



Indian Muslims and Palestinian Awqaf

Omar Khalidi

At the dawn of the twentieth century, British India contained more Muslims than the collapsing Ottoman Empire. The Indian Muslim elite—of which many claimed descent from various Arab, Iranian and Turkish ethnicities—were always conscious of their membership in trans-Indian, pan-Islamic world- the ‘*ummah*’ beyond the borders of their own homeland. Trade and pilgrimage to the *Haramayn Sharifayn* in Hijaz, Jerusalem in Palestine, Karbala and Najaf in Iraq, kept a steady, annual stream of Indian travel to and from the Middle East. In addition, some Muslim princely rulers such as the Nizam of Hyderabad welcomed migrants from Hijaz and Hadramawt to settle in his Dominions from the late eighteenth century.¹ The Indian Muslim elite maintained deep interest in the affairs of the Ottoman Empire, considering it to be the last political vestige of Muslim political power as the rest of the Islamic world had

General view of the entrance of the Indian Hospice

been colonized or controlled by the European powers.² The Indian Muslims' interest in the Ottoman Empire manifested in at least four ways. One was through political support to the independence and territorial integrity of Ottoman Empire as shown by the Khilafat movement;³ the second was financial support to projects like the Hijaz Railway;⁴ the third was the financial aid for relief from natural and man made calamities in the Empire,⁵ and fourth, through financial support to the advancement and preservation of Muslim religious and cultural institutions. Indian Muslim financial support to the *Haramayn Sharifayn*, Karbala and Najaf is manifested by the Nizam of Hyderabad's involvement in the preservation of the Prophet Mosque in Madina and *Awadh nawabs* in Shiite shrines. In 1924, the Nizam deputed an engineer to undertake the repairs to the Prophet's mosque.⁶ The Shiite *nawabs* of *Awadh* in northern India gifted endowments for the shrines in Najaf and Karbala.⁷

This article is concerned with Indian Muslim support to the projects of religious and educational purposes in one part of the former Ottoman Empire, Palestine during the British Mandate, 1918-1948. In Jerusalem, Indian Muslim presence dates back to thirteenth century CE, exemplified by the case of *Zawiyat al-Hindiyyah* or *Zawiyat Faridiyyah*. With the spread of Sufism in Jerusalem during the 16th Century, many of the Sufi centers *Zawiyah* were established to accommodate the followers of Sufi Orders. There were over 70 Sufi orders in Jerusalem at the time. The Indian Sufis of the Christi order took the "Chilla" (the word stems from the Persian, Urdu word for 40 symbolizing the number of days spent in seclusion in prayers) where Shaykh Farid al-Din spent 40 days, as a meeting place for them, which was originally the *Zawiyah* of the Rifai Order. The Indian Sufis purchased this piece of land and declared it as *Waqf* in the name of Shaykh Farid, later on the Indian residents purchased the surrounding lands also to be a *Waqf* as the "Takiya Faridiyyah" in Jerusalem. This *zawiyah* is thus named after Farid al-Din Mas'ud, (1175-1265), a Sufi shaykh hailing from the Punjab province in northern India. Farid al-Din Mas'ud is also known by his Persian/Urdu honorific *Ganj-i Shakar* repository of sugar. The *Zawiyah*, now a *Waqf* property measuring nearly 1.5 acres and is a prime real estate site. The *Zawiyah* has been extensively documented. The medieval traveler Evliya Chelebi identified it as one of the largest *Zawiyah* in the city in 1671. The old structure was largely replaced by a new building in 1869-1870, according to Taysir Jabbarah.⁸ In 1922, Haj Amin al-Husseini (1897-1974) requested the Indian Khilafat Movement leader Mawlana Muhammad Ali Jawhar (1878-1931) to send someone to look after the *Zawiyah*. Consequently, Khwaja Nazir Hasan Ansari (1880-1951) of Saharanpur, U.P. arrived in Jerusalem in 1924 to look after the *Zawiyah*. Upon arrival, he found, "the Hospice in a dilapidated condition with a few old houses which were later badly damaged during the 1927 earthquake."⁹ Ansari made several trips to his native India to raise funds for the rebuilding of the hospice between the two world wars. In 1931-1940, Shaykh Nazir Ansari successfully raised money in India from the Nizam of Hyderabad, Mir Osman Ali Khan (reigned 1911-48), the Nawab of Rampur and the Nawab of Bahawalpur. The main building in the hospice was named as Osman Manzil after the Nizam's name. During 1939-1947, the *Zawiyah* became a leave center for the Indian army



