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Quest Journals
Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science
Volume 10 ~ Issue 9 (2022) pp: 163-165
ISSN(Online):2321-9467
www.questjournals.org

Research Paper

The All India Muslim League's Role in the Freedom Movement During the First World War

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Abstract
This Article shows the role of the All India Muslim League in the freedom movement during the First World War. During the War period there was subdued political activity caused by internment and deportation of a large number of extremists. The British ha to fight Turkey. This raised the cry of Jihad in India, and thus the Indian Muslims came under the spell of nationalism. The significance of War links Indian National Movement with world forces. This close relationship between important happenings and Indian political events during this period reveal Indian National Movement to be the part of an international pattern in which is discernible a correlated evolution of political movements. Mr. Jinnah played a significant role to put this organization in an extremely advantageous position.

Key Words*: Movement, Muslim League, War, British, Nationalism,*

R*eceived 02 Sep., 2022;* ***R****evised 12 Sep., 2022;* ***A****ccepted 14 Sep., 2022 © The author(s) 2022.*
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I. Introduction

The Muslim League leaders were confronted with a difficult situation. They found it impossible to continue on old lines. Some of them quit the organization, for instance, Aga Khan, the Nawab of Decca. Men like Jinnah and Mohammad Ali took the rein in their hands, and eventually prevailed upon Ulama to join. Its leadership fell into the hands of younger elements. Who were in a position to take a more positive lines as they had nothing or very little at stake. The change brought the League and the Congress closure. Sympathy and support to the British Empire in the War crisis were expressed by the leaders of both the major political parties. In May 1914 Mazhar- ul- Haq visited England and addressed Indians on 'Indian Nationalism' at a meeting of the London Indian Association, Caxton Hall, Westminster. He called both Hindus and Muslims to unite to free their motherland from slavery. At least Wazir Hasan felt that now was the time for the League to develop its position: he did not want the Government to steal a march on them. Wazir Hasan, however, was not prepared to allow matters to rest.

Formation of Joint Scheme

Wazir Hasan was supported by most of the leading men of the community. He informed Jinnah that he wished to call a meeting of the Council to decide about the future program of the League. Jinnah immediately set up to invite the League to Bombay in 1915. Mazhar- ul- Haq was elected the president. In this session it was decided to form a committee to formulate and frame a scheme of constitutional reforms in consultation with other political parties keeping always in mind that due regard is paid to the needs and interests of the Mussalmans of India int he formation of the aforesaid scheme of reforms. The League spirit was matched by a similar resolution adopted by the Congress. The Congress responded the League gesture by authorizing the All India Congress Committee to talk to the League Council and draw up a joint scheme of self- government. Thus, a scheme in a spirit of mutual trust and goodwill was finalized at a joint meeting of the League Council and the Congress Committee at Calcutta in October 1916.

The Lucknow Pact

The Muslim League- Congress agreement on the future constitutional development of the country was an important and healthy sign of Indian politics. Jinnah the linkman between the League and the Congress held their historical session at Lucknow to take some momentous decisions. They demanded that in reconstruction of the Empire, India should be lifted from the position of a dependency to that of an equl partner in the Empire

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with the self- governing dominions. Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the president of Lucknow session, condemned the Government of the country and very boldly described this attitude as 'bastard and desperate political maxims' applied by the British against Indian Nationalism. To Jinnah, the War time was the most opportune moment to press for the demands. Thus, the All India Muslim League and the National Congress arrived at an arrangement Known as the Lucknow Pact. Main proposals of Lucknow Pact were;

(1) The allotment of the Muslim seats worked out under the agreement was as follows: -

Provinces	**Muslim representation (%)**	**Muslim Population (%)**
Punjab	50	55
United Province	30	14
Bengal	40	53
Bihar	25	10
Central Province	15	4
Madras	15	6
Bombay	331/2	20

(2) The Imperial Legislative Council should consist of altogether 150 members, of whom 120 should be non-official and one third of the elected members Muslims.

(3) No bill, nor any clause of bill nor a resolution introduced by a non- official member affecting one or the other community shall be proceeded with, if three- fourth of the members of the community, in the provincial or Imperial Council opposes the bill, clause or resolution.

(4) Defense, foreign and political affairs, war, peace and treaties were considered outside the powers of the Imperial Legislative Council.

The acceptance of separate electorates and fixation of proportion of communal representatives by the Congress were important decisions.The Governor felt that the Muslims have joined the Nationalists Camp. Whatever the impressions of the of the Governor, the deliberations of the League were a great satisfaction to its organizers.

