

## MUSLIM POLITICS IN SIND:

1938 – 1943

Muhammad Qasim Soomro

Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah on his return to India in 1935 was elected the President<sup>1</sup> of the All India Muslim League. One of the first tasks he addressed himself to was the reorganization of the still dormant Muslim League whose provincial branches had also become independent of the Central organisation. Realizing the gravity of the situation Jinnah proceeded carefully and tried to enlist as much support as possible of the influential Muslim Leaders. Consequently, branches of the Muslim League were opened even in the remotest areas of the Subcontinent.

A branch of the All India Muslim League had been established at Karachi as far back as 1 April 1917. It was reorganized in 1920 but it remained inactive because of the Khilafat Movement at the end of which, in 1924, another attempt was made towards its revival. The most important problem which engaged the attention of the Muslim leaders of Sind and elsewhere during the late twenties and early thirties, however, was the separation of Sind from Bombay Presidency.

The first Sind Provincial Muslim League Conference, after Sind's separation from the Bombay Presidency in April 1936, held at Karachi from 7 to 9 October 1938 and presided over by Jinnah, was of great importance for the Muslims of the Indian Subcontinent. It was at this session that for the first time in the history of Muslim India a resolution for an independent Muslim state in South Asia was adopted.<sup>2</sup>

Haji Abdullah Haroon, an eminent Sindhi politician did not rule out the possibility of the formation of "an independent federation of Muslim States" in South Asia.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Sheikh Abdul Majid Sindhi in his address reiterated that:

If the Congress did not concede Muslim rights, Muslims would have no alternative but to fall back upon the Pakistan Scheme and that nothing would prevent Muslims from Karachi to Calcutta to march to their own self-determination.<sup>4</sup>

The meeting itself recommended that the All India Muslim League should devise a scheme of constitution under which Muslim majority provinces, Muslim Indian States and areas inhabited by a majority of Muslims may attain full independence in the form of a federation of their own with permission to admit any other

Muslim State beyond the Indian frontiers to join the Federation and with such safeguards for non-Muslim minorities as may be conceded to the Muslim minorities in the non-Muslim Federation of India.<sup>5</sup>

Jinnah in his presidential address remarked:

I would draw the attention of the British statesman (sic.) and also of the Congress High Command and ask them to mark, learn and inwardly digest the recent upheaval and its consequent developments which threatened the World War. It was because the Sudetan Germans who were forced under the heel of the majority of Czechoslovakia who oppressed them, suppressed them, maltreated them and showed a brutal and callous disregard for their rights and interests for two decades hence the inevitable result that the Republic of Czechoslovakia is now broken up and a new map will have to be drawn. Just as the Sudetan Germans were not defenceless and survived the oppression and persecution for two decades so also the Musalmans are not defenceless and cannot give up their national entity and aspirations in this great continent.<sup>6</sup>

It was in this meeting that the Sind Provincial Muslim League was reorganized and Haji Abdullah Haroon was elected its President. The Sind Premier, Allah Bakhsh Soomro, on this occasion showed his willingness not only to join the League but also to form the Muslim League Parliamentary Party. On his request, the Muslim League high command permitted him to continue as the Premier of Sind.<sup>7</sup> The political leaders of Sind were at this stage divided into four groups: Allah Bakhsh and his colleague, Pir Illahi Bakhsh's group comprised eight members, Hidayatullah's group included 13 members, Mir Bande Ali, the leader of the Baloch group, enjoyed the support of 7 members and lastly G.M. Syed had a following of 6 members.<sup>8</sup> Jinnah wanted to unite the Muslim leaders in order to strengthen the Sind League enabling it to form provincial Ministry. He suggested that the above named politicians be brought together. Accordingly, Quaid-i-Azam along with the Premiers of Bengal and the Punjab, met the leaders of all the four groups and after prolonged discussions finally arrived at an agreement that a solid Muslim League group would be formed inside the Provincial assembly.<sup>9</sup> The agreement was signed by Allah Bakhsh, Pir Illahi Bakhsh, G.H. Hidayatullah, Mir Bande Ali, G.M. Syed and Sheikh Abdul Majid Sindhi.

