

SEPARATISM: THE FINAL OPTION FOR THE MUSLIMS OF THE SUBCONTINENT

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Prior to 1937, the Muslim leaders in British India were optimistic about the Hindu-Muslim unity and consequently believed in a united India. Even the stalwarts of the All India Muslim League who, later, resorted to launching a movement for a separate homeland, had initially joined the platform of the Indian National Congress. For a long time, Mr. Jinnah himself remained a member of both the Congress and League simultaneously. He was so anxious for inter-communal harmony in India that Mrs. Sarojini Naidu described him as "the ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity". Other Muslim leaders also worked hard to promote this unity and to keep India as one country. But gradually all of them were disillusioned and disappointed by the attitude and acts of the Congress and the Hindu-Mahasabha. The anti-Muslim and dictatorial policies of the Congress ultimately convinced the Muslims that they could not live with the Hindus in a common Federation with one government at the centre. So they were compelled to seek independence not only against the British but also against the Hindus. Accordingly, the Muslims demanded a separate homeland through the historic Lahore Resolution, passed on 23rd March, 1940. This resolution finally marked the 'parting of ways' for the two major communities living in the Subcontinent. Seven years later, the process of separatism was consummated with the division of India and the creation of Pakistan in August 1947.

The fact that the Muslims and the Hindus in India had really been two distinct peoples, does not require any proof now, since the partition of India and its due recognition by the World in 1947 has already solidified the truth. The Muslims' "anxiety to maintain their entity and Hindu exclusiveness alike had prevented the assimilation of the two peoples into a single community¹". Perhaps the first person to give the most comprehensive, categorical and vivid description of this communal separatism was Sir Syed Ahmad Khan who was constrained to point it out with an

object to prevent the Muslims from falling into the trap of the Indian National Congress. Emphasizing his point, Sir Syed posed a hypothetical question: "Now suppose that all the English were to leave India, then who would be the rulers of India? Is it possible that under the circumstances that the two nations, the Hindus and Mussalmans could sit on the same throne and remain equal in power? Most certainly not²" Despite the glaring differences between the Hindus and the Muslims, the inter-communal behaviour of the two peoples was not always that of hostility nor was it always that of friendliness. As a matter of fact, the relationship varied from period to period and the political seesaw of friendship and antagonism between the Muslims and the Hindus continued to operate. Of course the basic and fundamental differences always remained present, though sometimes they sank to the bottom and sometimes rose to the surface.

The vast majority of the Muslims had refused to be fused into 'one national whole' with other religious communities of India and that is why they tried to refrain from the Indian National Congress since as early as its formation in 1885. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan had very thoughtfully demonstrated his aversion to the Congress as well as to the idea of Muslims' common nationhood with the Hindus. It was on his advice that most of the Muslims remained away from the Congress.

I

The partition of Bengal which had been earned by the Muslims of East Bengal and Assam (1905) after great sacrifices, was resented tooth and nail by the Hindus. This situation not only further alienated the Muslims from the Hindus but also proved that their interests were quite antagonistic. Having realised that they would not remain safe as components of the single Indian nation, the Indian Muslims took a deputation to the viceroy, Lord Minto in 1906 and demanded a system of separate electorate and weightage for the Muslims in all elected bodies. Their demands were accepted by the Viceroy. Being encouraged by the partition of Bengal (1905) and the success of the Simla Deputation (1906) and also being conscious of their separate entity, the Indian Muslims formed a separate political party of their own, namely, the All India Muslim League, in December 1906. This was indeed the rejection of a single Indian nationhood and the expression of the two nation theory.

In 1911 the British Government bowed down to the Hindu pressure and suddenly annulled the partition of Bengal. This damaging act came as rude shock to the Muslims who had been given repeated assurances by the British that the partition was a settled fact³ and it would not be altered under any circumstances. Now when the settled fact suddenly got unsettled, the Muslims lost their faith in the British Government and began to adopt the policy of self-reliance particularly

in the field of protecting their interests against the Hindus. From this point of time the Muslim aversion to the British Government began to develop very rapidly. As a follow-up of the same sentiments, the Muslim League adopted a new creed in March 1913 according to which it demanded 'a form of self-government suitable to India'. The League also resolved to work for the communal cooperation in India.

