

REVIVAL OF” PUNJAB MUSLIM LEAGUE JINNAH – IQBAL COLLABORATION

PROF. RIAZ HUSSAIN

Iqbal was the Dreamer of Pakistan and Jinnah its Creator. Aside from this broader link between the two, this essay attempts to study a little known area of their practical cooperation.

From the late 1920 began that political interaction between M.A. Jinnah’ and Iqbal which blossomed into a working partnership in reviving the Muslim Organization in the key province of Panjab.

On 20 March 1927 a “Unity Conference was held at Delhi at which M.A. Jinnah as President of the League and Srinivasa lynger as President of Congress “concluded an agreement which came to be known as “Delhi Proposals.”

The two leaders agreed:-

(1) To accept a system of Joint Electorates, provided that Sind was separated from the Bombay province and reforms were introduced in the North-West Frontier Province and Baluchistan.

(2) To reserve seats for all communities in all provinces.

(3) That in Bengal and the Punjab (the two predominantly Muslim majority provinces) the allocation of seats would be in proportion to population. (This clause abrogated the Lucknow Pact.)

(4) That in the Central legislature Muslim Seats were to be no less than one-third of the total Seats¹⁴¹.

(1) In retrospect it was a solid achievement to get the Congress agree to the above proposals. The Quaid-i-Azam was accepting joint Electorates in Exchange for sure safeguards for Muslims in all provinces.

¹⁴¹ M.H. Sayyid, Muhammad Ali Jinnah (Lahore: Ashraf, 1953) PP 238-39).

(2) In the Event that adult Suffrage, as proposed in the Nehru Report is granted, the Punjab and Bengal should have seats only on population basis subject to re-examination after ten years.

(3) The residuary powers should be vested in the provinces and not in the centre.

(4) The Separation of Sind from Bombay and raising North-West Frontier Province to the status of a Governor's Province should not be made contingent on the establishment of the constitution framed by the Nehru Committee.¹⁴²

M.A. Jinnah who consistently had two purpose in mind (a) safeguard of Muslim rights; and (b) Joint Front with Congress to oust the British, pleaded with the congress to adopt the League's modification.

The Congress refusal to do so shook M.A. Jinnah's confidence in that organization once for all. Meanwhile the British Government set up the Simon Commission "to make recommendations for future constitutional reforms in India". The Commission Visited India from February to march 1928 and again from October 1928 to April 1929. The Muslim League split into two divisions on the question of the attitude to be adopted towards the commission.

One section of the League had M. A. Jinnah as President and Dr. Kitchlew as Secretary. The other was led by Muhammad Shafi (President) and Iqbal (Secretary) The Shafi section of the league met in Lahore (1928). It rejected the "Delhi Proposals" and offered cooperation to the Simon Commission. Meeting in Calcutta (1928) the Jinnah League disowned the Shafi faction, adopted the "Delhi Proposals" and declared its non-cooperation with the Simon Commission. It also proposed the following modifications to the Nehru Committee Report:

1. Muslim representation in the Central Legislature should not be less than one-third.

¹⁴² See Rafi Ahmad Kidwia, Proceedings of the All-parties National Convention, Calcutta 1928; All-parties National Convention, Allahbad, 1929: P.78).

Report at the All parties conference (12 February, to 15 March 1928). The composition of the Nehru Committee with its parity of Muslim and Hindu Mahasabha members besides Congress and liberal Hindus is revealing.

It Consisted of:-

(1) Pandit Motilal Nehru (Chairman) (2) All Imam (Muslim) (3) Shuaib Qureshi (Muslim) (4) M.S. Aney (Hindu Mahasabha) (5) M.R. Jykar (Hindu Mahasabha) (6) G.R. Pradhan (Non-Brahmin Hindu) (7) Sardar Mangal Singh (Sikh League) (8) Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru (Liberal Hindu) (9) N.M. Joshi (Labour).

The Nehru Committee recommended Separation of Sind from Bombay and the Elevation of the North-West Frontier Province and Baluchistan to the Status of Constitutional provinces, but it did not concede reservation of Seats in the Punjab and Bengal. Also, it insisted that the Central Government retain Residuary Powers and that Muslims compose only 25% of the Central legislature.

In the large Muslim-majority provinces of Bengal and Panjab, the allocation of seats would at any rate be in proportion to the population.

The “Delhi Proposals” thus contained the germ of Pakistan.

The All-India Congress committee “Substantially accepted the ‘Muslim proposals’ in a resolution passed in May 1927.”¹⁴³

In December 1927, Sub-Committees were appointed both by the League and the Congress to prepare an agreed draft based on the “Delhi Proposals” of the constitution of a self-governing India.¹⁴⁴

The Punjab Muslim League, under the leadership of Mian Muhammad Shafi, Main Fazl-i-Husain and Iqbal raised a voice of dissent from the “Delhi Proposals”.

The, Congress, too, betrayed the Delhi Agreement by adopting the Nehru Committee Report. The Shafi League convened a meeting in Lahore

¹⁴³ Rajendra Prasad, India Divided (Bombay 1947). P-127).

