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## Hasrat Mohani A Poet And A Nationalist



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**Abstract-** The early 20th century was a transformative period in the subcontinent's politics, marked by pivotal events like the 1905 Bengal partition, Swadeshi and Boycott movements, rising revolutionary and nationalist activities, the 1906 Simla Deputation, and the formation of the Muslim League. These developments had a profound impact on Indian society. Hasrat Mohani, like many nationalist leaders, was deeply influenced by the prevailing atmosphere. With a natural revolutionary spirit, he stepped forward with dedication and a willingness to make sacrifices. His sensitive nature allowed him to absorb the changing tides and meet challenges head on.

**Keywords-** Nationalist, Freedom, Independence, journal, politics

The Indian National Movement contributed towards the freedom of India from the age old clutches of the British regime. Many leaders played a prominent role in India's struggle for independence beyond the boundaries of religion and gender. The contribution of each and every individual was remarkable and unbelievable. One such freedom fighter who was known for his own style and war cry against the foreign rule was Maulana Hasrat Mohani, the forgotten nationalist. Mohani, occupies a significant place in the cultural and political history of modern India. He is held as one of the first-rank and top-most leaders of the twentieth century national movement.

The early 20th century was a transformative period in the subcontinent's politics, marked by pivotal events like the 1905 Bengal partition, Swadeshi and Boycott movements, rising revolutionary and nationalist activities, the 1906 Simla Deputation, and the formation of the Muslim League. These developments had a profound impact on Indian society. Hasrat Mohani, like many nationalist leaders, was deeply influenced by the prevailing atmosphere. With a natural revolutionary spirit, he stepped forward with dedication and a willingness to make sacrifices. His sensitive nature allowed him to absorb the changing tides and meet challenges head on.

'*Long live the Revolution*' popular as **Inquilab-zindabad** (a-war-cry-for-change) was raised by Syed Fazl-ul-Hasan, known to the world as Hasrat Mohani. If '*We shall overcome*' served as the anthem of the African-American Civil Rights Movement in the United States, in India that recognition would go to 'Inqilaab Zindabad' coined by Mohani, a slogan which became the chant of the Indian nationalists.

*'parhiye is ke siwa na koi' sabaq,  
khidmat-i-khalq-o-'ishq-i-hazrat-i-haq'*<sup>1</sup>

(Take to your heart no lesson but one:

Serve all life, and love Truth.)

Hasrat Mohani

Not many would be aware of the name of Mohani in consonance with the historical Indian national movement but he is remembered today famously for his romantic ghazal '*Chupke chupke raat din*'. He composed poetry which reflected his passionate love for his country and his goal of total freedom from the British rule. He was one of the pioneers in demanding independence from the British and along with Ram Prasad Bismil got the proposal for Poorna Swaraj (complete Independence) accepted by the Indian National Congress in 1921. This great freedom fighter and a noted Urdu poet, was born in 1875 in a lesser known village of Mohan, District Unnao in the United Provinces.<sup>2</sup> and was one of the greatest revolutionary leaders of the Indian National Movement. Mohan a small Kasbah in Uttar Pradesh, lies on the left bank of the Sai river, about 6 km east of Hasanganj and 38 km north-east of Unnao. In the British period Mohan was a part of Lucknow district. After independence it got merged into Unnao district and came to be known for producing great writers of the period like Hasrat Mohani and Iffat Mohani. Hasrat belonged to a modest zamindar family, as his father Syed Azhar Husain<sup>3</sup> had inherited from his grand mother three villages in the tehsil of Khajwah as ancestral property. He started his education in Miyan Ji Ghulam Ali's Maktab who was the grandfather of the famous modern Urdu poet Maulana Syed Afqar Mohani. This was a well-known Centre of Islamic theology. Books like Sikandarnama, Bahar-i Danish, Akhlaq-i Mahsani and Insha-i Abul Fazal were taught there.<sup>4</sup> After matriculating with distinction, he joined the Mahommedan Anglo-Oriental College, Aligarh,<sup>5</sup> in 1899 and earned his B.A. from there. In a very short span of time owing to his personal integrity and his talent for poetry, he won the appreciation and affection of his fellow batchmates and adopted the title Hasrat ("Longing") for

his takhallus (nom de plume). He also started his own journal 'Urdu-i- Mualla' from Lucknow and newspaper 'Mustaqil' from Kanpur. The journal, Urdu- i- Mualla was published on 1st July 1903 <sup>6</sup> and Hasrat entered into the field of active politics as an editor of the said journal. In 1905, young Aligarh Muslims such as Tufail Ahmad and Hasrat Mohani attended the Congress held at Benares, and, in May 1906, the Aligarh College Students' Union took an alarming line when it passed by 'overwhelming majorities' motions advocating joint action by Hindus and Muslims in politics.<sup>7</sup>