In pursuance of this agreement, telegrams under the joint signatures of Allah Bakhsh and G.H. Hidayatullah were sent to those members who were not in Karachi, requesting them to attend the meeting scheduled for 12 October, 1938.<sup>10</sup> All the members, except a few, participated and those who could not attend also gave the acceptance of the decisions made.<sup>11</sup>

In the meeting of 12 October, Allah Bakhsh backed out of the agreement holding that he and his supporters would join the League only if he was assured beforehand that the party would agree to elect him the leader and let him continue as the Premier.<sup>12</sup> An overwhelming majority of the members present in the meeting considered this attitude contrary to the very concept of the formation of the parliamentary party that a member of any group should lay down preconditions before joining the party. His betrayal of the agreement was considered to be the result of his being a puppet in the Congress

hands awaiting instructions from its high command.<sup>13</sup> Every effort was made to persuade Allah Bakhsh and his seven supporters to abide by the earlier agreement but all in vain. In the meantime, those who were inclined to join the League signed the pledge accepting the creed, policy and programme of the Muslim League. As a result twenty seven members came under the banner of the League, including some of the former supporters of Allah Bakhsh.<sup>14</sup>

The Congress Assembly Board telegraphically sought permission of the Congress President to vote in favour of Allah Bakhsh if a no-confidence motion was moved in the Assembly against the Premier. Likewise, the President of Sind Congress Party sent telegrams to the Central leaders like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Sardar Patel and Subhas Chandra Bose informing them about the current developments in Sind politics. These politicians advised the provincial party to cooperate with Allah Bakhsh and facilitate his retention of the office.

Consequently, the Muslim League Assembly Party was established in Sind with G.H. Hidayatullah and Mir Bande Ali as Assembly party leader and deputy leader respectively. Appreciating this development, Jinnah said that the formation of the Muslim League parliamentary party showed that the majority of Muslims in Sind "was in support of the policy and the programme of the Muslim League".<sup>15</sup>

In October 1938, at the end of Sind Provincial Muslim League Conference, Haji Abdullah Haroon in a letter to the Aga Khan alluded to the fact that the quarters of Muslim League were seriously considering the possibility of having a separate federation of Muslim States and provinces so that they could get freedom once for all from the Hindu molestation.<sup>16</sup>

The Aga Khan's reply was encouraging. He said:

We would also welcome a possible solution. Is your League likely to advocate Pakistan as the final policy of Moslems? If so the sooner public opinion is prepared gradually the better.<sup>17</sup>

Towards the end of 1938, Haji Abdullah Haroon in a foreward to Dr. Latif's book — *The Muslim Problem in India*, proposed the division of India into two separate federations, each reflecting the strength of one of the two major communities. The main body of the Muslim federation would be North Western areas and Kashmir.<sup>18</sup>

G.H. Hidayatullah, the leader of Sind Muslim League, in an attempt to bring the League into office launched a move against Allah Bakhsh ministry. In addition to Sind Congress Party's support, Sardar Patel and Maulana Azad visited Sind to add to the strength of Allah Bakhsh. All this helped to increase the Congress influence within the policy making field of the Sind Government.<sup>19</sup> Thus Allah Bakhsh was placed in a critical position; if he wished to continue to enjoy the support of the Hindu group, it would deprive him of the League's support, and if he appeased the League, it would be at the cost of the confidence of the Hindu members. To resolve this problem he managed to neutralize the League's opposition by including Hidayatullah and Bande Ali in the

ministry, although they were the leader and deputy leader of the Sind Muslim League Assembly Party respectively. On the other hand, the Muslim League finding no other way to remove Allah Bakhsh from power, thought it necessary to mould the Hindu and the Muslim public opinion against the premier and in this connection also invited the League leaders from the Centre to intervene.

