It was a centre of a new society of which Obaidullah was the Nazim and the association was thoroughly seditious. The Nizarat received a subsidy of Rs. 200/- per month from Bhopal, therefore he requested to the government that Obaidullah should be sent back to Sindh”<sup>42</sup>.

Maulana Idrees Ahmad, Assistant Secretary, Aligarh College and father of Maulvi Anis Ahmad was also attracted towards Nizarat-ul-Ma’arif. Khwaja Abdul Hai and Maulvi Anis Ahmad received scholarship from Nizarat-ul-Ma’arif. Dr. Ansari contributed Rs. 50/- per month towards the organization<sup>43</sup>. Nizarat-ul-Ma’arif was the rendezvous of the Muslim Clergy who conspired against the British rule<sup>44</sup>.

## THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

Shaikhul Hind wanted to bring foreign Government of Afghanistan and Iran closer to each other and to seek military support of Turkey in attacking India through Iran and Afghanistan<sup>45</sup>. In 1915, Shaikh-ul-Hind instructed Obaidullah Sindhi to go to the Kabul along with three companions Abdullah, Fateh Mohammad and Mohammad Ali to unite number of people for common cause.<sup>46</sup> Also, to co-operate with a revolutionary party<sup>47</sup> of Raja Mahendra Pratap in liberating India with the help of Germany, Turkey and Afghanistan from

<sup>36</sup> Husain Ahmad Madani, *Naqsh-e-Hayat*, Vol. 2, Deoband, 1952, Pp. 193-194.

<sup>37</sup> Mohammad Mian (ed) *Tehrik Shaikh-ul-Hind, Reshmi Khutoot Sazish Case*, Delhi, 1957, P. 51

<sup>38</sup> Ibid (ed), P.195.

<sup>39</sup> Husain Ahmad Madani, *Naqsh-e-Hayat*, Vol-2, Deoband, 1952, P. 144

<sup>40</sup> Mohammad Mian, *Ulema-e-Haq*, Vol.1, P.136.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, P. 136

<sup>42</sup> Letter from the Secretary, Government of U.P. to Secretary, Government of India 27<sup>th</sup> September. 1915 by Shan Mohammad, *The Indian Muslims: A Documentary Record 1900-1947*, Vol. 5, Meerut, 1982, Pp. 51-52.

<sup>43</sup> Mohammad Mian (ed), *Tehrik Shaikh-ul-Hind, Reshmi Khutoot Sazish Case*, Delhi, 1975, P.196.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, P. 196.

<sup>45</sup> Mohammad Mian, *Ulema-e-Haq*, Vol.1, P.129.

<sup>46</sup> *Kabul Mein Saat Saal (Seven years in Kabul)* by Maulana Sindhi. Also see Husain Ahmad Madani, *Naqsh-e-Hayat*, Vol-2, P.146.

<sup>47</sup> Revolutionary Party here is referred to Ghadar Party founded by Har Dayal, a hindu graduate of Punjab University who in 1905 proceeded to England on Government Scholarship for higher education. However he later change his mind and returned Government Scholarship and went to America where he organized the students from India and started Newspaper with the title ‘Ghadr’ in 1913. It was a revolutionary conspiracy of all communities with its branches in America, Philippines, Malaya, Singapore, Hong Kong, Egypt, Turkey, Afghanistan and Germany. During the war its propagation stirred a vain hope in India, particularly in Punjab, that Germany’s attack on England, if it concided with a general uprising in India, would give a golden opportunity to Indians to free themselves from the foreign yoke. Raja Mahendra Pratap and Maulvi Barkatullah who had joined

British yolk. Provisional Government was established in collaboration with Ghadar Party under the life President of Raja Mahendra Pratap, Maulana Barkatullah its Prime Minister and Obaidullah Sindhi was entrusted with the portfolio of Home Ministry<sup>48</sup> was establish to deal directly with the Afghan Government and also sent missions to the Government of Russia, Turkey and Japan to seek their help for Liberating India from British Government<sup>49</sup>. He also organized a branch of the Indian National Congress with himself as its President, which later affiliated to the mother organization in 1922<sup>50</sup>

The Provisional Government of India got support of Kabul Chief Maulana Abdur Bazraq. He actively helped Obaidullah in his plan to raise an army called “Hizbullah” (the army of God) with its head quarter in Medina. This was the beginning of Silk Letter Movement. Sheikh-ul-Hind to perform Hajj and simultaneously the carnival of Reshmi Rumal began. It is known as silk letter movement because the letters written on silk cloth executed the complete plan of the Movement and its Progress in Afghanistan<sup>51</sup>.