1st Islamic Congress (Conference) in Jerusalem (1931) Haj Amin al-Husseini, Maulana Shawkat Ali among the Muslim Leaders.

soldiers stationed in the Middle East. Two large dormitories built by the Indian army were named Travancore Wing and Delhi Wing. The hospice was damaged during the Israeli bombing during the 1967 war killing Shaykh Nazir Ansari's mother and other family members. The shaykh's house was also destroyed. The Indian government's help enabled the hospice trustees' to repair the damage but more remained to be done, according to a former prime minister I.K. Gujral.¹⁰ A series of distinguished Indians visited the Zawiyah during the 1930s culminating in the visit of Gujral in 1996, where he found the hospice, "an oasis of Indian hospitality."¹¹ However, the Shaykh's Indian wife moved to Beirut after the 1967 war and the Shaykh's Palestinian wife and Munir al-Ansari are now in control of the Zawiyah.¹² Evidently, the Zawiyah is only one of the many Indian Islamic (and some Indian Christian) endowments in Palestine. In the Islamic court of Jerusalem, Taysir Jabbarah found a record dated 1656 CE/1067 A.H. documenting a Waqf created by Salih, son of Jawhar al-Hindi al-Kashmiri.¹³ The Waqf in question was a house to accommodate pilgrims from Kashmir. Beyond Jerusalem, Indian Muslims purchased lands in Ramallah and Gaza dedicated as Waqfs.¹⁴ The former Indian diplomat in Ramallah, Zikrur Rahman has identified Waqfs in Haifa and Jaffa, and is documenting Indian Muslim and Indian Christian endowments in all parts of Palestine, pre and post 1948 to inventory the Indian legacy in the Holy Land.¹⁵

As noted earlier, India's Muslims constituted the largest segment of the Muslim



A rare photo showing Haj Amin al-Husseini presenting the Palestian Flag to Maulana Shawkat Ali, beside Maulana Shawkat Ali is Sheikh Nazir Hasan Ansari.

ummah until the partition of the subcontinent in 1947. Before the era of large scale oil revenues in the Middle East, many in the Arab world looked up to India's rich princes and businessmen for financial aid for religious and charitable projects. A Palestinian delegation to the Hijaz allegedly issued an appeal in 1922 to "India and other Muslim countries to help foil an attempt to convert the al-Aqsa Mosque into a place of worship for Jews. Fears of an intense Pan-Islamic response to this matter threw the British Colonial Office into a dither."¹⁶ It was under these circumstances that a three man Palestinian delegation headed by Jamal al-Husseini (1892-1982), Secretary of Palestine Muslim-Christian Association visited India from November 1923 to June 1924 to collect funds for the restoration of the al-Aqsa Mosque.¹⁷ The other two members of the delegation were Shaykh Muhammad Murad, Mufti of Haifa and Shaykh Ibrahim al-Ansari.¹⁸

Respecting Indian Muslim sensitivities and driven by fears of revolt, Lord Reading, the Viceroy of India received the Palestinian delegation on 6th November, giving it official sanction and approval. The delegates subsequently toured several cities in India collecting funds. The Indian Muslim leaders of the time- the brothers Muhammad Ali and Shawkat Ali, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Sayf al-Din Kitchlew, and Dr. M.A. Ansari accompanied the delegates. The Palestinians goal was to raise about 1,50,000 British pounds but they were only able to raise 25,000 Pounds, of which

major amounts—over 100,000 Indian Rupees came from the Nizam of Hyderabad and the Bohra Dai Mutlaq Tahir Sayf al-Din.¹⁹ In addition to donating funds, the Nizam wrote to the Turkish leader Mustafa Kamal Ataturk urging him to send funds and restoration experts. But the Turks were engaged in fighting invading armies, and Ataturk responded that no money or experts could be spared at the time.²⁰ Evidently, rivalry between factions in Palestine played a part in the relatively small collection made in India. According to Raef Yusuf Najm, a Jordanian scholar, “the enemies of The Supreme Islamic Council wrote to the princes and leaders of Arab and Islamic countries warning them against making contributions and claiming that the members of the Islamic Council used these contributions to assassinate their political opponents, not to restore the al-Aqsa Mosque.²¹ Regardless of the amount collected and regardless of Turkish preoccupation with the war of liberation, the renowned Ottoman architect Ahmad Kamal al-Din restored the al-Aqsa mosque during the years 1922-26 earning him worldwide acclaim.²²