¹⁴⁴ Waheed-uz-Zaman, Towards Pakistan (Lahore: 1964) PP 34-35).

in May 1928 and proceeded to draft a memorandum for the Simon Commission. Iqbal urged the imperative necessity of provincial autonomy. The meeting adopted a temporary draft for circulation among other leaders of the League for eliciting their views.

In the meantime Iqbal went to Delhi for a medical treatment and stayed there for a few weeks. In his absence the Shafi League released the draft for publication in the press. Mian Shaffi's conservative attitude appalled Iqbal. He considered it a reactionary approach to constitutional problems. Accordingly, he resigned his position as Secretary of the Shafi league. All his previous ideas culminated in this address and all his subsequent actions and those of the Muslim nation were dictated by it. Using identical language M.A. Jinnah in his Presidential Address to the All-India Muslim League session in March 1940 re-stated Iqbal's two-nation theory.

From 1932 to the last day of his life in 1938 Iqbal zealously devoted himself to the reorganization of Muslim League as a mass political party in the Punjab.

In this endeavour he was bound to come into conflict with the power clique in the Punjab which was composed of Muslim and Hindu feudal gentry led by Fazl-i-Husain and after his death in 1936 by his successor, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan. The British Government decision to hold elections in the provinces during January, February 1937, gave rise to feverish political activity. In May 1936, the League resolved to nominate a Parliamentary Board. The Board was entrusted with the task of drafting a platform and organizing election campaign in the provinces.

In the early months of 1936 the Punjab Political scene was dominated by two stalwarts, Fazl-i-Husain and Iqbal. After serving the Viceroy as his Executive Councillor Fazl-i-Hussain had returned to the Punjab to infuse new life into the Unionist Party.

He was busy in collecting into one party big Muslim, Hindu and Sikh landlords and urban capitalist interests.

Iqbal, on the other hand, was endeavoring to convert the Muslim league into a mass political party.

M.A. Jinnah arrived in Lahore in May 1936 in connection with the organizational work of the league. Iqbal at this time impressed on him the necessity of deriving strength from the support of the common man.

The objective, though laudable, was a long-term one. The elections were near and the League's organization was almost non-existent. Faced with this dilemma, M.A. Jinnah sought to convert political leaders of the Punjab and urged Fazl-i-Husain to accept the discipline of the League's parliamentary Board.

Rather than give a straightforward reply Fazl-i-Hussain indulged in constitutional hair-splitting. He argued that Provincial autonomy meant decentralisation; therefore, it was wrong to admit central control over provincial election. Since conditions in each province varied it was impossible to follow a uniform principle.

In the Punjab it was impossible to secure a Muslim majority through separate control of elections. Finally, in many provinces Muslims might find it necessary to have non-communal organisations, and in that case a central Muslim agency was obviously out of the question. Fazl-i-Hussain preached to the Muslim League to show "elasticity and initiative" to gain political support of Hindu landlords and money-lenders. He declared in an abusive tone that "Elasticity and initiative should not be sacrificed for the sake of an all-India leader's aspiration".¹⁴⁵

Mr. Jinnah suggested that Fazl-i-Husain and the Muslim members of the Unionist Party could form alliances with other groups inside the Assembly according to the usual democratic practice, but they should stand at elections as League candidates. Fazl-i-Husain had contended that in many provinces Muslims might find it necessary to have non-communal organization. Referring to this M.A. Jinnah replied: "Why, the Congress is more progressive and non-communal than the Unionist Party. Why not join the Congress Party?"

M.A. Jinnah called on Iqbal at his Mecleod Road residence. No longer in good physical health, Iqbal was yet content in spirit to see the Muslim league

¹⁴⁵ The Civil and Military Gazette, Lahore, 7 June, 1936).

progressing towards his ideal under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the man whom he had whole heartedly accepted as his leader. On 8th May, 1936, Iqbal, Khalifah Shujauddin, Malik Barkat Ali and their supporters issued a statement in which they stated:-

“Our nation has full confidence in Jinnah’s integrity and political judgement. It is for this reason that now the reactionary leaders are flustered. Jinnah’s organization endeavours would shatter illusory leadership of the selfish leaders, because the Muslims would now elect their true representatives in the forthcoming elections.¹⁴⁶ On 12th May 1936, at a special meeting of the Punjab Muslim League in Lahore the following office bearers were elected. President, Dr. Shaikh Muhammad Iqbal; Vice-Presidents, Malik Barkat All and Khalifa Shuja-ud-Din, Secretary, Ghulam Rasul Khan; joint Secretaries, Mian Abdul Majid and Ashiq Husain Batalvi. The meeting pledged support to the Central Parliamentary Board and its policies. Even the Majlis-i-Ahrar and Ittihad-i-Millat buried their difference over the Shahid Ganj Mosque and joined forces with the Punjab Muslim League. On 21 May the Quaid-i-Azam announced the membership of the central Parliamentary Board. Iqbal,s name ranked first in this list. Out of the total quota of eleven members from the Punjab, three seats were allocated to Ittihad-i-Millat and four to Ahrar, reserving only four seats for the Punjab Muslim League.Thus the Central Parliamentary Board showed ample appreciation of the cooperation offered by the Ahrar and Ittihad. The Ittihad group presided over by Maulana Zafar All Khan seeded from the compact on the pretext that it had not been given parity with Ahrar. The Ahrar too broke away. Both parties later opposed the League at the elections.