### THE SILK LETTER MOVEMENT

On the eve of the First World War the Government of India began to suspect Shaikh-ul-Hind because of Obaidullah’s activity against British Government in North-West Frontier, who was directed by him to reach Kabul and to channelize Indian Revolutionaries for India cause. In order to escape the strict vigilance of Government Shaikh-ul-Hind reached Hijaz in 1915 to perform hajj<sup>52</sup>. The whole expense of the journey was facilitated by Hakim Abdur Razzaq Ghazipuri and Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari from Delhi<sup>53</sup>.

Shaikh-ul-Hind was accompanied by Maulana Mohammad Main Ambethwi, Maulana Aziz Gul, Maulana Murtaza Hasan Chandpuri, Maulana Mohammad Sahool Bhagalpuri, Hakim Khan Mohammad, Maulana Matlab-ur-Rahman Deoband, Haji Khan Mohammad, Maulana Matlubur Rahman Deobandi, Haji Mehboob Khan Saharanpuri, Haji Abdul Karim Saronji and Maulana Wahid Ahmad Madani<sup>54</sup>

This movement was organized in a secret manner because firstly, it was designed to unite all the forces of Islam into a banner of one, including the Turks, the Arabs under the Sharif of Mecca, the Afghan, the Frontier Tribes and the last but not the least the Indian Mohammedans.<sup>55</sup> And secondly, the main objective was not only to liberate India but all the Islamic countries under infidel rule.<sup>56</sup> In the words of Maulana Gulam Rasool Mahr, “the activities of various movements since the time of Syed Ahamd Shahid to Shaikh-ul-Hind convinced that since the national condition was not suitable to launch any intensive movement, therefore

‘Obaidullah’s Provisional Government at Kabul, were the prominent leaders of the movement, See Zia-ul-Hasan Faruqi, The Deoband school and The Demand of Pakistan, Asian Publishing House, P.60.

<sup>48</sup> Raja Mahindra Pratap, *My Life Story 1886-1979*, Vol.1: 1886-1941, edited by Dr. Vir Singh (Delhi Originals, 2004), P. 41.

<sup>49</sup> S. Abid Hussain, *The Destiny of Indian Muslims*, Delhi, 1965, P.75.

<sup>50</sup> Husain Ahmad Madani, *Naksh-e-Hayat*, Vol-2, Deoband, 1952, Pp.145-81.

<sup>51</sup> Husain Ahmad Madni, *Naksh-e-Hayat*, Vol-2, Deoband, 1952, P. 244.

<sup>52</sup> Mohammad Mian, *The Prisoners of Malta (Asira’n-E-Malta)* English translation of Maulana Syed Mohammad Main by Mohammad Anwar Hussain and Hasan Imam, Manak Publication PVT LTD, New Delhi, 2005, P.38, Mushirul Haq, *Modern Politics in India (1857-1947)*, Meenakshi Prakashan, Meerut, 1970, P.84.

<sup>53</sup> Mohammad Mian, *The Prisoners of Malta (Asira’n-E-Malta)* English translation of Maulana Syed Mohammad Main by Mohammad Anwar Hussain and Hasan Imam, Manak Publication PVT LTD, New Delhi, 2005, P.38.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, P.40, Also see Mohammad Mian, *Ulema-e-Haq*, Vol-1, P.139, Maulana Asghar Husain, *Hayat Shaikh-ul-Hind*, Deoband, 1948, P. 31.

<sup>55</sup> Dwyer O’ Michael, *India as I Know It*, London (1885-1925), Mittal Publication, New Delhi-110059, India, P.178

<sup>56</sup> Stewart Jules, *The Kaiser’s Mission to Kabul: A Secret Expedition to Afghanistan in WWI*, I.B.Tauris Publisher, 2014, P.125



Mahmud-al-Hasan followed the policy of educating masses in Darul-uloom against British government”<sup>57</sup> which he utilized in his silk letter movement.