The popularity of Urdu-i-Mualla caused great insecurity to the British government who confiscated the Urdu Press in 1913 and fined Hasrat Mohani a sum of three thousand rupees. Hasrat had also to suffer criminal charges for one of the articles published in his journal and had also to give up on his rare collection of books to pay the fine for the punishment.<sup>8</sup> At the time of Hasrat's arrest his wife Nishat wrote to him: '*Whatever has befallen you ,bear with manly courage. Never should you think of me or your home. Beware you should not give expression to any weakness on your part*'. After his release, the couple resumed the newspaper. The newspaper had only two employees - Nishat and Hasrat.<sup>9</sup>

In his later life, Mohani also wrote a commentary on the poetry of Mirza Ghalib titled 'Sharh-e-Kalam-e-Ghalib' (explanation of Ghalib's poetry) and a commentary on the nature of poetry itself titled 'Nukaat-e-Sukhan' (important aspects of poetry). As a versatile poet he penned many remarkable pieces of poetry including many of which he devoted to Lord Krishna. Hasrat had immense love and devotion for Lord Krishna which in fact is reflected in his verses. He is said to have frequently visited Mathura to celebrate Krishna Janmashtami, the birthday of Lord Krishna. He wrote lyrical ballads some written in Urdu and others in the Awadhi dialect.

*'Mann tose preet lagai Kanhai*  
*Kahu aur kisurati ab kaahe ko aayi*  
*Gokula dhundh Brindaban dhundho*  
*Barsane lag ghoom ke aayi*  
*Tan man dhan sab waar ke 'Hasrat'*  
*Mathura nagar chali dhuni ramaye' <sup>10</sup>*  
 (My heart has fallen for you, Kanhai  
 How can it think of anyone else now?  
 I searched for him in Gokul and in Brindavan  
 I even went till Barsana looking for him  
 Having sacrificed everything for him, I Hasrat  
 Am now going to set up my abode in Mathura)

He called Krishna 'Hazrat Shri Krishna Alaihi Rahma'<sup>11</sup> ('The Venerable Shri Krishna Blessed be His Name'). Seeing no duality between his assiduous roza-namaz and ardent Krishna bhakti, He believed in the lines he wrote-

*'Maslak-i ishq hai parastish-i husn  
Hum nahin jaante aazab-o-sawaab'*

(The path of love leads to the worship of beauty  
I know neither reward nor punishment)

He was a disciple of Hazrat Shah Abdur Razzaq Farangi Mahalli in the Qadri Sufi Order. He himself evolved into a mystic and mysticism to him was the true religion. Just as Sufism believes in losing oneself to the Beloved to achieve salvation he believed that love of Radha Krishna was also a beautiful example of the same.

He has written about the light of love found in holy places like Mecca and Medina, Benaras or 'Mathura, the  
*boo-i uns, that permeates both:*

*Irfaan-e ishq naam hai mere maqaam ka  
Haamil hun kis ke naghma-i nai ke payaam ka  
Mathura se ahl-i dil ko woh aati hai boo-i uns  
Duniya-i jaan mein shor hai jis ke dawaam ka  
Labrez-i noor hai dil-i 'Hasrat' zahe naseeb  
Ek husn-i mushkfaam ke shauq-i tamaam ka'*<sup>12</sup>

(The name of my destination is Love's Knowledge  
The message of whose melodious flute I carry  
The scent of Oneness wafts from Mathura to the people of heart  
And suffuses the living world  
It is Hasrat's good fortune that his heart is brimful with the radiance  
And love of that musk-scented Beautiful one)

Mohani besides being a worthwhile poet was a great freedom fighter whose name however remains the most marginalized in the history of the Indian National Movement to the extent of being markedly absent from popular Indian consciousness. However, considering his important contribution and his pivotal role in the National movement for India's independence he cannot be ignored from the pages of Indian history. He can in fact be described to be a nationalist in his own right. He strongly believed in hindu muslim unity without which he believed Indian nationalism would be incomplete.

