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History

GENESIS OF ALL INDIA MUSLIM LEAGUE

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to highlight the origin of All India Muslim League. Time had come to formally organize the Muslims after the success of the Simla Deputation. The Muslim leaders desired to create a permanent political forum. The Congress's anti-Muslim activities too emphasized the need of a political platform for the Muslims from where the interests of Muslims could be projected. The Muslim leaders of Simla Deputation after their meeting with the Viceroy held consultations among themselves as to the possibility of forming a political association. The annual session of All India Muslim Educational Conference was held in 1906 at Dacca. The prominent Muslim leaders from all over the country were attending this meeting. When the meeting ended, Nawab Saleem Ullah Khan of Dacca, convened a meeting of the Muslim leaders at his residence.

INTRODUCTION :

The objective of this meeting was to discuss the possibilities of forming a political association for the Muslims. The meeting was presided by Nawab Viqar-ul-Malik on 30th December 1906. Nawab Saleem Ullah of Dacca had already circulated an idea of the political organization known as All India Muslim Confederacy. Nawab Viqar-ul-Malik in his presidential address stressed the need for a political platform for the Muslims. He said that Congress political activities were highly injurious for the Muslims for which Sir Syed Ahmed Khan had asked the Muslims to keep away from the Congress politics. He said the Muslims form only one-fourth of the total population of India. It is obvious that if the British leave the country at any time, the Muslims will come under the domination of that nation which is four times bigger than the Muslims. The other participants also expressed their views in favour of forming a political organization for the Muslims.

Nawab Saleem Ullah Khan of Dacca, therefore, proposed Muslim League which was supported by Hakim Ajmal Khan, Maulana Zafar Ali Khan and other participants.

Nawab Mohsin-ul-Malik and Nawab Viqar-ul-Malik were elected provisionally as Joint Secretaries of the Muslim League. A Committee consisting of sixty members was set up to draft the constitution of the Muslim League. The Constitution Committee included all the members of Simla Deputation. Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar, a distinguished student of Aligarh and Oxford, was given the responsibility of drafting the rules and regulations of the League. The first regular session of the Muslim League was held at Karachi on 29th and 30th December, 1907 exactly after one year of its formation. Sir Adamjee Pirbhay, a prominent leader of Bombay, presided over this session. The draft Constitution prepared by the committee was placed before the session for approval. The Constitution was adopted after a further scrutiny by the members of the Constitution Committee present at Karachi session.

The Karachi session of the League was adjourned after adopting the Constitution. The session resumed after a few months and met again on 18th March, 1908 at Aligarh. Agha Khan was formally elected as the President and Major Hassan Bilgrami as the Secretary.

Objectives of Muslim League

1. To promote among the Muslims of the India feeling of loyalty towards the British Government.
2. To protect and advance the political rights and interests of Muslims of India and respectfully to represent their needs and aspirations to government.
3. To prevent the rise among Muslims of India of any feelings of hostility towards other communities.

Muslim Politics

The anti-Partition agitation and the resignation of Bampfylde Fuller, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal and Assam who was

known for his pro-Muslim sympathy made the Muslim elites of the new province apprehensive about a possible annulment of the Partition. In an attempt to defend the Partition, the leadership in Bengal felt the need for a Muslim organization which would be capable of putting pressure on the government to extract tangible concessions for their community. This political move was comparable with that of the younger generation of leaders in the Aligarh school including men like Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali who later would achieve fame in the Non-cooperation-Khilafat movement and their mentor Maulana Abdul Bari. They felt that the loyalist line that had been adopted by Syed Ahmed was not going to make much of a difference in government policy. During the Hindu-Urdu controversy this younger generation protested against the government's language policy and came round to the view that a political organization for the Muslims was necessary to defend the community's interests. By 1906 the province of eastern Bengal and Assam had emerged as a symbol for Muslim assertiveness in Indian politics. At this juncture the Secretary of State Morley announced in British Parliament that representative government was likely to be introduced in India.