The final blow to the existing ministry came from the Masjid Manzilgah issue,<sup>20</sup> the possession of whose premises was a matter of serious dispute between Muslims and Hindus. In 1938, the Sind Muslim League asked the Government to hand over the Masjid to the Muslims. It was also made clear to the Government that non-acceptance of their demand would force the Muslims to start Satyagraha.<sup>21</sup> The British Government did not pay any heed to the demand and thus forced the Muslims to resort to agitational tactics. To control the situation the Premier of Sind ordered Abdullah Haroon to leave Sukkur and M.A. Khuhro was put under house arrest. Under Abdullah Haroon the League's movement was converted into a mass movement. The opposition of the Hindu organizations like the Hindu Association of Sukkur, Hindu Mahasabha and Hindu Panchayat to the restoration of the mosque to Muslims was by no means hidden from the Muslims.

The resignation of Abdus Sattar Pirzada, Chief Parliamentary Secretary, from the ruling Party, was also a result of the Manzilgah dispute.<sup>22</sup> The Muslim satyagraha movement led to communal tension and the police had to be called for controlling the situation. The subsequent skirmishes between the police and the agitators paved the way for the riots of 1939<sup>23</sup> which eventually led to the fall of Allah Bakhsh ministry in Sind. The Muslim League celebrated 22 December 1939, the day the Congress ministries resigned, as the day of deliverance throughout India.<sup>24</sup> In Sind also the day was observed with great enthusiasm. Numerous resolutions were passed, at various meetings, expressing full confidence in the leadership of the Quaid and no-confidence in Allah Bakhsh's ministry.

On 23 March 1940, at the historic session of All India Muslim League in Lahore, a resolution later known as Pakistan Resolution<sup>25</sup> was approved unanimously. Moved by the Bengal Chief Minister, A.K. Fazlul Haq and seconded by Choudhry Khaliquzzaman, the resolution put forward the demand for the establishment of a Muslim sovereign state in South Asia. The resolution stated:

Resolved that it is the considered view of this session of the All India Muslim League that no Constitutional plan would be workable in this country or acceptable to the Muslims unless it is designed on the following basic principle, viz., that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary, that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the North-Western and Eastern zones of India should be grouped to constitute 'Independent States' in which the constituent units should be autonomous and sovereign.<sup>26</sup>

The Quaid in his speech a day earlier had firmly refuted the view that

Muslims were a minority and had asserted that they "are a nation by any definition".<sup>27</sup> He had further observed:

The Hindus and the Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs and literature. They neither intermarry, nor inter-dine together and indeed they belong to two different civilizations which are based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions. . . To yoke together two such nations under a single state, one as a numerical minority and the other as a majority, must lead to growing discontent and final destruction of any fabric that may be built up for the government of such a State.<sup>28</sup>

The resolution electrified the Muslim masses all over the country and the vast majority of them soon became enthusiastic supporters of the demand for a separate Muslim homeland. Vigorous Hindu opposition to the Muslim demand further convinced the Muslims that a separate Muslim homeland was the only answer to their problems.

In the Lahore session of the League 19 delegates including M.A. Khuhro, Sheikh Abdul Majid Sindhi and G.M. Syed represented Sind.<sup>29</sup> Supporting the resolution Haji Abdullah Haroon pointed out that:

The Sind Muslims were the first to meet this question which was now before the League. In 1938, the Muslim League passed a resolution for establishing 'independent States' in the north-western and the eastern zones. Since then various constitutional schemes had been framed and they were now being examined by a command that it was the duty of the Muslims to pass it without any hitch. Sir Abdullah Haroon warned the Hindus that if the Muslims in Hindu provinces were not justly treated, the Hindus in the Muslim provinces would be treated in the same way in which Herr Hitler treated the Sudetans.<sup>30</sup>

He further hoped that his proposal would be acceptable to both the Hindus and the British "as there was no better solution of the thorny problem".<sup>31</sup>

The Muslims of Sind responded to the Resolution enthusiastically, and fully supported the demand for an independent State in various meetings held in different parts of the Province. The substance of this support was that the Muslims of Sind fully supported the Lahore resolution, reposed full confidence in the leadership of the Quaid and that they would not accept any constitution which was not acceptable to the All India Muslim League.<sup>32</sup>

