

ROLE OF MUHAMMAD ALI JINNAH IN THE INDIAN ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE (1930-32)

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ABSTRACT

Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, started his political career in 1906 by joining All India National Congress (AINC). He also became the member of All India Muslim League in 1913. As a joint member of both parties Jinnah worked hard to bring both the communities closer to each other. He succeeded when Congress and Muslim League signed Lukhnow Pact in 1916 but difference between both communities developed soon. On the other hand British government desired to introduce new constitutional act for India. At this critical juncture Jinnah suggested the idea of holding round table conference to discuss the constitutional deadlock. He played very active role in the conference which demonstrated his devotion for the rights of his nation and dedication to constitutionalism.

Keywords: Congress, Muslim League, Self-Rule, Communities, Representatives, Minorities, Communal Award

INTRODUCTION

Muhammad Ali Jinnah, an ambassador of “Hindu-Muslim unity” got success in his greater national cause when in December 1916 both Hindus and Muslims reached on a communal settlement and joined hands against the British Government. (Ali 1988: 14) However, he was shocked when the period from 1922 to 1927 witnessed extreme Hindu-Muslims riots leaving long-lasting impacts on politics of the region. (Qureshi 1965: 27)

Jinnah presented proposals for Hindu-Muslim unity in the session of Muslim leaders at Delhi in 1927. Unexpectedly Jinnah surrendered the right of separate electorates if the Muslim were given 1/3rd representation at center, representation of Muslims in Punjab and Bengal on population basis, and residuary powers to be vested in the provinces. (Sayeed: 1968: 96) Although the Muslim leaders from Punjab were silent in this session but after their returning to Punjab, they refused to surrender the right of separate electorate. (Zaman 1961: 130) On this issue, the Punjab Muslim League was divided into two factions. The group who was opposing the surrendering of separate electorates was led by Sir Muhammad Shafi. But it was Congress who even rejected these proposals.

In 1927, the British Government sent a statutory Commission under the chairmanship of Sir John Simon to inquire the working of diarchy in the provinces and to prepare constitutional recommendation but Congress rejected it. On the same issue, once again Muslim League divided into two parts. As a whole the Indians leader boycotted the Commission. Congress convened All Parties Conference to prepare constitutional recommendations which are commonly known as Nehru Report. The Nehru Report, which demanded joint electorate and 1/4th Muslim representation, was totally unacceptable for Muslims. Consequently Jinnah presented his famous 14 points as the Muslim demands in March 1929. (Mahmood 2000: 12)

Since 1922, the Hindus and Muslims were bitterly divided hostile to each other while Muslim leadership was also very divided. (Char 1983: 550-551) In May 1929, General Elections were held in England and in these elections Conservative Party was defeated by Labor Party. Ramsay Macdonald, a close friend of M.A Jinnah became the Prime Minister of England. (Aziz 2002: 40) In the critical situation of India, the victory of Labor Party with Ramsay Macdonald as the Prime Minister was an encouraging development for M.A Jinnah. Therefore without waiting any more on 19 June 1929 Jinnah wrote letter to British Prime Minister regarding the latest political development of India and suggested some new lines of actions. He wrote:

..... the present situation is a very serious deadlock and if allowed to continue it will, in my judgment proves disastrous both to the interests of India and Great Britain.... May I suggest a solution which I think would most probably be acceptable to Indians. His Majesty Govt. before they formulate their proposals should invite representatives of India to sit in conference with them with a view to reaching a solution. (Saiyid 1970: 141)

In this letter Jinnah presented the idea of holding a conference of Indian representatives to sit and discuss constitutional matters. The idea of a conference was also very inspiring for Macdonald and he accepted this idea. (Saiyid 1970: 141-47) The Viceroy of India, Lord Irwin was informed about this decision and was asked to announce it in British India. In October 1929 Viceroy of India, Lord Irwin made a declaration of holding the 1st Round Table Conference (RTC) in London at which the British Government would meet the representatives of British India and Princely states for the purpose of seeking the greatest possible measure of agreement on constitutional proposals. (Aziz 1997: 50)

On the other hand Congress that was busy in Civil Disobedient Movement, its leader met at Lahore under the chairmanship of Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru, and passed a resolution boycotting the 1st proposed RTC. (Punniah 1938: 313) Jinnah was well aware that in the absence of Congress it would be very difficult for both Indian representatives and British Government to accept any constitutional proposal for India. Therefore he decided to meet with Gandhi in order to make him agree to attend RTC. Jinnah met Gandhi on 30th November 1929 at Allahabad, but failed to convince. Gandhi. (Punniah 1938: 313)

Despite of the boycotting of Congress, the 1st RTC was held in London on 12 November 1930. Almost all the invited representatives of British India and British Indian States were present except Congress. (*The Times of India*, 2 Dec. 1929) The Muslim delegation was represented by Jinnah, Sir Agha Khan, M. Ali Johar and Sir M.Shafi etc.