The Simla Deputation: October 1906

Since Morley's announcement did not define the principle of representation and left the room open for a full-fledged discussion on this matter, the Muslim leaders became apprehensive about the possibility of Hindu domination in a representative system. Congress was looked upon as a symbol of Hindu domination. This was the context in which the Muslim leaders, - mostly elite Muslims from northern India met Lord Minto, the Governor-General in Simla in early October 1906 to apprise him about their views on the principle of representation. They reiterated the position that only the Muslims had the right to act as representatives of their community. In Islamic political theory, allegiance to Islam defines the principle of representation. To the extent that this principle emphasized representation of interests rather than of numbers, it fitted in with the standard practice in Britain before universal male suffrage was introduced in the 1860's. Once the British rulers found in the dissenting voice of the Muslim leaders an opportunity to play their divisive strategy, it was a short step for them to introduce the separate electorate in the India Councils Act of 1909, popularly known as the Morley-Minto Reforms.

Genesis of Muslim League

The Simla deputation was the first step that the Muslim leaders had taken to achieve their objective of separate representation. Far from being a 'command performance', performed by them at the behest of the British bureaucracy, the initiative actually came from the so called young party of the Aligarh College, to the exclusion of leaders from Bengal. The deputationists informed Minto that the Muslims constituted a separate community, separated from the Hindus by religion and history and therefore were entitled to proportional minority representations in the representative bodies and in the public services. Minto's indulgent response to this deputation came as an incentive for the Simla deputationists to organize a party. A tentative decision was taken to launch the

organization during the annual session of the Mohameddan Educational Conference which was scheduled to be held at Dacca, the capital of the new province of eastern Bengal and Assam in December, 1906. In eastern Bengal, the spread of the swadeshi movement had already alarmed the Muslim leaders who found the prospect of a separate organization enticing. Salimullah, the Nawab of Dacca had already floated the idea of a separate political organization of the Muslims in the province of eastern Bengal and Assam as a possible antidote to the growing strength of Swadeshi nationalism. Once the interest of the East Bengal leadership converged with the young party of Aligarh, the stage was set for the formation of the All India Muslim League at the end of December 1906. Even though the Congress tried to neutralize its impact among the educated Muslims, the Muslim League succeeded in drawing in the support of the Muslim professional elites. In the initial stages the League and the educational conference were one entity dominated by the elites from United Provinces but gradually the League managed to make inroads into the Punjab and Bengal, - provinces in which large majority of the Muslims lived. Provincial Muslim Leagues were formed before long. It was a loose organization but had the potential to become a powerful body representing Muslim interests. Thanks to the London branch of the Muslim League, set up by Sayeed Amir Ali, the League managed to exert its influence on the ongoing discussion on constitutional reforms.

Morley-Minto Reforms

As far as John Morley, the Secretary of State for India, was concerned, the man's liberal conscience looked towards a more happy relationship with the moderate Congress leaders who, he thought, were expected to work as Her Majesty's opposition in India. During the many meetings that Gopal Krishna Gokhale had with Morley during his stay in England in 1906, the Indian moderate leader wanted to extract a concession from the British government, like colonial self-government, in order to vindicate the moderate position against the extremist onslaught. Gokhale however failed in this objective. He managed to extract a concession by way of an announcement by Morley about the proposal towards some kind of representative government in India. One of Morley's objectives was to rally the moderates behind the colonial state, which also required at least some concessions to the Indian liberal leadership. The Viceroy Minto's understanding on this matter was somewhat different. Minto favoured the loyalists among the Princes and the Muslim elites. The latter had already been activated by the discussions on reforms and started pleading for safeguards to the Muslim minority in a representative system, which would inevitably pave the way for the domination of the Congress representing the Hindu middle classes. It was certainly a wrong understanding of the Congress' intentions but that was the way the mind of the Muslim leadership worked, worried as it was by the prospect of Congress domination.

Consequently, the Indian Council Act of 1909 remained a half-way house between a system of elective representation and one based on the principle of nomination that had been already put to practice in the earlier Act in 1892. In the Morley-Minto reforms the principle of interest-based representation continued to rule with the land-holders, and professional classes, while Muslim, European and Indian businesses were allotted a specific number of representatives. The Congress demand for a non-official majority in the imperial Legislative Council was not accepted, although with regard to the Provincial Councils this began to be practised with the usual caveat of the government nominating a number of non-official members. Separate electorate of course remained one of the most obvious clauses that sowed the seeds of discord in Indian politics.

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