



Research Paper

Role of the All India Muslim League (1906- 1914)

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Abstract:-

This paper examines the achievements of the Muslim League as a pressure group while Morley- Minto reform scheme is worked out. The League claimed constitutional safeguards, separate electorate, weighted representation, reserved quota in the Government services, religious liberty and preservation of cultural values. Finally, the Muslim League's request for safeguard was conceded in the Indian Council Act in May 1909. It also sees the Muslim League breaking out of its Aligarh chrysalis to spread its wings in the wider world of Indian politics, at the same time it is noted how it moves the headquarters from Aligarh's academic tranquility to Lucknow's political hothouse. The annulment of the partition of Bengal in November 1911 created turmoil and decline their future expectations. The Italy- Turkey war in 1911 and the Balkan's war in 1912 annoyed the Muslim League and it lost faith in the British Government. Turkey occupied a special place in the hearts of Indian Muslims because it was the seat of their Caliph. All these internal as well as external affairs affected the Muslims loyalty towards the British Government and created a profound change in the angle of their vision.

Key Words – Muslim League, British Government, Council, Constitution, War

I. Introduction:-

The first decade of the 20th century witnessed a number of significant developments which gave a new confidence to the Muslims. The decision of the Government for the partition of Bengal in 1905, the assurance given by the Viceroy to the Simla Deputation of the Muslims in 1906 and the foundation of the All India Muslim League offered Muslims an opportunity to assert themselves in an organized way in politics of British India. It certainly boosted the moral of the community.

The partition issue not only created a rift between the Government and the Congress and widened the gulf between the Muslims and the Hindus rather it also gave birth to a dissension inside the Congress camp itself. The declared Government aim of the reform was to give a larger share of representation on the elected councils. The League's concern was to press forward its demand for separate representation and weighting to take account of Muslim 'Political Importance'. There were two stages when the League was able to put pressure on the Government. The first was when the Government in India was preparing rules for election and the second determining the number of Muslim seats.

Morley-Minto Reform and the All India Muslim League

In October 1907 the Government published the reform proposals, setting 31st March as the last date to receive comments from the public. The response from the Muslim League to these proposals came in the form of "Suggestions on the Council Reform Scheme of the Government of India by the All India Muslim League". The announcement made by the Secretary of State in December 1908 regarding Reform Scheme of joint electorate greatly alarmed the League and the scheme was denounced as dangerous in the Amritsar Session of the League held under the presidentship of Syed Ali Imam. Ali Imam, it would seem, had gone over Morley's suggestion of mixed electorates, and there is much evidence to suggest that he did so for reason of personal ambition. In a swift move to the London branch of the Muslim League under the leadership of Syed Amir Ali presented memorandum to Mr. Morley the Secretary of State for India in January 27, 1909 reiterating the demand of separate electorate. But Morley put them off with a non- committal answer.

Putting Pressure on Parliament

The next stage of the Muslim League's attempt to apply pressure began in April when the bill on the reform was being discussed in Parliament. On the 1st April 1909, Buchanan, the Under Secretary of State for India, made a statement in the Parliament on behalf of Morley which indicated that the Government was not too keen on separate Muslim electorates. He announced that Muslims seats can be filled in many ways. The

announcement confirmed the worst fears of the Muslim League. Under the presidentship of Ali Imam the League council met at Aligarh and declared that the League would not 'welcome' reforms if Muslim claims were ignored by the Government. During the month of April and May 1909, the protest meetings were held all over India. Their proceedings were forwarded to both Government in India and England. Some of the meetings like the one at Lucknow on 27th April 1909 were very large. It was attended by about twelve thousand Muslims. *The Indian Daily Telegraph*, an Anglo Muslim newspaper, observed that no such assembly of Muslims had taken place before.

The result of these efforts of the Muslim leaders paid them. When the debate on the Reform Bill started in the British Parliament the number of pro- Congress members being small, their voices were drowned in loud arguments both from the opposition benches led by conservative leader A. J. Balfour as well as the Liberal Cabinet who strongly argued in favour of the Muslim demands and decided to introduce separate electorates. Eventually the Muslim League's request for safeguard was conceded in the Indian Council Act of the famous Morley- Minto Reform in May 1909.

Meanwhile, the Government of India prepared its rules and regulations for the election of new Councils and forwarded it to Secretary of State for India for his approval. Ultimately when the rules and regulations were published in November 1909, it was found that both authors (Morley and Minto) of the reforms had reverted to the position they had taken up on October 1, 1906. They added mixed electoral element too. The Muslim share in the Imperial Legislative Council was exactly the same as had been given out in the Simla meeting a few weeks earlier: six separately assigned seats from the six provinces besides two more promised by nomination if the community failed to obtain that number in general election. This total number of eight seats was to be had out of 28 elected seats and was meant to represent "political importance", in excess of the total proportion of Muslims in India. Signs of discontent appeared on the Muslim side. But the Muslim attitude of dissatisfaction was overcome by the advice given to the League by the leading men like Colonel Abdul Majeed of Patiala and Aga Khan. These Counsels had the desired effect on the Muslim League which agreed to accept the terms offered.

The Viceroy requested the Secretary of State to approve 15 November 1909 as the date for India Councils Act to be effective, which he did. Thus, for the Muslim League the implementation of the scheme was the end of one phase of its struggle. The winning of six fixed seats and two under mixed electorates. Eight in total of 28 seats to the Imperial Legislative Council, was a remarkable achievement. This number represented 28 percent of the Council as compared with the 23 present Muslim population of British India. The leaders of the Muslim League regarded this achievement as a great success.

