



Quaid-i-Azam and Democracy

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Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah was one of the most dynamic personalities of South Asia, who rose from obscurity to become one of the most prominent barristers of Bombay. He became familiarized with the principles of democracy and representative government elucidated by liberal thinkers like Hume and Mill at an early stage while he was still a student at Lincoln's Inn, in London.

"As a democrat" says Jamil-ud-Din Ahmad, "he believed in converting others to his viewpoint by reasoning and arguments, and to this end his forensic abilities were a valuable asset to him."¹ Although he had actively campaigned for Dadabhoy Naoroji's election to the British Parliament, during his stay in England, he formally started his political career in 1906 by attending the Calcutta session of the India National Congress, as private secretary to Dadabhoy Naoroji, who was then the president of the Congress. From 1909 onwards he was elected unopposed as the representative of the Muslims of Bombay to the Imperial Legislative Council. Although he had to resign from the Congress in 1920, he continued to command the confidence of both Hindus and Muslims and was known as the 'Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity.' While referring to this aspect of the Quaid's



personality, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, who was a great admirer of the former, remarked:

. . . . But it is nonetheless his the [Quaid's] personal triumph and a testimony to his authentic mission that he stands approved and confirmed by his countrymen not merely as an ambassador but an embodied symbol of the Hindu-Muslim unity.²

Quaid-i-Azam being a lawyer and a man of principle firmly believed in the rule of law and his commitment to democracy was beyond any doubt. Throughout his fight for the cause of Muslims of South Asia, he never budged an inch from the path of constitutionalism. He adopted democratic methods as were permitted under the prevailing rules. The task before him was no doubt the most difficult one. While other leaders struggled for independence within states already in existence; the Quaid alone sought a separate state where none had existed.

Mr. Jinnah "was one of the leading figures in the anti-Willington Memorial agitation which served to rouse the citizens of Bombay."³ "Eventually the apple-cart of Lord Willington's supporters", says Syed Hashim Raza, "was upset. The meeting convened to pass the resolution of loyalty and appreciation of Lord Willington ended in a fiasco and the Commissioner of Police asked his men to clear the hall. Among those who were the victims of police assault was the Quaid-i-Azam himself."⁴ He felicitated the citizens of Bombay on that occasion in these words:

You have today scored a great victory for democracy. Your triumph has made it clear that even the combined forces of bureaucracy and autocracy could not overawe you. December the 11th is a Red-letter Day in the history of Bombay. Gentlemen, go and rejoice over the day that has secured us the triumph of democracy.⁵

The Quaid fought successfully the first battle of democracy against Lord Willington and thus laid the foundation of a glorious political career.



The Quaid fully realized that difference of opinion was the cornerstone of democracy. Hence, he always gave due consideration to the opinions of others and expressed his own views without any hesitation whatsoever. In the historic Nagpur session of the Congress, in 1920, when the main resolution on non-cooperation was passed in the presence of a surging audience of some 50,000 and over 14000 delegates voted their support for it, the Quaid-i-Azam was the only one to raise his solitary voice of dissent.⁶ This showed his high sense of moral courage to differ on a matter which he considered inimical to the interests of his country. It was on this occasion that Colonel Wedgewood, a British Member of Parliament, who attended the meeting as an observer, remarked:

India was on the road to freedom as she was capable of producing at least one man who had the strength of character enough to stand by his conviction in the face of a huge opposition and no support whatsoever.⁷

Quaid-i-Azam was hailed in political circles for his democratic instincts and outlook which made him a fearless champion of democracy. Recognizing his services to the cause of democracy, a memorial called "People's Jinnah Hall" was built in the compound of the Congress House in Bombay. Opening ceremony of this memorial was performed by Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, who appreciating the Quaid's services in the cause of democracy sent a telegram to the Quaid, who was at that time in Europe and described him as "a prophet honoured in his own country and in his own time."⁸

Quaid-i-Azam always followed the constitutional and democratic course and never committed himself to anything on behalf of the League, until it was duly considered by the Council of the All-India Muslim League. Even the decision on the participation of the Muslims in the 'Quit India' movement was deferred by him until the matter was brought before the Working Committee of the League which decided to advise the Muslims to keep aloof



from the movement launched by the Congress in August 1942.