In order to cripple the ministry of Allah Bakhsh, G.M. Syed endeavoured his best to form a Muslim League ministry. The Hindus also turned against Allah Bakhsh, because in their view, he had failed to provide proper security and protection to the life and property of their community.<sup>33</sup> The Muslim League held the Premier responsible for the communal riots which, in its opinion, could have been avoided. In fact, despite all the efforts of Allah Bakhsh to solve the issue, the League exploited the situation to bring about the fall of his ministry. Growing dissatisfaction made the Sind Governor ask the Premier either to prove his majority in the Assembly or quit the office. The Premier, in the given circumstances, had no option but to resign.<sup>34</sup>

The Governor then appointed Mir Bande Ali, Leader of the Sind Nationalist Party as Premier and the latter formed the ministry on 18 March

1940.<sup>35</sup> But he too failed to reconcile the Hindu-Muslim differences. Later on the Muslim League and the Sind National Party agreed to form a coalition ministry. On 16 December 1940, Quaid-i-Azam came to Karachi and his lengthy discussion with various leaders left little doubt that the League in Sind had suffered a setback through this coalition ministry. But nevertheless, in the best interests of the Muslim League, he decided not to disturb the settlement. However, he considered it essential that the League should have an effective voice in the ministry. The Quaid further suggested that all the Muslim ministers in the proposed new Cabinet should be answerable to the Muslim League, failing which they should dissociate themselves from the ministry.<sup>36</sup>

In December 1940, in order to speed up the work of organizing the Muslim League in Sind, the Quaid formed a seven member Muslim League Organizing Committee and nominated G.M. Syed as its Chairman.<sup>37</sup> The first meeting of the Committee was held on 22 February 1941 at Sann, district Dadu, Sind.<sup>38</sup> It was resolved in this meeting that a programme should be chalked out to work for the realization of the goal of Pakistan. In February 1941, on commencement of the session of the Sind Legislative Assembly, the Congress Party moved a no-confidence motion against the Government. Allah Bakhsh and two Hindu members crossed the floor and went over to the opposition benches, leaving Mir Bande Ali, the Premier, in a great predicament. Consequently, the Premier adjourned the session and said that he would soon offer his resignation also.

After the resignation of Mir Bande Ali on 6 March 1941, Allah Bakhsh was brought back as Premier by the Congress.<sup>39</sup> As soon as he assumed premiership, he allegedly started working for the promotion of Hindu interests rather than the interest of Muslims who constituted an overwhelming majority of the population. After failing to exert pressure on the Congress ministry to abandon its pro-Hindu stand, the Muslim League leadership apprised the Quaid of the prevailing situation. The Quaid condemned the ministry and informed the Leaguers from Sind about the communication he had sent to the Governor of Sind on the subject. He also advised the provincial League authorities to approach the Governor.

Allah Bakhsh ministry by now had been firmly established in the Assembly but consequent upon the arrest of Congress leaders in August 1942, Sind Premier, as a sign of protest against the repressive policies followed by the central government publicly renounced his title and honours. In view of his unconcealed support to the Congress, the League leadership of Sind wanted nothing less than removal of Allah Bakhsh from office of Premier. At last on 12 February 1942, for his allegedly disloyal conduct, Allah Bakhsh ministry was dismissed.<sup>40</sup> This completely changed the political atmosphere of Sind. Despite the pressure of a stronger group led by Khuhro, who was leader of the Muslim League Assembly party, which was the largest single group in the Assembly, the Governor of Sind asked G.H. Hidayatullah on 16 October

1942 to form a new ministry.<sup>41</sup> This latter ministry had the support of the League as well.

The Sind Legislative Assembly met on 3 March 1943 in which G.M. Syed tabled the Pakistan Resolution stating that since Indian Muslims were a separate nation they demanded a separate Muslim state in South Asia.<sup>42</sup> Out of 27 members, who attended the meeting, 24 cast their votes in favour of the resolution, whereas three Hindus voted against it.<sup>43</sup>

When Pakistan Resolution was presented in the Sind Legislative Assembly Mr. Nihchaldas C. Vizirani declared that in view of the ruling that Hindus had no interest in the resolution, which was to give effect to the sentiments of the Muslims of Sind, the members would leave and as a result seven Hindu members walked out.<sup>44</sup> However, the resolution that India should be divided into two federations was adopted. This resolution of Sind Assembly had considerable impact upon other provinces. Sind, thus came to be the first province in India to have a full fledged Muslim League ministry and continued as such till the Partition.<sup>45</sup>