Shaikh-ul-Hind met Hafiz Abdul Jabbar<sup>58</sup> who arranged his meeting with the Ghalib Pasha, the Governor of Hijaz. Shaikh-ul-Hind discussed with him the whole episode of political situation in India and his purpose behind Hijaz visit. The Governor of Hijaz appreciated Shaikh-ul-Hind effort against British tyranny and assured him of help. The document which was written by the Governor of Mecca firstly, appeal to the Indian Muslims to extend their full support to Sheikh-ul-Hind movement and assured he will provide material support to this movement from Turkey came to be known as “Galib Nama”<sup>59</sup>. Another, document was addressed to the Governor of Madina, Bashir Pasha, requesting him to make every possible arrangements for Shaikh-ul-Hind’s visit to Turkey and his meeting with Anwar Pasha. Last was addressed to Anwar Pasha introducing Shaikh-ul-Hind as a great Islamic scholar and requesting him to fulfill all the timely requirements<sup>60</sup>.

This Galib Nama is given in the report of Sedition Committee appointed by the Government of India in 1918 as follows:

“The Mohammadans in Asia, Europe and Africa adorned themselves with all sorts of arms and rushed to join the Jihad in the path of God. Thanks to Almighty God that the Turkish Army and Mujahideen have overcome the enemies of Islam. Oh: Moslems, therefore attack the tyrannical Christian Government under whose bondage you are hasten to put all your efforts, with strong resolution, to strangle the enemy to death and show your hatred and enmity for them. It may also be known to you that Maulvi Mahmud-al-Hasan Effendi (Formerly at the Deoband Madarsa) came to us and sought our counsel. We agreed with him in this respect and gave him necessary instructions. You should trust him if he comes to you and help him with men, money and whatever he requires”<sup>61</sup>.

Shaikh-ul Hind was advised by the Ghalib Pasha to return back to India in order to carry on his mission among Indian Muslims and also to seek support and co-operation of Hindus. However in India conditions were not favorable to him because British Government was after him and had fear of being getting arrest. Therefore, he decided to stay back. Shaikh-ul-Hind wanted to meet Turkish Government after meeting Galib Pasha and Anwar Pasha and then to Yaghestan.

Sheikh-ul-hind sent back Maulana Matalub-ur-Rehman, one of his companions of Hajj to India and later Maulana Murtaza and Mohammad Mian from Medina to India with Ahmad Mian (brother of Mohammad Mian) along with the letters. All the three successfully evaded the vigilance of the customs officials when they arrived at Bombay<sup>62</sup>.

<sup>57</sup> Mian Mohammad, *silk Letter Movement*, P.46

<sup>58</sup> Haji Abdul Jabbar was not only known among the government circles of Hijaz, but was also a known and respected figure among the residents of Hijaz. He originally belonged to Delhi and was from the family of a famous trader, Haji Ali Jaan who was very close to Syed Ahmad Shaheed and an associate of Mujahideen of Sethyana. See Mohammad Mian, *The Prisoners of Malta( Asira’n-E-Malta)* English translation of Maulana Syed Mohammad Main by Mohammad Anwar Hussain and Hasan Imam, Manak Publication PVT LTD ,New Delhi, 2005, P.42.

<sup>59</sup> Mohammad Mian, *The Prisoners of Malta( Asira’n-E-Malta)* English translation of Maulana Syed Mohammad Main by Mohammad Anwar Hussain and Hasan Imam, Manak Publication PVT LTD ,New Delhi, 2005,P.43.

<sup>60</sup> Mohammad Mian(ed), *Tehrik Shaikh-ul-Hind, Reshmi Khutoot Sazish Case*, Delhi, 1975, P.78.

<sup>61</sup> Seditious Committee Report, 1918, Calcutta, 1918, P.179.

<sup>62</sup> Y. Dev Prasad, *The Indian Muslims and World War 1 (1914-1918)*, Pp. 135-136( quoted from the Report on Silk Letter Case, Central Intelligence Department, U.P, Part 1, P.16, L/P & S/10/633. No. 4260/1916).

Mohammad Mian disseminated the messages of Ghalib Pasha with the instruction of Shaikh-ul-Hind to his followers in India and North-West Frontier. Also by this time Mahendra Pratap and Barkatullah with an anti-British mission reached Afghanistan from the West and began to work in collaboration with Obaidullah Sindhi to induce the Amir of Afghanistan to abandon his neutrality<sup>63</sup>.