According to Arif Haswi even during his student life Hasrat was deeply interested and involved in politics.<sup>13</sup> His poetry reflected his passionate love for his country and his goal of total freedom from the British rule. He was a staunch nationalist and criticised the liberal and moderate section of INC and when he joined the party, he allied himself to Bal Gangadhar Tilak -- the then leader of the radical section in Congress. He did not agree with the political objectives of the Aligarh movement, and found his hero in Tilak and Sri Aurobindo. Syed Suleiman writes that whenever Hasrat stayed in the hostel with them he would speak of Tilak with great love and reverence. Since the beginning of his political career he was inclined towards and deeply felt attracted to Lokmanya Tilak and considered him as the greatest freedom fighter and flag bearer. He also composed many pieces of poetry in praise of Tilak. He openly favoured and supported the leaders of the extremists group in the Congress and declared that in politics he considered himself, and others like him, bound to follow in the footsteps of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the leader of patriots, and Babu Aurobindo Ghosh, the chief of freedom-lovers.<sup>14</sup> Writing about him later, Maulana Hasrat Mohani said in an article: “ *I made my first acquaintance with Lokamanya Tilak in 1900 when I was still a student at the M.A.O. College, Aligarh. About that time my fellow-students of the fourth year, B.A. class, had decided upon their making a confession of political faith openly in a meeting and a declaration of respective Gurus supported with full reasons for the choice. Several students accepted Sir Syed Ahmed Khan as their political guide; some owned Dadabhai Naoroji; a few acknowledged Surendranath Bannerjee, but I chose the Lokamanya as the ideal leader for me. Ever after I had continued opportunities of meeting Tilak Maharaj and studying his great personality at close quarters as a result of which I daily grew more and more to reverence him. I devoted myself entirely to working with him and under his lead.*”<sup>15</sup>

The political career of Mohani was nothing short of an Odyssey. He was a staunch nationalist and criticised the liberal and moderate section of INC and when he joined the party, he allied himself to Bal Gangadhar Tilak -- the then leader of the radical section in Congress. At the instance of Tilak, Hasrat had joined the Congress in 1904 and attended the special Bombay session of the Congress as a delegate. In support of the swadeshi movement, the maulana even opened a swadeshi store exclusively of Indian cloth as he believed that national development and swadeshi were inseparable. Arif Haswi writes: ‘Maulana Hasrat was the ardent supporter of the Swadeshi movement from its beginning. He always tried his best to propagate this movement and considered the Swadeshi movement as the sole means for its economic development.’<sup>16</sup>

The Bolshevik Revolution of Russia in 1917 also had a huge impact on several Indian revolutionaries and Mohani was one of them. He became a part of the Communist Party of India and became active in communist politics.

The World War I (1914-1918) saw Indian participation on the side of the British Empire. The Khilafat Movement (1918-1924) saw the Muslims and Hindus closing their ranks further. In his presidential address Maulana Hasrat Mohani at the 14th Annual Session of the AIML Ahmedabad on 30<sup>th</sup> December 1921 regretted the weak position of the AIML. While expressing full appreciation for the Hindu-Muslim unity and the movement for Swaraj, the



Maulana voiced his reservations as regards both. He has stressed that though it is good to see Hindus and Muslims jointly struggling for the independence of India, but in the wake of independence, it will be hard to resolve the deep-rooted conflicts between the two communities and to avoid the Hindu domination over the Muslims in the new arrangement. He put forward the idea of a united states of India, where the Muslim minority provinces were to derive strength from the Muslim majority provinces.

One of his popular verses is:

*'Gandhi ki tarah baith ke kaate' nge kyun charkh*

*Lenin ki tarah de' nge duniya ko hila hum*

*Why should we sit and spin yarn on the 'charkha'*

*Like Lenin we will shake the world.*<sup>17</sup>

Hasrat Mohani was the first person to demand 'Complete Independence' or 'Poorna Swaraj' for India along with Swami Kumaranand leader of the Indian communist movement at the Ahmedabad session of the Indian National Congress in 1921. This session found attendance in the famous revolutionary leaders like Ramprasad Bismil and Ashfaqullah Khan. He was also the chairman of the reception committee of first Indian communist conference which was held on December 25, 1925.

He was the only prominent Muslim of his generation to promote and champion the radical thinking of Tilak. He wrote strongly about him in his journal and also wrote many verses praising him. Due to his radical approach and inflammatory speeches, Hasrat was arrested at the Ahmedabad conference in early 1922. He was tried in Ahmedabad, and sent to Yeravada Central Jail after conviction where he stayed until March 1924. As Hasrat wrote a lot of poetry during his time in the jail, precisely dating each poem was his habit on such occasions. He in fact celebrated through his writings, being withheld in the city of his mentor, Bal Ganga Dhar Tilak.

