

Kanpur Mosque Tragedy (1913)

The U.P Government granted a total of two and half lack rupees to widen the roads of the Kanpur and to fulfill other welfare works. This scheme also included AB road. The widening of this road became a serious issue. The real problem was that if it were widened straight, there lay in its way, a Hindu temple just opposite to the Mosque in the Machli Bazar.

When Hindus heard of this scheme, they forced the Government to halt its progress. Then the only way left to save the temple was, to turn the road in some other direction, because there was not much space between the mosque and temple, to widen the road. Hence, there was a threat for the Muslims that the eastern part of the mosque might have to be demolished which was used for the purpose of ablution and for baths in order to commence the road.

So on 1st of April 1912, in the Improvement Trust Committee session. The Muslims requested that no portion of the mosque should be included in the road for the sake of its widening but all was in vain.

On April 1913 Lt. Governor of U.P. Sir James Meston, received a petition through Shahid Husain, from a group of Muslims of Kanpur upon “alienation of any part of the mosque.” Eminent Muslim scholars tried to prove that the targeted portion is the part and parcel of the mosque from the religious point of view. On 12th of April 1913, a memorial was presented by barrister Shahid Hussain, which was about protecting the eastern part of the mosque against the expected demolition. On 6th May 1913, James Meston sent a letter to the memorialists concluding that “the washing place is not the part and parcel of the sacred building and must be removed. The authorities of the mosque will be asked to choose another site on which a washing place will be built for them by the municipal Board”

Then on 20th July 1913 Sir James Meston himself visited Kanpur and inspected the mosque. He had shown complete disregard for the feelings of the Muslims and the Government abolished the Eastern part of the mosque. There was an outrage among the Muslims of Kanpur and the Muslim press strongly protested against it. This action taken by the Government was condemned

throughout India. Tylor, who was a Magistrate of Kanpur was ordered by James Meston “to take effective measures to prevent any breach of peace in connection with the execution of the orders, if he wants extra police let him say so.”

The Muslims then gathered at Idgah on 3rd August. When the meeting was over an angry procession which was carrying black flags appeared before the mosque and began to place the loose bricks over the dismantle structure as a symbol of reconstruction. Then to disperse the mob, the police force opened fire under Tylor’s orders. The firing continued for 15 minutes and almost 600 cartridges were used.

By this regard, Muslim Anjumans from all over the India strongly protested against this wicked act of firing on the Muslims. Anjumans that strongly protested were Anjuman-e-Ziaul Islam, Bombay, Anjuman-e-Islamia, Amritsar, Anjuman-e-Hadayatul Islam, Islamia, Kohat. Press media also didn’t remain quiescent and Muslim press strongly condemned this perfidious act of Government. The Zamindar commented “the demolition of a part of the Kanpur mosque at the point of the bayonet and the characterization of the Muslim outcry caused thereby – a spectacle so heartrending that has shaken the faith of Mussalmans in the Government’s principle of non-interference in religious matters.”

Similarly, All India Muslim League did not remain quiet on this tragedy. On 31st August and on 19th September, Council of the AIML had passed two notable resolutions. One, for the appointment of a committee comprising, both officials and civilians to conduct an impartial inquiry and the other on the importance of showing gratitude to Sayyid Wazir Hasan and M. Ali for going to England to present the Muslim case.

Sir James Meston’s attitude filled the hearts of Muslims with painful feelings, when after this tragedy he distributed the merit certificates to those who had taken part in the firing. It showed his hatred for the Muslims.

Lord Hardinge showed blatant anger at this policy and strategy. Lord Hardinge called this act as a “stupid blunder.” He said that it was the example of shortsightedness of Taylor and Meston. Lord Hardinge felt the pain of the Muslims and visited Kanpur along with Sayyid Ali Imam on 13th to 14th October. He compromised with the Muslims allowing them to build a new building over the

public road. He also visited the mosque and ordered to release the prisoners and withdrew the cases.

Thus, this tragedy played a significant role in awakening political consciousness among the Indian Muslims.