On 7 March 1943 the Council of the All India Muslim League adopted the following resolution at Delhi in the light of the aforementioned resolution of the Sind Assembly:

This meeting of the Council of the All India Muslim League approves the decision of the Sind Provincial Legislative Assembly in endorsing the principle of Pakistan scheme adopted by the Lahore Resolution of All India Muslim League on the 23rd of March 1940, and feels confident that before long the other Muslim majority provinces will follow suit.<sup>46</sup>

No other province succeeded in getting a resolution passed between 1943-46, nor could a ministry be formed by the Muslim League in any of the other provinces except Bengal, where Maulvi Fazlul Haq formed a Muslim League Government.

The thirty first Annual Session of the All India Muslim League was held at Karachi, on 24 December 1943 and it was presided over by the Quaid.<sup>47</sup> G.M. Syed was the chairman of the Reception Committee while Liaquat Ali Khan was its secretary. This meeting was attended by 80,000 people,<sup>48</sup> including all the prominent provincial personalities from all over India. Among them were Khizr Hayat from the Punjab, Sardar Aurangzeb Khan from the North West Frontier Province, the members of the League Council, Nawab Bahadur Yar Jang, President all States Muslim League, Miss Fatima Jinnah, Lady Nusrat Haroon and Mrs. Tahira Aijaz Agha. The sub-committee of Women Muslim League included Mrs. Shah Nawaz, Mrs. Anwar Hidayatullah and Mrs. Allana.

Welcoming the participants G.M. Syed in his speech said:

I, of course, greatly appreciate the efforts of the Muslims of Hind which they have put forth in the furtherance of Pakistan movement but I think they are not enough. Independence and progress of a people cannot be achieved by passing resolutions and indulging into paper propaganda. For our purposes, best endeavours and heavy

sacrifices are required. History bears witness that you have sent, in the past, such gentlemen as Sayed Brelvi and Ismail Shaheed for the above purposes.<sup>49</sup>

After G.M. Syed's speech, Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, reviewed the political situation of the country and said:

You have shown not only to India, but to the whole world, and fully established, that we are a nation and that we shall never rest content until we seize the territory that belongs to us and rule over it.<sup>50</sup>

Addressing all those who were opposed to the demand for Pakistan, the Quaid said:

'We cannot depend upon any one, and we do not depend upon any one. It is only by our own inherent strength, by our work, by our service, by our sacrifices, that we shall achieve this goal of ours [Pakistan]. Hindus cannot give you Pakistan... I am confident that with all their diplomacy, in befooling people, with all their great genius in bamboozling people, we are now shock-proof even against the diplomacy of the British Government. They cannot and will not be able to prevent us from seizing Pakistan'.<sup>51</sup>

He concluded his speech with the words that:

'In Pakistan lies our deliverance, our defence and our destiny'.<sup>52</sup>

#### NOTES

1. He remained the President of the All India Muslim League consecutively for three years. See Muhammad Laiq Zardari, *Tahrik-i-Pakistan Main Sind Jo Hisso*, Moro, 1984, pp. 115-116.
2. G. Allana, *Pakistan Movement Historic Documents*, Karachi, 1968, pp. 193-196.
3. Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada, *The Pakistan Resolution and the Historic Lahore Section*, Karachi, 1968, p. 9.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
6. Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada, *Evolution of Pakistan*, Lahore, 1963, pp. 148-149.
7. *Daily Gazette*, Karachi, 14 October, 1938.
8. Ashique Hussain Batalvi, *Hamari Quomi Jidd-o-Juhd: May-December 1938*, Lahore, 1966, p. 149.
9. For the terms of Agreement see Jamiluddin Ahmad, *Speeches and Writings of Mr. Jinnah*, Lahore, 1968, Vol. I, pp. 65-67.
10. *Daily Gazette*, 14 October, 1938.
11. Ashique Hussain Batalvi, *op. cit.*, p. 154.
12. *Daily Gazette*, 12 October 1938.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Ashique Hussain Batalvi, *op. cit.*, pp. 154.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
16. Al-Haj Mian Ahmad Shafi, *Haji Abdoola Haroon: A Biography*, Karachi n.d. p. 138.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
18. Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada, *Evolution of Pakistan, op. cit.*, pp. 151-152.
19. G. Allana, *Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah: The Story of a Nation*, Lahore, 1967, p. 289.
20. The Masjid Manzilgah building situated on the Indus in Sukkur City in the vicinity of Sath Bella (Temple), was built about 300 years ago by Syed Mir Ma'sum Bhakhri' during the reign of Akbar. The British used this Masjid as an office for some time but later restored it as a Mosque. This was done despite Hindu opposition, who claimed it as a temple, see *Daily Gazette*, 17 August, 1939.