The basic issues which came under discussion were the question “whether the future constitution of India should be a federal or unitary” and second was the issue of dominion status. (Qureshi 1965) Jinnah reminded the British Government about their promises with Indian people and added that now Indian expected those promises into actions. (Proceedings 1930 A: 7) He reminded Macdonald of the promise he had made in the Labor Conference in 1928 that within a period of months, a new dominion “India” would join the Commonwealth with an equal status to others. (Wolpert 1961: 122) On the issue of dominion status Jinnah said;

The Great Britain had a great interest in India and we asked you equally to concede that we have a greater and far more vital interest, than you have, because you have the financial or commercial interest and the political interest but to us it is all in all. (Proceedings 1930 A: 84).

Jinnah further said that there are four parties sitting around the table now, the British party, the Indian princes, the Hindus and the Muslims. (Wolpert 1961: 50) It was the strategy of Jinnah who had long recognized the Muslim interests, needs and demands and declared the Muslims a “party” a distinctive and separated bloc from the British, the Hindus and the Indian princes. Jinnah vehemently advocated full responsible federal government. (Aziz 1997: 50)

After initial session, the members of the RTC were split into many sub-committees. (Aziz 1997: 51) The conference made nine sub-committees on Federal Structure, Provincial Constitution, Minorities, Burma, NWFP, Franchise, Defense, Services and sub-committee Sind. (Qureshi 1965) Jinnah was appointed the member of four sub-committees on Federal Structure, Minorities, Defense and sub-committee on the separation of Sind from Bombay. He actively participated in all the meetings of sub-committees and committee of Conference. In 1st session, Jinnah participated and addressed the committees more than 47 times while in 2nd session he spoke more than 25 meetings. (Qureshi 1965) In the meetings of Federal Structure Committee, Jinnah emphasized on an autonomous and bicameral legislature. (Proceedings 1931 A) According to Jinnah the legislature should have the powers to legislate which may come into operation in all Indian provinces and Indian states. (Proceedings 1931 A) About the elections of the both houses of the legislature, Jinnah recommended that the members of the lower house should be elected directly on adult franchise whereas the members of the upper house should not be elected by the nominees of the British Government or Indian princes but elected by the provincial legislature. (Proceedings 1931 A: 242)

Regarding the future constitution, Jinnah made it clear that no constitution could be enforced in India without the approval of the Indian Muslims. On 13th June 1931, Jinnah emphasized that “no constitution will be acceptable to the *Mussalmans* of India unless due safeguard are provided to their rights and interests which will give them a complete sense of security in the future constitution. (Proceedings 1931 A: 300)

The ideas of Jinnah were supported by Sir Agha Khan and Sir Muhammad Shafi. The Muslim leaders reached on an agreement outside the Conference according to which it was Shafi who was assigned the responsibility of presenting 14 Points of Jinnah being the united demands in the various committees of the Conference by the Muslim delegation. (Proceedings 1931 A: 596) Jinnah expressed his consent because he knew the protection of Muslim interests are more important than his personal popularity.

The final report of the Federal Structure sub-committee contained series of the provisional decisions, which was submitted on 15th January 1931. (Coupland 1968: 117-119) The recommendations of Jinnah about nature and elections of legislature were accepted by the sub-committee for Federal Structure. (Coupland 1968: 117-119) The Report said that there should be a bicameral legislature and seats should be allocated to the lower house on population basis. Furthermore, the Report said that the lower house should be elected directly while the upper house should be elected indirectly by the provincial legislatures. (Coupland 1968: 117-119)

The second important sub-committee of the RTC was the sub-committee for Minorities. It was consisted on 39 members with Ramsay Macdonald was its president. (Proceedings 1932 A: 596) Out of its 39 members, 33 were Indians. The Muslim League was represented by M.A Jinnah, Sir Agha Khan, and some other delegates of the Conference. (Proceedings 1932 B: 13)

In the meetings of sub-committee for Minorities, Jinnah emphasized on the protection of the rights of all minorities in India. He was of the view that in the future constitution, the

minorities communities must be provide due safeguards to their claims as without their co-operation, no constitution could be enforced in India. (Proceedings 1932 B: 13) On the pressure of Jinnah and other Muslim delegates, the Minorities sub-committee unanimously accepted that the new constitution must contain the provisions to assure the minorities committee that their interests would not be prejudiced. (Proceedings 1932 B: 13) It was also accepted that the various claims of minorities regarding their employment in the civil services should be set by the Public Service Commission both at center and in the provinces. (Proceedings 1932 B: 25)

