

Muslim League's Role in the Transfer of Power

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The decade 1937-47 has perhaps been the most hectic and crucial period of the history of the Indian subcontinent. This period saw the relentless struggle for independence climaxing into a triumph-defeat scenario: the price of independence had to be the break-up of the country, sadly, on the basis of religion. This tragedy of August 1947 has never ceased to dog India and Pakistan since.

Looking at the history of the Muslim League before participation, an independent observer cannot escape the impression that the sole objective of this organization was to prevent the transfer of power to the people of India. The British apparently groomed and used it as a counterweight to the Indian National Congress which, since its formation in 1885, had been insisting on self-rule for India.

The Muslim League was born on December 30, 1906 amid a spate of statements by pro-British Muslim scholar Sir Syed Ahmed Khan exhorting the Muslims to be loyal to the British and keep away from the Congress. In August 1885 he founded the Indian Patriotic Association "to strive to preserve peace in India and to strengthen the British rule; and to remove those bad feelings from the hearts of the Indian people which the supporters of the Congress are stirring up throughout the country, and by which great satisfaction is being raised among the people against the British Government."

He also condemned the very first demand of the Congress party for the reconstitution of Legislative Council on a representative basis. He opined that "the mixture on a representative basis. He opined that "the

mixture of nationalities" in India could not affect the working of (an Indian) Parliament. Here he was echoing Sir John Serry's opinion, he expressed in 1883, that "India is not a political name, but only a geographical expression like Europe or Africa. India does not make the territory of a nation or a language, but the territory of many nations and many languages"⁽¹⁾.

The formation of the Muslim League resulted from a meeting between Lord Minto, Viceroy and Governor General of India and a deputation of Muslims led by the Aga Khan on October 1, 1906 at Simla. The deputation had demanded adequate Muslim representation on district and municipal boards, governing bodies of universities and provincial councils. They also demanded a separate electorate system, One month later Nawab Salimullah of Dacca circulated a scheme of the Muslim All India Confederacy from which emerged the Muslim League. One aim of the Confederacy was : (a) To convert the growing influence of the so-called Indian National Congress, which has a tendency to misinterpret and subvert the British rule in India, or which may lead to that deplorable situation, and (b) to enable our young men of education, who for want of such an association, have joined the Congress camp, to find scope to exercise their fitness and ability for public life"⁽²⁾.

On December 30, 1906, when the Muslim League was formed, it declared its objective thus: "to promote among the Musalmans of India feelings of loyalty to the British Government, and to remove any misconception that may arise as to the intention of the Government with regard to any of its measures"⁽³⁾.

The next 41 years (till partition) of the Muslim League were marked by a struggle first, for political equality with the majority community (1906-40), and, second for a homeland for the Muslims of India (1940-47). The Muslim League, since it appeared to be the King's own party, claimed to be the sole representative of the Indian Muslims, and sought to justify this claim by calling the Indian National Congress a Hindu organization and its leaders Hindu Leaders. It strongly contested the prefix "National" to the word Congress. Thus the whole national struggle for independence was sought to be drowned in a communal confusion. To mobilize support among the Muslims, the League exploited the name of Islam as a negative force- to create hatred and suspicion against the majority community and those nationalist Muslims who refused to support the League. It would appear that in the philosophy of the League a Muslim was an anti-thesis of a Hindu, *i.e.* it seemed to believe, and there was a Muslim because there was a Hindu. In other words, in the philosophy of the league, a Muslim acquired his personality of a Muslim, the League totally ignored his cultural moorings. Thus, in one master stroke, the League hit at both the principles of democracy and the national and cultural identity of an Indian Muslim, (This has been the root of crisis in Pakistan since its creation.)

Perhaps, for this stance, the League could not have become the force it did by 1947, Any nationalist stand meant the dilution of the League's ideology. This was abundantly proved during the period of its closeness to the National Congress. In 1913, Mr. Mohammad Ali, then in London was persuaded to join the League on his condition that "loyalty to the League and Muslim interest would in no way and at no time imply even the shadow of disloyalty to the larger national cause to which his life was dedicated"⁽⁴⁾. At the Dacca session of the League in December 1917, Jinnah declared: "this country has not been governed by the Hindus, and let me submit, that it has not to be governed by the Musalmans either and certainly not by the English. It has to be governed by the people and the sons of the country."