Since the newly-adopted objective of the Muslim League was very much in line with the policy of the Indian National Congress, the latter took up a more positive attitude towards the former. The two parties became so friendly to each other that they began to hold their sessions jointly. In 1916 an epoch-making agreement was signed between the Congress and the League, known as the Lucknow Pact through which the Congress recognised the separate political entity of the Indian Muslims and hence separate electorate and weightage in the provinces where the Muslims had been in minority. Mr. Jinnah played the most significant role in bringing about this pact. Thus the Congress-League and the Hindu-Muslim Unity began from 1913 and continued throughout the World War I (1914-18) and even for some years after the World War.

Following the termination of the First World War, a number of circumstances arose which further strengthened the unity of these two communities and enhanced their common aversion to the British Government. In March 1919 the Government passed the Rowlatt Act for the suppression of any anti-government activities and the repression of the people in India. There was hue and cry in the country against this Act which came to be nicknamed as 'Black Act'⁴. A memorable agitation was launched by the people in every part of the country particularly in Delhi (6th April 1919), where unprecedented scenes of Hindu-Muslim Unity were witnessed⁵, and the people of both the communities jointly shared the bullets and blood.

Meanwhile the Muslims were furious over the failure of the British Government to honour her promise regarding the integrity and freedom of the area which were predominantly Turkish and were supposed to remain under Turkey. The Indian Muslims started a countrywide khilafat Movement for the preservation of the Caliphate and restoration of the Turkish possessions. The Movement was chiefly against the Britishers who were the victors of the World War. Since the non-Muslims of India were also disgusted with the British rulers due to their repressive policies and since the Hindu-Muslim unity was already in full swing, Mr. M.K. Gandhi and the Congress Party declared their support to the Khilafat Movement and consequently a countrywide non-cooperation campaign was launched in support of the Muslims' Movement.

II

The Khilafat and the non-cooperation movements progressed vigorously and the Government was shaken to the roots. It is said that about eighty thousand people were put behind the bars during the agitation.

After the chief leader of the Khilafat Movement Moulana Mohammad Ali was arrested, the leadership of the Movement went into the hands of Mr. Gandhi who abruptly called off the Movement (February 1922) to the utter disappointment and disadvantage of the Muslim masses. The leaderless Khilafat Movement dwindled down and finally died out. The end of the Khilafat Movement also terminated the remarkable Hindu-Muslim unity of the non-cooperation days. By the middle of 1922, the alliance between the Hindus and Muslims completely broke down and there appeared a wave of communal riots in different parts of the subcontinent.

From the very beginning of the Khilafat Movement, it was rather doubtful whether the Hindus could actually be sincere in their support to the Khilafat issue and whether their simultaneous launching of the non-cooperation movement was truly for the sake of the Muslim community. According to Professor Qamaruddin Khan "the two movements (Khilafat and non-cooperation) had quite different aims: The Khilafat Movement demanded the restoration of Khilafat in Turkey, whereas M.K. Gandhi and the Congress wanted the movements of India to establish the Hindu Raj. The two movements agreed to work together because they had to fight against a common foe, the British"⁶. It is true that the Khilafat issue was the starting point of the movement, but it grew into a full fledged political struggle and the Khilafat question was reduced to a mere symbol.

In pursuance of the Government of India Act 1919 and in order to examine the working of the Indian Constitution and its future, the British Government sent a commission to India in 1927 under the leadership of Sir Simon, known as the Simon Commission. The Commission was boycotted both by the Congress and the League all over the country. Mr. Jinnah described it as 'All white Commission' since there was no Indian member included in it.