*'Rasm e jafa kaamyab dekhiye kab tak rahe,*

*Hubb e watan mast e khwaab dekhiye kab tak rahe,*

*Daulat e Hindostan qabzah e aghyar mein*

*Be adad o be hisaab dekhiye kab tak rahe!*<sup>18</sup>

*(How long will tyranny succeed, let us see*

*Till when will freedom be a dream\*, let us see*

*Hindustan's riches are in the clutches of plunderers.*

*Till When will this continue, let us see.)*

*[\*dream here alludes to awakening of Indians from their slumber]*

Maulana Hasrat Mohani announced the formation of an Independent Muslim Party known as the 'Azad Party' on October, 1931 in collaboration with Maulana Azad Subhani at a public meeting at Albert Hall, Calcutta. It was decided that the party would work for a federal, as against a unitary system of Government and for adult franchise. The aims and objects of the 'Azad Party' were as follows: The Constitution of the government should be systematic, democratic and decentralized; There should be two types of power - federal and provincial; and every adult would have the right to franchise, etc.<sup>19</sup> After India achieved Independence, Hasrat Mohani was elected as a member to the Constituent Assembly and was involved in the task of framing the Constitution of India under the chairmanship of Dr B.R. Ambedkar. In one of the deliberations in the Constituent Assembly on Dominion Status and Commonwealth, he said: "I think it necessary to point out to you that the Independence, which you have got, was already, christened as Dominion Status, but they openly call it as an independent status. They never meant full independence. Who will be bigger fools than us, who knowing that we are being cheated, are celebrating our Independence and are illuminating our houses? I can't understand this. ..." <sup>20</sup>

"As I am not given to oppose the opinion of the majority, I kept quiet then, but now, I say that real Independence has not come to us. I have got eminent jurists and wise men as my friends here but it seems that the vision of all is befogged and they seem to be in a dream. I was saying that members of the Congress High Command are my friends and have been my co-workers. I came here to this Constituent Assembly through the Muslim League, generally for the purpose of cooperating with my old friends. But now I find that they do not want my co-operation and they are rejecting my co-operation. There is no alternative left for me but to oppose them tooth and nail, and I oppose them on the ground that I have just explained that they have been made fools by these British Imperialists."

On the same day, Hasrat further said: "Another proof of the fact that you have been befooled is that even such an enemy of Indian freedom as Mr. Churchill is, went out of his way and congratulated the Labour Government for having this thing passed. He said. 'I do not mind whether this is only for a short time. It is quite sufficient for me that they have accepted for the time being to remain a Dominion.' Mr. Churchill is clever enough, you know that. I am very sorry and it is very surprising that people of such keen intellect as my friend Mr. Rajagopalachari, Dr. Radhakrishnan, and Dr. Ambedkar do not see this trick and this deception." <sup>21</sup>

A versatile writer and poet, some of Mohani's publications include Kulliyat-e-Hasrat Mohani, Sharh-e-Deewan-e-Ghalib, Mushahidaat-e-Zindan, and Nikat-e-Sukhan. A nationalist to the core, Maulana Hasrat Mohani once commented "My advice to my Muslim friends has always been to discard communalism once for all." <sup>22</sup>

When the Constituent Assembly decided to discontinue the provision of reservation for religious minorities, it substantiated Mohani's point of view. However, the crucial aspect of Mohani's argument was about Muslims as a minority. He refused to accept them as a minority so long as they were a part of the democratic process. He argued that so long as the Muslims continue to have their party, they would continue to be a minority.

Hasrat led a life of simplicity and austerity and was a man who was free from worldly desires and wants. He was a fearless person who feared none but God. For days his family suffered starvation for want of food, but he bore all these trials with a smiling countenance. He possessed the rare qualities of sincerity, piety, straightforwardness, fearlessness, and above all the spirit of contentment and sacrifice. Whenever he ascended the high pedestal of the presidency of All-India Muslim League or the All-India Khilafat Committee, he performed his duties like the early Caliphs treading on the footprints of the Holy Prophet. It may fairly be concluded, without fear of contradiction, that Maulana Hasrat Mohani belonged to an illustrious tribe of great heroes of early Islam.

*'Kya rakkha hai tumhare tute-langde Pakistan me,*

*Jo rakkha hai wo rakkha hai mere Hindustan me' <sup>23</sup>*

This was the reply of Hasrat Mohani on being invited to cross over to Pakistan after the partition of India. This great hero of India passed away in 1953, and lies buried at an obscure and decrepit graveyard in Anwar Bagh in Farangi Mahal, besides a busy spice market of Lucknow, hardly visited by anyone worth a mention.

*'Chahe Mujhe Aseer Karo, Chahe Meri Zuban Kaato,*

*Mere Khayalat ko bediya pahna nahi sakte.'*

*Hasrat Mohani*



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