Years of Trial and Turbulence,1917- 19

There was a new development. This was the emergence of All- India Home Rule League, founded in September by Mrs. Annie Besant. Muslims whole heartedly supported it and even the Muslim ladies contributed their savings to it. The Home Rule League wished to speed up the demand for self- government for India. Its activities spread almost all over India. It was more than four years that Ali Brothers had been interned at different places without any offences being specified. They supported Hoe Rule movement of Tilak and Annie Besant. Meanwhile, Mrs. Annie Besant was arrested. By now Jinnah had become very bold. Moved by the arrest of Mrs. Besant, Jinnah brought the whole legal profession in Bombay to the Home Rule League. In 1917 he became the president of the Home Rule League, Bombay branch. The Home Rule activities must have come as a great challenge to the Muslim League and Congress. Therefore, it seemed necessary for the two organizations to accelerate their actions, too.

The Home Rule leaders after the internment of Mrs. Besant in June 1917 made a common case with the internment of Ali Brothers and protest meetings spread all over the country. In the heat of political excitement, all Muslim and Hindu leaders came forward to forge a common demand against the Government. A joint meeting held at Bombay in July 1917 decided to submit a memorandum to Britain's Parliament in support of the joint Reforms scheme adopted by the League and the Congress.

Interaction of Events

The new Secretary of the State Mr. Montague on August 28th 1917 gladly made a significant announcement in the House of Commons indicating Britain's policy of increasing association of Indians in every branch of administration and the general development of self- governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire.

The Montague announcement was vague and it was received with mixed feelings of hopes and disappointment. The attitude of the Muslim leaders towards the announcement was not favourable and cordial because of the military debacle which Turkey suffered in the war. It was decided in the joint meeting of the League Council and the Congress Committee held at Allahabad in October 1917 that India Deputation should see the Viceroy and the Secretary of State with a memorandum in support of Congress- League scheme. Accordingly in November 1917 a joint representation was made to the Secretary of State and the Viceroy Mr. Chelmsford demanding the immediate adoption of the Congress- League scheme, and the specification of the time- limit for the grant of complete self- government to India. Again, during the Calcutta session of the Muslim League in December 1917 the same demand was reiterated. The session also demanded the immediate release of all Muslim internees including Ali Brothers. During his discussion with Montague Jinnah was more interested in proposed structure of the Central Government. He knew that some degree of power is going to be given to the provinces.

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The End of the War and Montague- Chelmsford Reforms

By this time the War had reached its most decisive point due to withdrawal of Bolshevik Russia from the War. The only way to keep India calm in the midst of mounting War pressure, economic strain and political trouble was to divert their attention towards Montague- Chelmsford reform plan. By this they hoped to control dissent, defuse, tension and channel the obvious political potential being generated among Indians into constructive use of power, particularly at provincial level. The Montague – Chelmsford reforms announced in July 1918 were thus a significant departure.

As soon as it became known that the official report was due to appear shortly, Ramaswamy Ayer of the Congress asked the Muslim League Secretary to take steps for a meeting so that the content of the report could be discussed. Finally, the League did call a special session at Bombay along with the Congress on 31 August 1918 and passed a resolution, in defense to Congress wishes, promising to take part in a deputation to be sent at England to discuss further with the Government the question of reforms. The proposals were rejected both by the Muslim League and the Congress at Bombay session. With victory for the Great Britain and her allies the First World War came to an end in the second week of November 1918. In India political trends took a radical turn and Indians became more determined in their opposition to the Reform proposals. The Muslims too becoming more anti- British in their attitude at the end of the War. The dismemberment of Turkish territories and the uncertain future of the Caliph after the defeat of Turkey in the War had created anxiety in their mind. Thus, the role if Indian Muslims had become a matter of concern for the Government.

II. Conclusion

In December 1018 the League session held under the Chairmanship of Dr. M. A. Ansari. It demanded that the complete responsible government be granted to the provinces at once and that the principle of self-government be applied to India. They also demanded the repeal of the Defense of India Act, Indian Press Act, Arm Act, the Seditious Meeting Act, and all other repressive measures as well as the immediate release of the Muslim internees. Thus, at the end of the First World War India and Britain stood at the cross roads of History. The Indian hopes of better relation in Lieu of their cooperation during War were belied with the publication of the Montague- Chelmsford Report. The end of the Great War was followed by the beginning of India's determined fight for freedom. Muslim League became more anti- British. The principle of self- determination was not been applied to India in accordance with her demands. The meeting deplored the disregard shown by the British to the Turkish question and Holy places of Islam and gave a threat to start mass movement.

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