Following the boycott of the Simon Commission, the British Government challenged the Indians to produce an 'agreed scheme' of the future constitution for India. The Congress took up the challenge and convened an All Parties Conference to draw up a constitution for submission to the British Parliament. The Conference convened at Bombay (May 1928) appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Pandit Motilal Nehru to determine the principles of the future constitution. The committee submitted its report in August 1928 known as the 'Nehru Report'.

It was strongly a Hindu oriented Report which included the proposals of unitary centre and joint electorate. Muslims were shown as any other Indian and hence they were not supposed to have any special political interests⁷.

In March 1929, Mr. Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the President of the All Indian Muslim League drew up his celebrated 'Fourteen Points' which were a sort of reply to the Nehru Report. These included Federal constitution with residuary powers vested in the provinces; separate electorate, one third representation of the Muslims in the Central Legislature, Cabinet, Services etc. The Congress leadership dismissed Mr. Jinnah's proposals and kept up its policy of promoting the interest of the Hindus and never to incur their displeasure.

The chronology of political events from the end of the Khilafat Movement to the rejection of Mr. Jinnah's Fourteen Points, confirmed that the 'parting of ways' between the Congress and the League was inevitable. Therefore the poet philosopher Dr. Sir. Mohammad Iqbal in his presidential address to the Annual Session of the All India Muslim League at Allahabad in December 1930, demanded a consolidated North West India Muslim State consisting of Punjab, N.W.F.P., Sind and Baluchistan as 'final destiny of the Indian Muslims'. Meanwhile, Mr. Jinnah who was ever anxious to bring about the Hindu Muslim Unity, was totally disillusioned and frustrated when the Congress refused to entertain the minimum demands of the Muslims contained in the Fourteen Points. Being utterly disappointed by this uncompromising attitude, he decided to move to England on a self-imposed exile in June 1931⁸.

From 1930 to 1932 three Round Table Conferences were convened by the British Government in England, to find a workable solution for the constitutional problems of India. But unfortunately these conferences failed to resolve the dilemma of communal conflict on the subcontinent. The Conferences being unproductive, the British Prime Minister announced the Communal Award in August 1932. This was followed by the Government of India Act 1935 which established provincial autonomy while provision regarding the Central Government remained suspended.

III

Earlier in 1933 a Cambridge law-student from Punjab, Chaudhri Rahmat Ali, with the help of his Muslim friends, put forward a detailed scheme of the division of India and the creation of an independent homeland consisting of the Muslim majority areas of West and North-West which according to him already constituted a nation by reason of their distinct culture and historical occupation of territory⁹.

This scheme of independent state was presented by him in a pamphlet, entitled, 'Now or Never'. He coined the term 'PAKISTAN' and with the help of his friends in England he formed an organisation namely the Pakistan National Movement, 'to work for Pakistan, for the Pak-Plan and for the Pak-ideology'¹⁰. During the Round Table Conference in London, Chaudhuri Rahmat Ali kept himself in touch with Muslim delegates as well as with the member of the British Parliament and took pains to explain to them his scheme of an independent 'PAKISTAN'. But unfortunately the Muslim leaders (such as Sir Zafarullah Khan, Abdullah Yousuf Ali and Dr. Khalifa Shujauddin), giving evidence before the Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform, dismissed the idea of 'Pakistan' as "only a student's scheme—chimerical and impractical".

Although Rahmat Ali's Movement was not based in India, it was after all launched by an Indian student and was addressed to the Muslims of India. This 'Pak-Plan' which was initially poohpoohed as 'impractical scheme of the students' turned out to be the only workable solution for the Muslims of the subcontinent in future. Only within seven years of Chaudhuri Rahmat Ali's Movement, the grand adoption of the Lahore Resolution (1940) proved the practicability and far-sightedness of the 'student's scheme. No less a person than Mr. Jinnah himself duly acknowledged the contribution of Rahmat Ali and his fellow students in London. Delivering his presidential address at the 30th Annual Session of the All India Muslim League in Delhi in April 1943, Mr. Jinnah said "what is the origin of the word 'PAKISTAN'? it was not the Muslim League or the Quaid-e-Azam who coined it. Some young fellows in London, who wanted a particular part of the North-West to be separated from the rest of India and coined as name in 1929-30, started the idea and called a zone 'PAKISTAN'¹²."