Similarly, in October 1946, when the Working Committee resolved to send Muslim League representatives to the Interim Government, many members of the Committee insisted that Quaid-i-Azam should go in. But he declined, saying that if he joined the Government he could not continue as President of the League, and then who would be there to carry on the struggle for Pakistan to a successful conclusion?

Nawab Syed Mohammad Ismail of Patna at a meeting of the Muslim League Council proposed that Quaid-i-Azam be elected Life-president of the League. In disapproving the proposal the Quaid remarked that according to democratic practices, he must come to the members of the Council every year to seek a renewal of this confidence on the basis of his work and services. According to Mr. Hasan A. Sheikh, a former General Secretary of the Bombay Provincial Muslim League and President of the Bombay City Muslim League, "On the 25th of March each year he [the Quaid] got himself enrolled as a member of the Primary Muslim League through which he went to the District Muslim League and through the District Muslim League, he went to the Provincial Muslim League, and thence got elected as Councillor for the All-India Muslim League to qualify himself for election as the President."⁹

This proves that the Quaid always followed democratic methods and stood for democracy and his stand was backed by the acts and activities of his lifetime. On 25 December, 1945, the birthday of the Quaid was celebrated in Bombay. At a place near the J.J. Hospital the portrait of the Quaid with royal robes was put up by some of his admirers and on the corner of the portrait was written "Shahinshah-i-Pakistan Zindabad."¹⁰ While passing by the road, the Quaid noticed this portrait. He immediately came down from the car and addressed the huge crowd that had gathered and said: "Pakistan is going



to be a democracy and there was no room for a Shahinshah in Pakistan."¹¹

The Quaid always pleaded for free and fair elections and believed that the successful working of any democratic polity depended on the conduct of elections free from corrupt practices. During the December 1946 elections, Mr. G. Allana was in charge of the election campaign in Sindh. The Quaid instructed him in the following words:

But remember one thing. I don't want to pay a single rupee to any voter as bribe to vote for us. That I will never approve. I prefer defeat to winning election by adopting dishonest and corrupt methods.

On another occasion, the Quaid was informed that the candidate, opposing Mr. M.A.H. Ispahani, who was a candidate for election to the Bengal Legislative Assembly from the Chamber of Commerce constituency of Calcutta in 1946, agreed to withdraw his candidature in favour of Mr. Ispahani if he was paid Rs.250.00 as the amount of the security deposited by him. The Quaid reacted angrily and without hesitation told Mr. Siddiqui "go and tell him that Hassan will fight him to the last, irrespective of whether he succeeds or fails."¹²

Quaid's practice of democratic ideals is further adumbrated by his attitude towards the opposition and his tolerance of differences and disagreements. The Quaid wrote a letter to Mr. Ahmed E.H. Jaffer, who had voted against him and said:

I do not mind your voting against me. By all means exercise your right in any manner you deem fit. But remember, never go against the dictates of your own conscience. If you feel that you are doing the right then do not hesitate. But if you feel that you are doing something for some consideration at variance with your conscience then shun that course. Throughout my life I have followed that dictum. I do not care what people say or think. I only do what my conscience tells me is right. If you follow my advice you will rise free like gold. This applies not only in the Assembly and at the Council but it



should be taken as a touchstone in all walks of life. Do not run after jobs, jobs must run after you.¹³

Speaking before the London branch of the Muslim League, on 14 December 1946, the Quaid analysed the Hindu society with reference to democracy as under:

Democracy is alien to Hindu society. I do not want to show any disrespect for any other society. But the Hindu society is caste-ridden and caste-bound. The untouchables have no place socially, economically or any way at all. Democracy is the blood of the Musalmans, who look upon complete equality of manhood. (sic) I give you an example. Very often when I go to a mosque, my chauffeur stands side by side with me. Musalmans believe in fraternity, equality and liberty.¹⁴