Jinnah was also the member of Defence sub-committee which was constituted under the chairmanship of J.H. Thomas. The meetings of Defence sub-committee were held on 7th, 9th, 12th, and 14th, January 1931 and its report was submitted on 16th January 1931 to the Committee of the Conference. (Proceedings 1932 B: 25) In the meetings of the Defence sub-committee, Jinnah very actively participated and attended its all meetings. In these meetings, Jinnah opposed the recruitment of British Army Officers. He was of the view that about 120 British officers per years were being recruited for Indian, it should be banned and these officers should be taken by British Government from Indians on due merit and ability. He made it clear that even if this is accomplished, it would take at least 20 years to completely indianite the British Indian Army officers. (Proceedings 1932 C: 64)

The Report of the Defence sub-committee recommended that the Defence of India was not the alone responsibility of British Government and declared that it must to an increasing extent be the concern of the Indian people also. (Proceedings 1932 C: 87) It also suggested that the rate of indianization in the British Indian Army should be gradually increased. How the report did not give any specific time framework for indianization of Army as desired by Jinnah. (Proceedings 1932 C: 87) Jinnah dissented on some points of the report of the sub-committee which was noted in the report. He reiterated his points of fixing a period to Indianize the Army and agreed to all its suggestion in order to maintain harmony.

Out of the nine sub-committees of the Conference, one was Sind sub-committee. This sub-committee was given the task to consider the matters regarding to the separation of Sind from Bombay and constitute Sind as a separate province. This sub-committee was appointed under the chairmanship of Lord Russell in which the Muslims delegates were represented by Mr. M.A. Jinnah, Sir Agha Khan and Sir Muhammad Shafi. (Proceedings 1932 C: 87) The meetings of sub-committee for Sind were held on 7th, 9th, 12th, and 14th January 1931 and its report was submitted on 16th January 1931. (Proceedings 1932 D: 15) In these meetings, Jinnah emphasized on the separation of Sind from Bombay and considered it the matter of high importance for Muslim community. Jinnah wanted to declare Sind as a separate province because till 1932 there were only two Muslim majority provinces. The Chairman concluded its report in which it accepted the separation of Sind from Bombay and also recommended the appointment of a committee to examine the financial matters in this regard. (Proceedings 1932 D: 70) Only two members Dr. Moonje and other member were not agree to the Report. (Coupland 1968: 120)

Before the 2nd session of RTC could held, the British Government felt the absence of All Indian National Congress and decided to negotiate with her. Ultimately the discussions were held between Lord Irwin and Gandhi, and both leaders reached on an agreement on 5th March 1931 which called Gandhi-Irwin Pact. (Coupland 1968: 120) According to this agreement, Congress agreed to attend the 2nd session of RTC and called off its Civil Disobedience Movement. (Niranjan 1957: 90) Accordingly, the leaders of Congress released from the jail.

The second session of RTC was held from 7th September 1931 which remained continue till 1st December 1931. (Niranjan 1957: 90) Most of the members of 1st session were back in their seats and the Congress appointed Mr. Gandhi as sole representative to the Conference. (Proceedings 1932 D: 20) A number of issues regarding the establishment of Federal Supreme Court in India, High Courts in provinces, safeguards for the Indian, Muslims composition, the powers of Lower House, matters regarding Indian federation and communal problem came under discussion.

In the general discussion of the Conference, Jinnah demanded for the establishment of Federal Supreme Court in India. He suggested that Supreme Court must be given the powers to hear the cases relating to the constitution and federal laws. (Proceedings 1932 D: 20) He further suggested that Supreme Court should also be given the powers of appellate civil jurisdiction and appellate criminal jurisdiction in place of Privy Council. Regarding the appointments of the judges, Jinnah was not in favour of appointing judges from civil service as was already practiced. (Proceedings 1932 A: 773)

Jinnah suggested that personnel of the Supreme Court must be qualified in all those constitutional matters as constitutional experts. (Proceedings 1932 A: 781) Jinnah also mentioned the subject which was discussed with regard to the invasion of the right of community or of any class relating to the constitution, and if any right of any community is attacked it should go to Supreme Court. (Proceedings 1932 A: 964)

There was a great harmony among the Muslim members of the delegation regarding safeguards and the interests of Indian Muslims. While speaking in the meetings of Federal Structure sub-committee, Jinnah said;

...I am authorized on behalf of the Muslim delegation to state that under the circumstances mentioned by you and explained to us, we are willing that the discussions on the four matters that were mentioned by you may be proceeded with; but we wished to make it clear that were reserve to ourselves and we think that it is essential and vital condition that unless and until the Muslim demands and safeguards are not incorporated in the future constitution it will not be acceptable to us. (Proceedings 1932 B: 1101)