21. *Daily Gazette*, 17 August, 1939.
  22. Shaikh Abdul Razzak, *Sukkur Past and Present*, Sukkur, 1963, p. 160.
  23. The political nature of the Manzilgah matter was also confirmed by Justice E. Weston, Chairman, Court of Inquiry. He observed that the objective of the Muslim League in taking up the Manzilgah matter was purely political, designed to drive the Allah Bakhsh ministry out of office. He further stated that originally Manzilgah was a mosque and that the Hindus were responsible for the riots. See *Daily Gazette*, 2 September, 14 September, 1940 and *The Muslim*, Islamabad, 23 March 1985.
  24. *Daily Gazette*, 23 December 1939.
  25. "Pakistan is both a Persian and an Urdu word. It is composed of letters taken from the names of all our homelands - 'Indian' and 'Asian'. That is Punjab, Afghanistan (North West Frontier Province), Kashmir, Iran, Sind (including Kach and Kathiawar), Tukharistan, Afghanistan and Baluchistan. It means the lands of the Paks - the spiritually pure and clean". Choudhry Rahmat Ali quoted by Khalid bin Sayeed, *Pakistan The Formative Phase, 1857-1948*. Lahore, 1969, p. 105.
  26. *Resolutions of All India Muslim League from March 1940 to April 1941*, Delhi, 1944.
  27. Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada, *The Pakistan Resolution and the Historic Lahore Session*, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
  28. *Ibid*, p. 49.
  29. Files of Sind Provincial Muslim League, Karachi, Archives of Freedom Movement, Karachi University, n.d. Vol. III, p. 78.
  30. Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada, *The Pakistan Resolution and the Historic Lahore Session*, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
  31. *Ibid*.
  32. *Al-Wahid*, Karachi, 27 April, 1940.
  33. G.M. Sayed, *Struggle for New Sind: A Brief Narrative of the Working of Provincial Autonomy in Sind During a Decade (1937-47)*, Karachi, 1949, p. 46.
  34. *Ibid*, pp. 46-47.
  35. *Daily Gazette*, 20 March, 1940.
  36. *Ibid*, 17 December 1940.
  37. G.M. Sayed, *op. cit.*, p. 74.
  38. Muhammad Laiq Zardari, *op. cit.*, p. 196.
- p. 196.
39. Karim Bux Khalid, *Awami Daur No.6*, Karachi, May 1972, p. 30., see also *Daily Gazette*, 7 March 1941.
  40. The comment of G.M. Sayed on the dismissal of Allah Bakhsh is worth reproducing:
 

"On the arrest of Congress leadership in August, 1942, the Sind Premier publicly renounced his titles in protest against the repressive policy followed by the British Government. This only infuriated the British Government and it took an unprecedented step in the history of Provincial Autonomy by dismissing Allah Bux from his office of Premiership for his disloyal conduct." G.M. Sayed *op. cit.*, p. 89.
  41. *Daily Gazette*, 17 October 1942.
  42. *Ibid*, 4 March 1943.
  43. *Sind Assembly Debates*, Vol XVII, No. 6, March 1943.
  44. *Daily Gazette*, 4 March 1943.
  45. G. Allana, *Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah: The Story of a Nation*, *op. cit.*, p. 352.
  46. G. Allana, *Pakistan Movement Historic Documents*, *op. cit.*, p. 352.
  47. *Daily Gazette*, 25 December 1943.
  48. Muhammad Laiq Zardari, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