It was a highly patriotic and secularistic statement, although it indicated a sharp diversion from the basic philosophy of the League of loyalty to the British Government and distinction between Hindus and Muslims. In the next decade or so, Jinnah brought the League so close to the Congress that the difference between them seemed to lay only in the name. At its 1920 session, at

Lahore, the League even demanded Swaraj. But then the League was under extraordinary influences. First it was a period when the Muslims were annoyed with Britain due Congressman, Jinnah, as its President.

This Congress-League unity was disturbed when, in 1928, the Nehru Committee recommended, among other things, joint electorates. The reaction of the League to the report of this committee put the clock back to the early days of the League. At a meeting in Delhi on January 1, 1929, presided over by the Aga Khan, the League demanded a federal government with complete autonomy; separate electorate system (which was already in existence); share of Muslims in Central and Provincial Cabinets; 33 per cent representation of the Muslims in the Central Legislature; separation of Sind from Bombay; NWF P and Baluchistan be elevated to full-fledged Provinces; Constitutional guarantee of Muslims share in all services of the State and on all statutory self-governing bodies; constitutional provision for the protection and promotion of Muslim education, language, religion, personal law etc.: Constitutional guarantee that no change in the Constitution be made except with the concurrence of all States and no inter-communal matters be discussed or passed in the Central or Provincial Legislatures if a three-fourth of the members oppose it.

This summed up the Muslim League demand and clearly indicated that it had returned to its old path of confrontation against the Congress. One reason might have been the fact that by now the Muslim' anger against the British had subsided. The Nehru Report was made just a pretext although it had only recommended the principles which are the essentials of secular democracy, a goal which Jinnah had earlier cherished.

The League got the first taste of its popularity at the 1937 elections held under the 1935 Government of India Act. The League denounced the Federal scheme embodied in the Act but agreed to contest the elections. The results: out of 1,585 seats, the Congress won 716 including 26 Muslim seats. The League captured only 106 of the 491 Muslim seats. The results proved that the League was strong in Hindu-majority area, but weak in Muslim-Majority areas. By virtue of this victory the Congress ruled eight of the 11 provinces from July 1937 to October 1939. This situation aggravated the minority complex of the League and in 1938 it floated the thesis that this Muslims were not a minority but a nation.

The Pirpur Report of 1938 remarked: "The Muslims

think that no tyranny can be as great as the tyranny of the majority". The Congress Ministries resigned in December 1939 in the wake of the Second World War, because the party refused to support the British War efforts. The Congress had demanded to know, in return for its support, what were the war aims of the British in regard to democracy and imperialism and the new order that was envisaged. The League celebrated the Congress quittal of power as Deliverance Day on December 22, 1939.

Humiliated by the 1937 election results, the League was now trying to whip up communal frenzy. It was in this state of frenzy that the League announced its Pakistan Plan at the 1940 Lahore session – the plan which Jinnah had early ridiculed, when advocated by Rahmat Ali, a Muslim student in London. But who devised the 1940 resolution is an intriguing question. National Democratic Party leader Khan Abdul Wali Khan created a sensation in December 1981 by disclosing, with a documentary evidence, that the Lahore Resolution was the handiwork of a British agent Sir Zafarullah Khan, an Ahemdiyya⁽⁵⁾. Earlier, on April 2, 1981, Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada had reproduced a letter in Dawn of Karachi disclosing Jinnah's secret links with Sir Winston Churchill, who was opposed to giving freedom to India. Also, Dharminder Gaur in his book *Behind the Enemy Line*, published in New Delhi in 1976, clearly established Jinnah's links with the British intelligence, which was trying to prevent independence.