The letters of Anwar Pasha and Jamal Pasha were carefully dispatched to India, since it was difficult to pass through English hands. Maulana Hadi Hasan Raees of Khan Jahanpur was assigned with the duty to carry document to India escaping from British eyes and carefully handing over to Haji Noorul Hasan who would then take photographs of the documents from Mirza Sahib Photographer Delhi and to would deliver them to frontiers through Muhammad Mian,<sup>64</sup> The police who assumed of Shaikh-ul-Hind onboard resulted in the escape of box containing the letters from the C.I.D search in Bombay. Luckily the box containing the letters was already handed to Mohammad Nabi (cousin of Hadi Hasan).

These letters were sent by Mahmud-ul-Hasan through Mohammad Main via Kabul where Obaidullah wrote those letters to different heads of the countries such as Russia, Turkey and Czar of Russia to withdraw its alliance with Great Britain and urging them to declare war against the British in support of India and Turkey duly signed by Raja Mahendra Pratap the president of the Provincial Government.

Although Obaidullah Sindhi gained Habibullah (Amir of Afghanistan) support to wage war against British but ironically the British who got the wind of this sinister move took Amir of Afghanistan in their confidence by promising to safeguard Afghanistan by attacking Iraq to prevent Turko-German forces to reach Afghanistan and return Amir of Afghanistan would refrain himself from attacking British from North-West Frontier of India<sup>65</sup>.

The letters of Obaidullah Sindhi written on silk yellow handkerchief so as to escape the Afghan and British intelligence were handed over to Shaikh Abdul Rahim Sindhi with a request to handover these letters to some reliable Haji who would in turn give them to Mahmud-ul-Hasan in Hijaz. Although Shaikh Abdul Huq was a trustworthy person but somehow letters fell in wrong hand Khan Bahadur Rao Nawaz Khan (father of Allah Nawaz Khan) instead of Shaikh Abdul Rahim Sindhi. Khan Bahadur who was the magistrate of Multan passed these letters to British Government and later handed over to Punjab C.I.D.<sup>66</sup>

Mahmud-ul-Hasan movement is regarded as one of the most revolutionary movement in the history of India which was framed by the Britishers as “The Silk Letter Conspiracy” managed by the ulema of Deoband. These letters which were written on Silk cloth piece by Obaidullah Sindhi and Mohammad Main Ansari from Kabul to Mahmud-ul-Hasan in Hijaz. These messages were exchanged with the exiled Deobandi leadership in Persian language concealed in silk cloth, sewn into the lining of the coat comprised of the entire scheme fell into the hand of Punjab C.I.D in 1916 which however later was discovered by General Sir Michael O’Dwyer, Lieutenant Governor of Punjab as “An attempt by Obaidullah Sindhi and his associates to communicate with sympathizers in India by means of a plot known as “The Silk Letter Movement”. These letters describes:

1. The progress of the movement in Kabul and India.
2. The arrival of the German and the Turkish mission.

<sup>63</sup> Bamford.P.C, *History of the Non-Co-operation and Khilafat Movements*, Delhi, 925, Pp. 124-125.

<sup>64</sup> Husain Ahmad Madani, *Naksh-e-Hayat*, Vol-2, Deoband, 1952, Pp.219-220

<sup>65</sup> Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol-3 P.415.

<sup>66</sup> Mian Mohammad, *Asira’n-E-Malta*, P.48.

3. The formation of the “Provisional Government”.
4. The activity of the students and outlining the plan for the formation of “Army of God”<sup>67</sup>, to overthrow the foreign power through an alliance of all Islamic-States.

The movement which was so strong in its initial stages that it pushed Central Asia, Hijaz through all the traditional oriental method against the Britishers, soon turned out into a failure on account of Khan Bahadur of Multan who by showing loyalty to the British government exposed the whole conspiracy of Silk Letters, in fact Obaidullah Sindhi concept of Pan-Islamic of uniting Muslims brothers into a common brotherhood failed on account of difference's in interest of Arabs, Turks, Afghans.

### **FAILURE OF THE MOVEMENT AND SHAIKH-UL-HIND ARREST**

At the time when Silk Letters were leaked to the British government Mahmud-ul-Hasan reached Mecca from Taif and wanted to proceed further to Istanbul but fate did not shower on him since the British government in India was hunting for the main conspirators related to the Silk Letter Conspiracy. It was time when British government sent Khan Bahadur Mubarak Ali to Mecca to bring a fatwa (edict) of Kufr against the Ottoman rulers,<sup>68</sup> which was a preplanned conspiracy of the British against Mahmud-ul-Hasan.