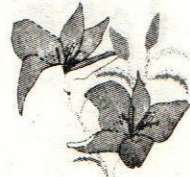
The Quaid had quite a different view about democracy which was to be introduced in Pakistan. He explained this concept of democracy in his speech made at Sibi Durbar on 14 February 1948, in the following words:

I have had one underlying principle in mind, the principle of Muslim democracy. It is my belief that our salvation lies in following the golden rules of conduct set for us by our great lawgiver, the Prophet of Islam. Let us lay the foundations of our democracy on the basis of truly Islamic ideals and principles. Our Almighty has taught us that "our decision in the affairs of the State shall be guided by discussions and consultations."¹⁵

Explaining the reason for the establishment of Pakistan, the Quaid had this to say:

The establishment of Pakistan was the means to an end and not an end in itself. The idea was that we shall have a State in which we could live and breathe as free men and which we could develop according to our own lights and culture and where principles of Islamic social justice could find free play It should be our aim not only to remove want and fear, but also to secure liberty, fraternity and equality as enjoined upon us by Islam.¹⁶

Quaid-i-Azam showed no inclination either for the presidential or the parliamentary system, but he was very



clear on the fundamental principle that the Government should be constituted by the elected representatives of the people, with executive and judiciary functioning independently. In a broadcast to the people of the U.S.A., in February 1948, he elucidated the validity of Islamic principles in their application to democratic polity in the following words:

The constitution of Pakistan has yet to be framed by the Pakistan Constituent Assembly. I do not know what the ultimate shape of this constitution is going to be, but I am sure that it will be a democratic type, embodying the essential principles of Islam. Today, they are as applicable in actual life as they were 1,300 years ago. Islam and its idealism have taught us democracy. It has taught equality of man, justice and fairplay to everybody. We are the inheritors of these glorious traditions and are fully alive to our responsibilities and obligations as framers of the future constitution of Pakistan.¹⁷

The Quaid was in favour of giving autonomy to the provinces. Commenting on the Viceroy's speech at Calcutta, the Quaid in a statement, on 10 December 1945, at Bombay, said:

Our Pakistan Government will probably be a Federal Government, modelled on the lines of autonomous provinces with the key power in matters of Defence and Foreign Affairs, etc., at the Centre. But that will be for our constitution-making body, to decide.¹⁸

The Quaid visualized a Pakistan with a popular government which would be free of the clutches of landlords and capitalists. In his Presidential address delivered extempore at the 13th session of the All-India Muslim League, Delhi, on 24 April 1943, he declared:

I have no doubt in my mind that a large body of us visualise Pakistan as people's government.... But I am sure that democracy is in our blood. It is in our marrows. Only centuries of adverse circumstances have made the circulation of that blood cold. It has got frozen and your arteries have not been functioning. But, thank God, the blood is circulating again, thanks to the Muslim League's efforts.



It will be a people's government. Here I should like to give a warning to the landlords and capitalists who have flourished at our expense by a system which is so vicious, which is so wicked and which makes them so selfish that it is difficult to reason with them. The exploitation of the masses has gone into their blood. They have forgotten the lessons of Islam. Greed and selfishness have made these people subordinate to the interests of others in order to fatten themselves....You go anywhere to the countryside. I have visited villages. There are millions and millions of our people who hardly get one meal a day. Is this civilization? Is this aim of Pakistan? Do you visualise that millions have been exploited and cannot get one meal a day! If that is the idea of Pakistan I would not have it....The constitution of Pakistan can only be framed by the Millat and the people. Prepare yourselves and see that you frame a constitution which is to your heart's desire.... The constitution and the government will be what the people will decide.¹⁹

In fact the Quaid's concern for democracy was at the top of his considerations. He strictly believed in the rule of law and was totally committed to democracy. When the members of the Pakistan Muslim League Council expressed the desire that he should accept its presidentship, the Quaid-i-Azam declined to do so for the reason that as Head of State he had to look after the interests of all sections and could not associate with any political party. This all goes to prove that the Quaid lived and died as a democrat. To him democracy was the way of life of the Musalmans and through it alone Pakistan could achieve a place of honour, dignity and glory in the comity of nations.

References

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