When Chaudhuri Rahmat Ali's pamphlet, 'Now or Never' came to India from England, its contents spread like a wild fire and it created tremendous sensation among the Muslims in general and students in particular.

Meanwhile great Muslim leaders of India, including Dr. Iqbal and Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan, were constantly pressing Mr. Jinnah to put an end to his self-imposed exile and return to India and lead the Muslim politics here. In response to the call of his community, he finally came back in October 1935¹³ and completely devoted himself to the task of organising Indian Muslims on one platform. Earlier in March 1934, he had already been elected as the President of the 'united' All India Muslim League in a meeting held at Delhi in his absentia. But the condition of the League at this time was simply deplorable: it was a dormant and ineffective political party which seriously lacked organisation and discipline; it had no primary branches and there was hardly any coordination between the central organisation and its

provincial units. A large number of Muslim politicians at the provincial level were vehemently opposed to the unity of the Muslims under the banner of the League. As a matter of fact "their political activities thrived on chaos and disorganisation: they had their own parties — mostly alliances of a few families and conveniences"¹⁴. Such self-seeking Muslim leaders had caused serious demoralisation among the Muslim masses who were sick of their personal bickering, jealousies and intrigues¹⁵. It was under these circumstances that Mr. Jinnah assumed the leadership of the Muslim League in 1935 and began to reorganise it.

While the Muslim League was still in the process of revival and reorganisation under the leadership of Mr. Jinnah, it decided to participate in the country's elections to be held in February 1937 under the Government of India Act 1935. At that time the League was hardly a match to an old and established party like the Indian National Congress which had strong financial resources and elaborate machinery for publicity. Naturally, the results of these elections were rather discouraging for the Muslim League. The Congress won clear majority in five out of eleven provinces: and in two other provinces, namely Bombay and N.W.F.P. they could form ministry with other allies. Later, one more province came under the ministerial grip of the Congress.

After the formation of ministry in eight out of eleven Indian provinces, the Congress became absolutely power drunk. It turned down the League's offer of cooperation and the proposal of coalition ministry in certain provinces¹⁶. The Congress pursued the policy of one-party rule and wanted to show itself up as the sole representative body of all the Indians. Mr. Nehru was constantly repeating that "there are only two parties in India — the Government and the Congress — and other must line up"¹⁷. Mr. Jinnah had already challenged Mr. Nehru's proposition even prior to the commencement of the elections (1937). He had openly declared that "I refuse to line up with the Congress. There is a third party in this country and that is the Muslims"¹⁸.

The Congress regime based on Provincial Ministries proved to be a real 'Hindu Raj', as anticipated by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan much earlier. As soon as the Congress people assumed power in the provinces, they took serious measures to destroy the separate political entity of the Indian Muslims. They ordered hoisting of the Congress flags on public-buildings: school-going children were ordered to wear 'Khaddar Clothes; and Gandhi-cap' they were also compelled to sing the anti-Muslim 'Bande Matram' (a song extolling a Hindu goddess) which was adopted as the national anthem. Hindi language was introduced as official medium and anti-cow-slaughter legislation was adopted by the Congress party. The most horrible feature of the Congress rule under the Government of India Act 1935 was the frequent

occurrence of communal riots in the Hindu majority provinces, specially Bihar, United provinces and the Central Provinces¹⁹. With a view to wreck the Muslim League and to merge it into the Congress, they (Congress people) opened the doors of their Ministry to the Muslim League on the condition that they (Leaguers) "must resign from the Muslim League, sign the Congress pledge and become members of the Congress Party"²⁰. Thus according to Ian Stephens, the Congress, a Hindu dominated body, was bent on the Muslims, eventual absorption²¹.