This fatwa was signed by many Sharifi officials and when Abdullah Siraj who sent one of his representative to Mahmud-ul-Hasan for his signature to edict with the headline as “From the Ulema of Mecca teachers at Masjid-e-Haram” in which all the Turks were regarded as Kafir (infidels) since they have dethroned Sultan Abdul Hameed Khan.

After a month and half they were transferred Malta, an Island in the Mediterranean sea on February 1917 and having stayed in Malta for three years and two months on March 12, 1920 Shaikh-ul-Hind was released<sup>69</sup> and was received by Khilafat Committee members who

### **SHAIKH-UL-HIND ROLE AFTER RELEASE FROM MALTA**

In 1920 when Shaikh-ul-Hind was set free and was still aboard the ship official Maulvi Rahim Baksh, advised him to remain aloof from Indian Politics and should go straight to Darul-Uloom Deoband. However the political situation in India infused new life in his vein and even when he was on his death bed he use to discuss strategies with political leaders against British Government shows his enthusiasm and determination for Freedom Movement. Husain Ahmad Madani successor of Shaikh-ul-Hind writes in his Naksh-e-Hayat:

“After bearing hardships of the prison and exile when Hazrat Shaikh-ul-Hind returned India, we found no change in his spirit to fight the colonial regime and his hatred against the British. The imposition of martial law in the country, the implementation of the Rowlatt Act and the Jalianawalla Bagh massacre within the country, and the act of dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, and the inhuman behaviour with the Turks outside India upset him. The moment he set his foot in Bombay, he met Maulana Shaukat Ali and other members of the Khilafat Committee.....”<sup>70</sup>.

<sup>67</sup> Dwyer O' General, *India As I Know It*, pg-176-179

<sup>68</sup> Mohammad Mian, *The Prisoners of Malta (Asira'n-E-Malta)* English translation of Maulana Syed Mohammad Main by Mohammad Anwar Hussain and Hasan Imam, Manak Publication PVT LTD, New Delhi, 2005, P.97.

<sup>69</sup> For detail on Malta Prison and life of Shaikh-ul-Hind in Malta see Mohammad Mian, *The Prisoners of Malta (Asira'n-E-Malta)* English translation of Maulana Syed Mohammad Main by Mohammad Anwar Hussain and Hasan Imam, Manak Publication PVT LTD, New Delhi, 2005.P. 55.

<sup>70</sup> Mohammad Mian, *The Prisoners of Malta (Asira'n-E-Malta)* English translation of Maulana Syed Mohammad Main by Mohammad Anwar Hussain and Hasan Imam, Manak Publication PVT LTD, New Delhi, 2005, P.56-57.



The episode of Peasantry movement, Khilafat, Jallianwala Bagh, Rowlatt Bill, Gandhi ji Satyagraha and Non-Cooperation and the attitude of Deoband towards it compelled Shaikh-ul-Hind to scarify himself for India cause. He even issued Fatwa (religious sanction)<sup>71</sup> in favour of Non-Cooperation of Gandhi Ji.

The establishment of Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Hind in the wake of Khilafat Movement in 1919, it a period of reapproachment between the 'Ulema' and 'the western educated' Muslims<sup>72</sup>.

He also made revolutionary tour of Jahanabad, District Fatepur, Allahabad, Ghazipur, Faizabad, Lucknow and Moradabad exhorting the Muslims to follow the lead of the Khilafat Congress leaders and work for the success of the Non-Cooperation Movement. He did it inspite of his serious illness and against the advice of his doctors. Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Usmani who use to accompany him wherever he went use to read the speeches on behalf of Shaikh-ul-Hind in favour of Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movement<sup>73</sup>.