After the death of Fazl-i-Hussain on 9 July 1936, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan became the boss of the Unionist Party. At about this time a prominent and influential Unionist, Malik Zaman Mehdi Khan, joined the Muslim league. The Malik was an able man and a sagacious organiser. Iqbal welcomed his conversion and co-opted him as Vice-President of the Punjab Muslim League. On the recommendation of Iqbal, the Malik was also included in the Parliamentary Board.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 9 May Ashiq Husain Batalvi, Iqbal Ke Akhri Do Saal, pp. 312-13.

Iqbal now proceeded to organize the election campaign. He appointed two committees to popularise the League message in the Punjab.

(1) The Draft Committee for drawing up the League platform. Members: Khalifa Shuja-ud-Din, Syed Tasaddaq Husain, Shaikh Mohammad Husain, Muhammad Azim Khan, Malik Barkat Ali, Malik Zaman Mehdi Khan, Ghulam Rasul Khan, Ashiq Husain Batalvi and Muzaffar Ali Khan Qazilbash.

(2) The Propaganda Committee. Its members were younger men like Raja Ghazanfar Ali Khan, Pir Taj-ud-Din and Mian Muhammad Shafi, Secretary of the Punjab Muslim Students Federation.

At Iqbal's invitation the Quaid-i-Azam again arrived in Lahore on 9 October 1936 to inaugurate the League's election campaign. The Punjab League had no uniformed Volunteer Corps at that time. At last the volunteers of the Anjuman-i-Islamia, Amritsar, were mustered and they presented a smart guard of honour to their leader at the Railway Station. The Quaid-i-Azam passed two weeks in Lahore, discussing, advising and generally overseeing the League preparation for elections.

On 11 October, the Punjab Muslim League held a public meeting outside Delhi Gate, Lahore. Iqbal was scheduled to preside over this meeting but was prevented by illness to do so. In his place Malik Zaman Mehdi Khan chaired the meeting. The Quaid-i-Azam was the principal speaker. Addressing the audience he severely criticised the Unionist party for serving vested interests and for being interested only in fortune-hunting. The Quaid-i-Azam's forthright utterances gained him vast popularity among the masses and helped to build up the prestige of the Muslim League. However, the Unionists had two overwhelming factors in their favour, the feudal Baradari system and money, which returned them to power. After all the Muslim League had been riddled with factionalism and had only recently been united. It did not have much time before the elections to bring its message home to the masses.

The overall result of 1936 election in India is an interesting eye-opener, because it shows the communal character of the Congress. The total seats in all Provincial Assemblies were 1583, out of which the Congress won 711.

This sounds impressive. But careful analysis will reveal that the six provinces, in majority provinces, viz. Madras, united Provinces, the Central Provinces, Behar, Orissa and Bombay. In Muslim majority provinces the Congress suffered a humiliating defeat. In Bengal, it won only 60 seats out of 250, in the Punjab 18 out of 175 and in Sindh 8 out of 60, and the places where it won were all Hindu constituencies. As for Congress Muslims they contested 58 seats and returned only 26.

The composition of the Punjab Legislative Assembly was as follows: Unionists (89) + Congress (18) + Non League Muslims (4) + Muslim League (1) + Akali Party (10) + Khalsa Nationalists (13) + Non-Congress Sikhs (13) + Independents (27) = Total = 175. Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan formed the Ministry by forging a coalition between the Unionists, the Khalsa National Party and the Hindu Election Board Party.

Elated at their victory the Unionists determined to suppress the rise of Muslim League in the Punjab. The Congress, humiliated at their poor showing, started a "Mass-contact movement to wean the Muslims away from communal parties". Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru was the moving spirit behind this campaign.

In the Punjab the Muslim mass contact movement of the Congress created an intriguing situation. The Unionist Party found itself in great quandary. The Party would dissolve if the Hindu and Sikh members defected to Congress. In the event of Muslims deserting to Congress, the Unionist Party would equally be annihilated. At this hour of peril, the Unionist Party had no choice but to woo the Muslim League. The motives of the Unionists, however, were hypocritical. Their plan was to offer cooperation to Muslim League on the all-India front. They would forge an alliance with the Punjab Muslim League taking care to appoint their own men to its important offices. They would thus maintain their own political dominance while professing allegiance to the League. Of this policy of the Unionists Iqbal was an inveterate foe.

On 11 August 1937, Iqbal reported to the Quaid-i-Azam, "The enthusiasm for the League is rapidly increasing in the Punjab, and I have no doubt that the holding of the session in Lahore will be a turning point in the History of the League and an important step towards mass-contact."

A session in Lahore, as Iqbal had said, was in deed going to be a turning point in the history of the League and of the nation but that was not to be until 1940.