

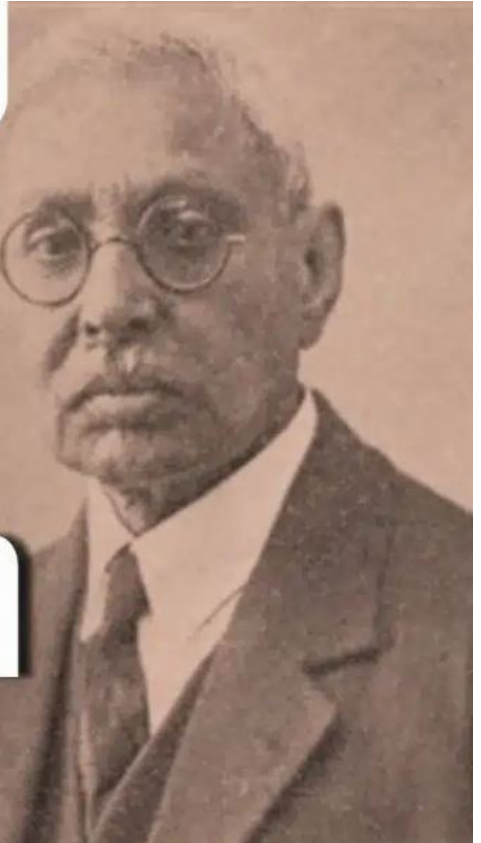
## Maulana Barkatullah: The Forgotten Freedom Fighter and the University Rename Row

June 6, 2026 • vajiramandravi.com



**VAJIRAM & RAVI**  
Institute for IAS Examination

# Maulana Barkatullah



### Maulana Barkatullah Latest News

- The executive council of **Barkatullah University in Bhopal** has passed a proposal to rename it **Vagdevi Bhojpal University**. The university was named after Maulana Barkatullah Bhopali in 1988 — before that, it was simply called Bhopal University.
- The rename proposal has sparked debate about who Barkatullah was and whether erasing his name amounts to erasing an important chapter of India's freedom struggle.

### Who Was Maulana Barkatullah

- Maulana Barkatullah Bhopali was born on July 7, 1854, in Bhopal. He was a **scholar, freedom fighter, and revolutionary** who spent virtually his entire adult life outside India — working to end British rule from abroad.

- He studied in Bombay and then London. He began teaching in Liverpool, where he came into contact with Indian revolutionaries.
- His writings and speeches drew the attention of British authorities, forcing him to leave for the United States in 1899.
- From that point, he never stopped moving — Japan, England, the US, Germany, Russia, Afghanistan, Brussels, Switzerland, France.
  - In US, he corresponded with the freedom fighter Maulana **Hasrat Mohani** (who coined the slogan Inquilab Zindabad).
- Wherever he went, he built networks, wrote, spoke, and organised against British colonialism.
- He died in September 1927 in Sacramento, California, while attending a **Ghadar Party event**, with his lifelong associate Raja Mahendra Pratap by his side. He is buried there.

## Core Beliefs of Barkatullah

- Barkatullah was a committed anti-colonial thinker who held one conviction above all others: India could only be free if Hindus and Muslims fought together.
- He saw the British policy of divide-and-rule as the primary obstacle to independence.
- He wrote about the suffering of ordinary Indians — both Hindu and Muslim — under colonial economic exploitation, noting that millions had died of starvation.
- His entire political career was built on the **idea of composite nationalism** — the belief that India's freedom was a shared cause that transcended religion.

## The Kabul Government: India's First Government in Exile

- The most significant chapter of Barkatullah's life came during World War I.
- In December 1915, Barkatullah, along with Raja Mahendra Pratap (a Hindu prince) and Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi (an Islamic scholar), established the Provisional Government of India in Kabul, Afghanistan.
- This was India's first government in exile — set up entirely outside British control.
- **Raja Mahendra Pratap** became President. **Maulana Barkatullah** became **Prime Minister** — which is why he is sometimes called the “first Prime Minister of independent India”.
- This was not merely symbolic. It was a bold political act — Indians of different faiths forming a government and asserting sovereign authority at a time when India was still firmly under British rule.
- The Kabul government sought support from Afghanistan, Germany, and later Soviet Russia to challenge British power.

## Meeting Lenin

- Four years after the Kabul government was formed, its leaders travelled to **Moscow to meet Vladimir Lenin**, then head of Soviet Russia.
- Barkatullah's statement in Russia captures his worldview clearly. He described himself as neither a communist nor a socialist, but said his goal was the expulsion of the British from Asia.
- He saw European colonialism — led by Britain — as the enemy, and found in the Soviets a natural ally against it.

- After the British victory in WWI dealt a severe blow to the revolutionaries' plans, Barkatullah continued his work — travelling across Europe and keeping his cause alive until his death.

## Why His Legacy Was Forgotten

- Barkatullah spent most of his life abroad and died in the US in 1927 — twenty years before Independence.
- He was never part of the mainstream nationalist movement led by the Congress inside India.
- His revolutionary activities were conducted across multiple countries, leaving little visible trace on the Indian public consciousness.
- He was formally recognised in 1988 when Bhopal University was renamed after him — a long-overdue acknowledgment of a son of the city who had given his life to its freedom.
- Historians argue that the proposal to rename the university now would undo even that belated recognition.
- Historians said that instead of changing the university's name, more should be done to popularise the legacy of Barkatullah.
- They note the irony that the central government has been actively working to popularise Raja Mahendra Pratap — Barkatullah's closest associate — while his name faces erasure.

**Source: IE | TP**

---

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/maulana-barkatullah-the-forgotten-freedom-fighter/>

© Vajiram & Ravi. For personal use only.