The rule of the Congress and its anti-Muslim policy fully exposed the falsehood of their claim that 'the Congress represents all interests justly and that there is no minority problem in India'. It was proved beyond any shadow of doubt that the Congress Ministry both in the discharge of its duties of administration and in the Legislature did their best to flout the Muslim opinion, to destroy Muslim culture and interfere with their religious and social life and trample upon their economic and political rights'. An objective view of the Muslims' grievances during the Congress rule in the provinces (1937-39), has been taken by Richard Symonds who says that: "The historical importance of the period of the Congress Ministries lies not so much in the question whether the Muslim grievances were great or whether they were exaggerated but in the fact that the overwhelming majority of the Muslims believed them to exist"²².

Prior to the formation of the Congress Ministries under the Government of India Act 1935, the Muslims were not thinking in terms of complete separation or division of India. They only talked of 'compromise' adequate representation in legislatures, services etc., and securing constitutional guarantees for other essential interests of the Muslims. They made earnest efforts in the direction of honourable settlement with the Hindus for peaceful coexistence. They participated in the All Parties Conference, sat at the Round Table Conferences in London, made offer of cooperation to the Congress by means of coalition (1937) and agreed to give a fair trial to the Scheme of Federation embodied in the Government of India Act 1935. Mr. Jinnah who was ever-anxious to bring about Hindu-Muslim Unity had gone to the extent of saying in 1937 that "there is really no substantial difference between the League and the Congress We shall always be glad to cooperate with the Congress in their constructive programme"²³. But all these gestures of friendliness from the Muslim and the Muslim League were spurned by the Congress which continued 'its policy of absorption instead of cooperation'²⁴. The Muslim League avoided the partition of India till the last limit. Even as late as 1937, the Muslim League at its Annual Session in Lucknow resolved that: "The object of the All India Muslim League shall be the establishment in India of full independence in the form of a Federation of free democratic states in which the rights and interests of Mussalmans and other minorities are adequately and effectively safeguarded"²⁵.

The attitude of the Indian National Congress towards the Muslims as well as the Muslim League, particularly after its victory in the provincial elections of 1937, pushed the entire Muslim Community of India to wall. They now came to learn from their bitter experience that no constitutional or administrative safeguards would be effective to protect their rights and interests against the totalitarian attitude of the numerically dominant Congress and as such the parliamentary democracy would obviously mean perpetual 'Hindu Raj'. In the words of Sir Reginald Coupland: "The psychological and philosophical background of the Congress movement, its modes of thought and conduct, the quality of what was known as the 'Congress-mindedness', were essentially Hindu, emphatically not Muslim"²⁶. The anti-Muslim and dictatorial mentality of the Indian National Congress moved even Mr. Jinnah who was described as the 'ambassador of Hindu Muslim Unity', by a non-Muslim. He was constrained to declare that "the sole aim and object of the Congress is to annihilate every other organisation in the country and to set itself up as a Fascist and Authoritarian organisation of the worst type"²⁷. Being completely disappointed with the attitude of the Congress Mr. Jinnah finally declared that "no settlement with the majority is possible, as no Hindu leader speaking with any authority, shows any concern or genuine desire for it"²⁸.

The frustrating policies of the Congress compelled the Muslims to revise their course of action and to determine their future political status de novo. In view of the acrid experience, the All India Muslim League decided to ask for complete abandonment of the Scheme of Federation envisaged in the Act of 1935. A revolutionary transformation began to take place in the ideology of the Indian Muslim as they were being forced into separation by the attitude of the Indian National Congress. Following the formation of the Congress Ministries (1937), all the hopes of friendly independent cooperation had been destroyed and Mr. Jinnah finally expressed that 'the majority community have clearly shown their hand that Hindustan is for the Hindu.'²⁹ Obviously, then the Muslims were left to struggle for their independence not only against the British but also against the Hindus. The only option available to them was complete separatism which they adopted as the goal of their future political activity. A definite and final declaration of this 'parting of ways' was given through the Lahore Resolution passed by the Muslim League in March 1940. This resolution is popularly known as the "Pakistan Resolution".

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