Transition of Leadership

Up to January 1910 the League was managed by men at Aligarh, but from this time it passed into the hands of men with Aligarh connection who controlled it from outside. Viquar-ul-Mulk had to take on his shoulder the work of both Muslim College and the Muslim League after the death of Mohsin-ul-Mulk in 1907. He found it difficult and decided to devote himself to the College and leave the Muslim League for someone else. In March 1908 the Aga Khan was elected the President, Major Syed Hussain Bilgramy was elected Secretary, and Haji Musa Khan of Aligarh's family Joint Secretary. Muhammad Aziz Mirza replaced Major Bilgramy as Secretary after fresh elections at the League Sessions at Delhi in January. He devoted himself to the Muslim League.

Change of Head Quarters

Aligarh was head quarter when the League was founded. But it was soon realized that the presence of the League in Aligarh would have distracted effect on students of the College. By 1910 the League and Aligarh were seen to be dangerous mix and Minto sighed relief when the League was finally shifted from Aligarh to Lucknow.

International Issues in South Africa, Tripoli and Balkan Wars

Although the All India Muslim League was founded mainly to concentrate on internal problems being faced by the Muslims of India, but international issues did not escape its attention. The first international issue was mistreatment of the Indians in the British colonies particularly in the Transvaal State of South Africa which for the Muslim League 'assumed the second most important issue after the political reform scheme at home. In the annual session held at Delhi on January 29-30, 1909, Hakim Azmal Khan, president of the reception committee and Aga Khan raised the burning question of the Indians in South Africa, who in his opinion were willfully subjected to persecutions, insult and indignity.

However, International concerns of the Muslim League were best exhibited in the case of Turkey. In 1911, Italy declared war on Tripoli, a Turkish territory in North Africa, and captured it by sheer force. The butchery inflicted on the Muslim population, there was blood- curdling. Seeing that the Turks were involved in defense of Tripoli, the Balkan states in Europe waged a war of independence against them. The Muslims of

India accepted that the British would favour Turkey, but the refusal of the British revealed its inclination on Italian side. Turkey occupied special place in the hearts of Indian-Muslims not only because of its being a great Islamic power, but also because it was the seat of their Caliph. The harrowing accounts of happenings in the Balkan inflamed Muslim sentiments in India and their feelings.

The loyalty of Muslims changed into active opposition to the British. Haji Musa Khan of Aligarh asked the Muslims to follow the verse of the Holy Quran which advocated Pan-Islamism. Maulana Mohammad Ali, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, through their papers, *the Comrade*, *the Al- Hilal* and *the Zamindar* reminded the Muslims of the Islamic brotherhood. Mohammad Ali and Azad wrote vehemently against British in their paper which led to the revival of Pan- Islamism in India after about a decade.

The Muslim leaders appealed for financial help for Turks. Dr. M.A.Ansari came out with Red Crescent Medical Mission. He spoke to the students of the M.A.O. College in a hurriedly convened meeting in the Strachery Hall, and asked them to contribute money. A meeting at Aligarh decided to send a medical mission to Turkey to take care of the wounded soldiers. After the tragic events which followed the Balkan disaster, the Pan- Islamic trends of Muslim India, secret alliances of Christian powers England, France, Russia and Italy to wipe out Islam from the map of Europe, and their conspiracy to attack Holy places of Muslims led to the formation of Anjuman- i- Khuddam- i- Kaba in March 1913 with Maulana Abdul Bari of Lucknow, the Ali Brothers, Mushir Hassan Kidwai and Dr. M. A. Ansari as chief organizers. They pledged to protect Makkah and other Holy places of Islam from the non-Muslim encroachments.

No doubt, international issues disturbed Indian Muslims. It was indeed development at home that was responsible for the change in Muslim League policy. Government had not been pleased by the way in which opinion had been mobilized to influence the Morley- Minto reforms in 1909, as the reaction of Minto and Hewett to the transfer of Muslim League from Aligarh to Lucknow revealed. In November 1911 the partition of Bengal was annulled by the Government. The shocked, disappointed and disillusioned Muslim community lost all hopes from the British bureaucracy. In 1911 the Muslim League was forbidden to hold its session in Delhi. It had long before decided that its session would be held in December 1911. Since the League event coincided with the event of the King- Emperor's coronation celebration, which was to take place in Delhi at about the same time.

II. Conclusion:-

Thus, the annulment of Bengal partition, the armed conflict in Iran, the Balkan war in the autumn of 1912, the failure of the British to establish a Muslim University at Aligarh as demanded in the Delhi Session of the Muslim League, and Britain's anti- Turkish policies coupled with the happenings which gave a new turn to the Muslim politics and created a profound change in the angle of their vision. Loyalty to the Government as the professed creed of the League leaders was bound to be revised and they decided to co-operate with the Congress provided it recognized separate political status of their community and was willing to their concede a definite share of power in the new reform scheme to be introduced soon by the Government. It was mainly the result of the growing influence and hold of the radical group of Muslim leaders. It was through Mr. Jinnah's efforts that the old creed of the Leagues was changed and resolution emphasizing the harmonious relationship and co-operation among the various Indian communities was passed with the hope that leaders of both sides would periodically meet together to restore the amicable relations between them and find out a joint scheme of action. Later Mr. Jinnah was enrolled in the Muslim League. Congress too, greatly appreciated this happy trend and endorsed the plea of the League for harmonious co-operation between the two communities in its Karachi session of December 1913. But any agreement with Congress, or other non-Muslim leaders of India, had to acknowledge one principle which was separate Muslim electorates in India's developing democratic system.