During the three decades of the British Mandate in Palestine (1918-48), twenty-one assets were turned into Waqfs. The largest of them was the donation of the Nizam of Hyderabad. The man who was instrumental in getting the donation was Haj Amin al-Husseini (1895-1974). Haj Amin was appointed by High Commissioner Herbert Samuel as Grand Mufti of Jerusalem on 8th May 1921, a post on which he remained until the 1950s. He was also appointed by Samuel as President of the newly established Supreme Muslim Council (SMC) in Jerusalem in March 1922. He led a campaign during 1928-29 rousing the Arabs of Palestine to stand against the threat to the Muslim holy places in Jerusalem. Haj Amin took his campaign beyond the border of his native land to neighboring Trans Jordan, Syria, Iraq and India. He arrived in Hyderabad accompanied by the Egyptian Pan-Islamist Muhammad Ali Allouba Pasha, the Mufti arrived in Hyderabad on 21st July 1933. He was the official guest of the state. After the visit, the Mufti wrote a long letter to the Nizam on 27th July thanking him for his philanthropy for al-Aqsa project. The Mufti further requested the Nizam as a pious Muslim ruler to donate funds for a projected Islamic university in Jerusalem. The Nizam, whose fabulous wealth and famed generosity toward Islamic causes had spread outside India into the Middle East, obliged. Soon correspondence ensued between the Prime Minister of Hyderabad and the British Residency, through which the colonial authorities compelled the Nizam to conduct his foreign affairs. Through British diplomatic channels, the Nizam contributed LP7, 543 for the Islamic University which the Islamic Congress that was held in Jerusalem in 1931 had resolved to establish.²³ The sum was deposited in a bank and not used until 1938. According to Yitzhak Reiter, “Haj Amin al-Husseini used this money to purchase 1,000 dunums of agricultural land in Kafr Zayta (in the Tulkaram sub-district) as part of the struggle over land purchases in Palestine, and to dedicate that land as a Waqf for the foundation of the Islamic university in Jerusalem (rather than using the funds directly for university, as the founder had intended). His purpose was to keep the land out of Jewish hands... The land purchase by SMC [Supreme Muslim Council] was to set a pattern for the Muslim community to thwart land acquisition by Jews.”²⁴

Omar Khalidi is the Librarian for Aga Khan Program at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the US.

Endnotes

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- 6 Secret intelligence Reports, British Library, cite in full.
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- 8 Taysir Jabbarah, *al-Muslimun al-Hunud wa Qidyat Filastin*, (Amman,: Dar al-Shuruq, 1998), pp. 57-61.
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- 11 I.K. Gujral, "Saga of Indian Hospitality in Jerusalem," *India Abroad* (New York, 15 March 1996).
- 12 Ahmad Nazir Hasan Ansari, op. cit.
- 13 Email from Dr Taysir Jabbarah, 10 March 2009.
- 14 Taysir Jabbarah, *al-Muslimun al-Hunud*, op.cit., p. 58.
- 15 Conversation over the phone with Zikrur Rahman in New Delhi, 20 March 2009.
- 16 Sandeep Chawla, "The Palestine Issue in India Politics in 1920s," pp. 27-42, in *Communal and Pan-Islamic Trends in Colonial India*, edited by Mushirul Hasan, (New Delhi: Manohar, 1981), p.29,
- 17 *Muslim Outlook* (Lahore) 7 June 1924, as cited in Sandeep Chawla, "The Palestine Issue in India Politics in 1920s," pp. 27-42, in *Communal and Pan-Islamic Trends in Colonial India*, edited by Mushirul Hasan, (New Delhi: Manohar, 1981), p. 31, footnote 23, citing Colonial Office to India Office 4 August 1922, unpublished archival documents preserved in the British Library's India Office Records.
- 18 British Viceroy Lord Reading's Telegram to Secretary of State for India in London dated 7 August 1923, as cited in Sandeep Chawla, op.cit., footnote 39, page 39.
- 19 British Resident at Hyderabad's telegram to Political Secretary, Government of India 14 December 1923, as cited in
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