The League could give a better account of itself at the 1946 election, because by now it had acquired the services of mullahs, who created a communal frenzy against Hindus and threatened Muslims of divine wrath if they did not vote for the League. These Muslims were threatened of Social boycott. Thus the 1946 elections did not really reflect the League genuine popularity. The League won 400 of the 538 Muslim seats in the Central and Provincial elections. It had won all the Muslim seats in the Central Legislative Assembly. But in the NWFP it won only 17 of the Muslim seats' as against 19 won by the Congress. It formed its ministries in Sind and Bengal while in Punjab a Unionist-Congress-Sikh coalition formed the Government. The Congress was invited to join the interim Government at the Centre. The League first protested, then joined it apparently to sabotage it from within. The League Finance Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, at the clear instruction of Jinnah, introduced taxation measures aimed at hurting Hindu of Jinnah, introduced

taxation measures aimed at hurting Hindu businessmen. Mushtaq Ahmed wrote in "Government and Politics in Pakistan", , that these measures might not have been introduced if Muslim capitalism had been equally advanced⁽⁶⁾. The League in fact had no interest in the interim Government while its members had boycotted the meetings of the Constituent Assembly. The Congress resented the League's attitude and threatened to quit the Government if the league was not forced out of it. The result was what happened in August 1947.

Now what is strange is that all through its Strule for a homeland for the Muslims of India, the League never formulated the new State's foreign and domestic policies, although its leaders who never went for jail for freedom struggle, had enough time to do so. The Congress, whose leaders were in jail most of the time, were well-prepared in this regard. This lapse proves that the League was not really serious about Pakistan. It was only working as a pressure group to seek certain benefits. Many Muslim Leaguers, who were closely associated with Jinnah during the Pakistan movement were not convinced of Jinnah's Philosophy. His own sister Fatima Jinnah told Mr. Sri Prakasa, India's first High Commissioner to Pakistan, in 1949, " I do not know how it was that Quaid-i-Azad thought that Hindus and Muslims could not live together. But he did so." Also, the first Chief Minister of Sind Mohammad Ayub Khuro, who was in the innermost counsels of the Muslim League, told him that nobody had really wanted partition of India and creation of Pakistan. The demand for Pakistan was only a policy of bargain to secure Muslims' future in united Pakistan⁽⁷⁾.

Again, Jinnah's own right hand man Liaquat Ali Khan did not appear convinced of his partition demand. According to Pakistan's present Attorney-General Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada, Liaquat Ali Khan was in secret contacts with Congress General Secretary Bhula Bhai Desai after the failure of Jinnah-Gandhi talks. The talks failed because Jinnah insisted on partition of India. On January 11, 1945, Liaquat Ali Khan signed an agreement with Desai on the interim Government with the knowledge of Jinnah. Pirzada wrote that had this agreement been implemented the partition plan would have either fizzled out or delayed. When Jinnah came to know about it he was furious and the agreement remained still-born. Liaquat Ali had made that bold agreement because he believed that Jinnah was not going to live long⁽⁸⁾.

Another lapse was about the two-nation theory. According to this theory Hindus and Muslims are two

different nations with nothing in common. At the 1940 Lahore session, Jinnah declared: "... it is a dream that the Hindus and Muslims can ever evolve a common nationality.... They neither intermarry, nor inter-dine together, and indeed they belong to two different civilizations which are based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions. Their aspects on life and of life are different. It is quite clear that Hindus and Musalmans derive their inspirations from different sources of history. They have different epics, their heroes are different and different episodes. Very often the hero of one is the foe of the other and likewise their victories and defeats overlap."

However, he cancelled all this and much more what all he had said about the two-nation theory, when he resented the division of Bengal and Punjab in the light of the very two two-nation theory. In the case of these two provinces had cultural and linguistic identity. He offered the Sikhs to have their Khalistan within Pakistan if they gave up their demand for the division of Punjab. In fact these two provinces flung the mischief of his two-nation theory in his face.

Now the tragedy is that on the two-nation, the validity of which Jinnah himself did not believe, the demand or partition was pitched- *i.e.*, the demand itself was fake,

but was advanced in order to prevent the transfer of power. Must they transfer the power, the next best alternative for the British would be to divide the country and keep the friendly portion under its influence. This is what happened in 1947 and that gives the clue to the fundamentals of Pakistan's foreign policy.

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