Regarding provincial autonomy, Jinnah wanted the formation of United States of India on American model in which provinces should be autonomous, and enjoying residuary powers. (Proceedings 1932 B: 1215) During the 2nd session of RTC, Jinnah, the Muslim leader and Ambedkar, the leader of fifty million untouchables remained very close to each other and they were agreed with each other not to discuss any other matter unless the problem of communal representation was not settled. (*The Times of India*, 8 Dec. 1930) This close relationship between the leaders of the two largest minorities (Muslims & untouchables) was not liked by Gandhi. In the second session Gandhi claimed that AINC was the only party which represented all Indian therefore no other leader except him could be eligible to discuss any Indian problem. When Ramsay Macdonald addressed the Conference delegates "My Hindus and Muslims friends" Gandhi interrupted with "there are only Indians here". (Khan 1977: 21)

When communal problem was not solved Gandhi tried to resolve it by presenting his own scheme as his last bid. He presented his own scheme for the resolution of communal problem of India which was a mere reproduction of Nehru Report. (Goyal 1988: 233) All the minorities rejected Gandhi's scheme and hence due to the unreasonable attitude of Mr. Gandhi, the communal problem remained unresolved.

On this attitude of Gandhi, Jinnah once again made it clear that the Muslim demands in the Conference were now based on the resolution of All India Muslim Conference (AIMC)

which was passed at Delhi on 25th April 1931. (Aziz 1987: 337) These demands were separate electorate for Muslims, reforms in NWFP & Baluchistan, residuary powers for provinces, separation of Sind from Bombay, weightage for Muslims in their minority provinces, safeguards against communal legislation, Muslim's quota in public service according to the proportionate representation and Muslim representation in ministries. The other minorities also presented a joint demand for the right of separate electorates. (Aziz 1987: 337) In their joint press statements, Sir Shah Nawaz Bhutto, Sir Abdullah Haroon, Mir Muhammad Baloch, M.A. Khauro and more than 20 other leaders of Sind & Baluchistan urged upon British Government to accept Jinnah's 14 Points. (*The Times of India*, 1 April 1931) Later on, another meeting of Muslim League was held on 15th November 1931 in which the council reaffirmed all its former resolutions on the Muslim demands and called the 14 points of Jinnah as the joint demands of all the Muslims of British India.

Although, the second session of RTC also failed to reach on any agreement but however, for the Muslims, both sessions played a vital role in realizing the Congress and British Government that nothing short of the 14 Points of Jinnah were acceptable to the Indian Muslims in the future constitution of India. Therefore at the end of second session, Ramsay Macdonald issued Communal Award on 16th August 1932. (Ahmed 1979: 200) Here, the Muslims were given weightage at the center as well as in Muslim minority provinces. The Hindus were also awarded more seats in Punjab and Bengal than their population warranted. Communal Award conceded 1/3rd representation to the Muslim at the center. The other demands of the Muslims like the separation of Sind from Bombay and reforms in NWFP were also accepted by the British Government. However, the demand of Muslims regarding the introduction of reforms in Baluchistan was not accepted. (Ahmed 1979: 200) Although Communal Award did not accept all the demands of Muslims community but they accepted it in the best interest of country. (Pirzada 1970: 225) It was a fact that the Communal Award was a great achievement of Jinnah, who through his bold stands in both sessions of the Conference compelled the British Government to accept Muslim demands through unilateral declaration. Although, Mr. Jinnah did not attend the 3rd session of RTC as Congress was once again boycotted the third session of RTC and started Civil Disobedience Movement. (Kapur 1985: 293) In the absence Congress and Jinnah, the last session of RTC proved to be a shortest duration as compared to the previous two sessions. (Menon: 1979: 50) The third session was also failed to bring any censuses agreement between Indians and British delegates.

CONCLUSION

Muhammad Ali Jinnah played a key role throughout the proceedings of RTC. Due to his efforts he remained successful in advocating the Indian Constitutional problem before the British Government. The 14 Points of Jinnah were also very minutely explained by the Muslim Delegation in the Conference. Jinnah presented the Muslims as a nation in India and demanded to be equally treated. Due to the efforts of Jinnah, all the key demands regarding the interests of Muslims community like separate electorates, residuary powers for provinces, weightage for Muslims, the separation of Sind from Bombay and reforms in NWFP were accepted by British Government. The proceedings of first Indian RTC were finalized on 24th December 1932. The British Government constituted a Joint Select Committee consisting of both the houses of British Parliament to consider the recommendations of RTC. The Joint Select Committee examined the recommendations of RTC and issued in white paper. After the approval of British Parliament, these deliberations were incorporated in the Government of India Act of 1935.

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