He even laid the foundation stone of the Jami'ah Milliyyah Islamiyah<sup>74</sup> at Aligarh in 1920 and presided over the second session of the Jam'iyat-ul-Ulama-i-Hind week before his death in November 20-21, 1920 in Delhi<sup>75</sup>

## CONCLUSION

After the defeat of the Muslim in the revolt of 1857, Maulana Qasim Nanotavi in 1866 founded Islamic Institution Deoband to prepare his students and instill in them an anti-British spirit to oust them from India. It was during this period few personalities among the Muslims appeared on the horizon who adopted different strategies to fight the British. They were Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Maulana Qasim Nanautawi school of thought, while the former stood for cooperation and conciliation with the British Government while the later was antagonistic towards British since Muslims had suffered untold suffering on account of them. The former was in favour of western education and government services while the later was confined to Quranic teaching. It is because of their difference in ideology efforts were being made to unite Aligarh School students with Deoband School student for Indian cause because although ideologies were different but the agenda of both was same. Both these institution contributed in imbibing nationalistic spirit among its students, as Mahmood-al-Hasan is one of thses Deoband Alumni who fought till his last breath against British Government.

His main objective was to liberate India and Muslim countries from British shackles. Therefore he began to appear in Politics from 1878 onwards with the establishment of Samrat-ul-Tarbiyat followed by Jamiat-ul-Ansar in 1890, 1910 Jalsa-e-Dastarbandi (Convocation) at Deoband, Nizarat-ul-Ma'arif 1913. It was then Obaidullah Sindhi was sent by Shaikh-ul-Hind to Kabul in 1914 which later came to be kown as Silk Letter Movement.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, Pp. 57-59, for detail on Fatwa, Zia-ul-Hasan Faruqi, *The Deoband School and The Demand for Pakistan*, Asian Publishing House, Delhi, P.63.

<sup>72</sup> Zia-ul-Hasan Faruqi, *The Deoband School and The Demand for Pakistan*, Asian Publishing House, Delhi, P.67.

<sup>73</sup> Husain Ahmad Madani, *Naksh-e-Hayat, Deoband*, 1952, Pp.247-248. Also see, Zia-UI-Hasan Faruqi, *The Deoband School and the Demand for Pakistan*, Asian Publishing House, Delhi, P.64. Mohammad Mian, *The Prisoners of Malta( Asira'n-E-Malta)* English translation of Maulana Syed Mohammad Main by Mohammad Anwar Hussain and Hasan Imam, Manak Publication PVT LTD ,New Delhi, 2005, P.62-64.

<sup>74</sup> Dr. W.C. Smith's " A Note on the Jami'ah Milliyyah Islamiyah" in his 'Modern Islam in India', London, 1946, Pp. 128-31; and Shaikh Muhammad Ikram's 'Mawj-i-Kawthar' (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), Firoz Sons, Karachi, n.d. Pp. 148-162.

<sup>75</sup> Mohammad Mian, *Jamiyat-ul-Ulema Kya Hai*, P.36. Also see Husain Ahmad Madani, *Naksh-e-Hayat*, Vol- 2, Deoband, 1952, P.258.

The movement which was started by Mahmud-ul-Hasan with the outbreak of Khilafat Movement and World War I in 1919 to overthrow the brutal and nasty British government on account of whom Indian Muslim had faced hardships and misery. Shaikh-ul-Hind Silk letter Movement was one of his efforts to unit Muslim countries for India Muslims. Mahmud-ul-Hasan who thought to work in a united framework of Islamic Universalism with the help of foreign governments soon shattered with the treaty between Amir of Afghanistan and British. Had the King Habibullah not supported British, the course of war could well have been dealt to end the British Empire. Although the movement was started with full enthusiasm and unconditional spirit began to shatter with Shaikh-ul-Hind arrest, completely paralyzed the movement. Obaidullah Sindhi's Provincial government in Kabul with Raja Mahendra Prasad and Barkatullah for the first time brought Hindu with orthodox Muslim Ulema together to a united platform to achieve India's Independence also proved as a failure.

The leakage of silken letters and arrest of Mahmud-ul-Hasan caused a serious blow to the Silk Letter Movement and convinced Shaikh-ul-Hind and Obaidullah about their belief for Universal Islamic brotherhood as an outdated concept since each nation has its own self-interest.

Shaikh-ul-Hind was the most renowned and determinant leader who fought with irresistible energy as if nothing can stop him who fought with the British till his last breath which was visible after his release from Malta prison and even after his death his mission was carried on by his followers. He also left the fire for Independence kept burning among his pupil's hearts and among whom Husain Ahmad Madani was one.

Although it was a good attempt by Indian Ulema which created nationalist spirit of purely freedom fighter for motherland proved weak in front of the mighty British government.

