

**COMMUNITARIAN RESPONSE TO THE LAHORE  
RESOLUTION OF 1940 IN THE BRITISH PUNJAB: AN  
ANALYTICAL DISCOURSE  
(Part II)**

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**Abstract.** Romila Thapar writes, “Hindu and Muslim communalists had their organizational bases in the 1920s such as the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha. Despite it being in essence anti-nationalist, the two-nation theory is now effectively not questioned. If anything it is once again being endorsed by some political parties.”<sup>1</sup> It is a stark reality that emergence of a movement has some philosophical background with a variety of demands. The best solution to this problem is to redress the grievances of the aggrieved faction along with a countering philosophy. In British India, the philosophy of nationalism and democracy paved the way for majority rule which intoxicated the Hindus who sidelined the Indian minorities particularly the Muslims and the same is being repeated in present India while dealing with the minorities. The current wave of the ‘Hindu nationalism’ in India with full force roots in the pre-partition political set-up about the Muslim League had been crying for decades and its voice was deemed as conspiracy. Philosophy, ostensibly religious in nature worked as a pushing force behind the political alignment in British India. Western philosophy of territorial and religious nationalism is repeatedly overlooked by many scholars, who take all the political parties except India’s Indian National Congress as ‘communal,’ fundamentalist, and perhaps ‘undemocratic’ too. Congress posed to pursue the western philosophy of secularism; Muslims and Sikhs followed the religious cult of nationalism. A contest between the religious communities appeared on the concessions and opportunities propounded by the *Raj*, which transmuted nationalism to communalism. Consequently, political leadership worked, in fact, mainly for their respective communities. Hindus for Hindustan, Muslims for Pakistan and Sikhs aspired for Sikhistan. Abuse of nationalism or communalism is best dealt with if change comes and makes its place in the equation without brutality and violence. Nonviolent movements represent intellectual contest, rather than physical fight. The Muslims felt jubilation on the passage of the Lahore Resolution<sup>2</sup> on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1940,

which demanded Muslim homeland. The All-India Muslim League set a clear direction of its struggle but it caused anxiety for the Sikh political leadership mainly dominated by the Shiromani Akali Dal. The Hindu press and leaders individually and massively cried against the League's partitioning scheme, while the major Hindu political forum, the Indian National Congress, could not chalk-out an abrupt reaction as a formal strategy. Mental agony overwhelmed the Sikhs on the idea of Pakistan and they relentlessly protested against it. Many tried to prove that the Lahore Resolution reflected a vague plan and Muslim masses did not back the partition scheme, nevertheless the factual position is that the League was very clear about its demand and enjoyed the majority's voice on its back. This article looks into the responses by the political stakeholders in the British Punjab to the Lahore Resolution. (This article consists of two parts. The second part will appear in next issue of *Al-Hikamt*).

**Key Words:** Lahore, Communalism, British rule, religious nationalism, Muslim rights, Pakistan, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs

### **Unionists and Pakistan**

The Unionist Premier, Sir Sikandar Hayat tried to convince the Punjab chapter of the Muslim League to cancel the annual session likely to be held on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1940. He also concluded deliberation with the Governor of the Punjab and both agreed that the ban on this gathering would infuriate the Muslims because the Khaksar issue had already been projected as the British brutality.<sup>3</sup> Sir Sikandar adopted erratic attitude on countering the League's politics. He expressed his views in a public gathering that he had not been against the Lahore Resolution which ensured a peaceful life for the Hindus and Sikhs in the Muslim majority region. Raja Ghazanfar Ali said that the Premier could never part with the League<sup>4</sup> but as a matter of fact, the League's political activities were irritating Sikandar. Feeling himself sandwiched between the League and the non-Muslim allies, he tried to wriggle out of the situation but his efforts came to naught. He was to maintain his coalition government and confidence of Quaid-i-Azam simultaneously. The Premier was obliged that Quaid-i-Azam had never created problems for him even over the issue of the Khaksar-Police clash in 1940 at Lahore. Sir Henry Craik wrote to Linlithgow on the wise leadership of Jinnah that he did not provoke clash between the government headed by a Muslim and the League. He not only facilitated the Punjab ministry but also secured the unity in the League circle. He further wrote that through his wisdom, Jinnah "increased his influence over Leaguers in the Punjab."<sup>5</sup> The

influence of Quaid-i-Azam on the Unionist Muslims after the Jinnah-Sikandar Pact had immensely increased as Ahmad Yar Daultana admitted in his letter to Jinnah, "I am a member of the Muslim League and my relations of loyalty with you will always remain un-shattered."<sup>6</sup>

In fact, amidst the inflammatory atmosphere because of the League's partition scheme, the Premier tried to dilute the situation. The League's Resolution had tarnished the secular image of Sir Sikandar. To remove the horrors of the non-Muslim allies, he in December 1940 stated that he could never concede the League demand to establish the Muslim domination in the Punjab.<sup>7</sup> But his anti-Pakistan statements were not sufficient to satisfy the Sikhs. He was informed that the Sikhs might mount pressure for their own independent state and the on-going communal tussle might result in some major clashes in the province. In the beginning, it was perceived that the Pakistan demand was one of the bargaining tactics of the League but once and again it became clear to Sikandar that the League's struggle was not a phony war. All such developments upset him because by opposing Pakistan his image as a Muslim leader would be damaged while by siding with the Muslim state he could lose the non-Muslim support. To counter this difficult situation, he tried to adopt a reconciliatory role between the rival forces.<sup>8</sup> Quaid-i-Azam did not pressurize the Unionist Muslims over the issue of the Pakistan scheme though a severe criticism from the old Leaguers came against them. They were of the view that the Unionist Muslims were not working fairly with the League and its leadership. They raised many questions before Quaid-i-Azam, i.e., the passive role of the Unionist Muslims on the Pakistan issue, by-elections and the League membership but he did not think it a right time to take action.

Sir Sikandar had to appease the Muslims by presenting himself a pure Muslim leader and, on the other hand, opposed Quaid-i-Azam to pacify the non-Muslim allies as he did in a speech at Lyallpur. While addressing the Pakistan Conference arranged by the students, he portrayed himself as a pure Muslim by saying that he prayed five times regularly but Quaid-i-Azam did not. He also named Pakistan as '*Lughwastan*' (farcical) but the audience shouted "Pakistan Zindabad, Quaid-i-Azam Zindabad" and none uttered the same appreciation for Sir Sikandar<sup>9</sup> which was a shocking gesture for the Unionist Premier. He spoke to the Punjab Legislative Assembly on 11<sup>th</sup> March 1941 rejecting the Muslim *Raj* in the Punjab as the League had envisaged but simultaneously "Sikandar dared not repudiate Jinnah."<sup>10</sup> According to

the government reports, he “in deference to Mr. Jinnah’s unique position in Moslem community was reluctant to cut adrift from the League.”<sup>11</sup> In fact, the Sikhs were criticizing Sikandar’s participation in the arrangements of the League session and drafting of the Lahore Resolution. They sought what stand particularly on the Pakistan scheme the Premier had. Therefore, in the address to the Assembly he cleared his position:

I have often heard them [Sikhs] say: ‘We are nationalists and therefore we will not allow any partition of India’- very laudable sentiments....But I should like to point out to my Sikh friends that if they press for a powerful and superimposed Centre at the expense of the provinces, they will be doing gross injustice to the Punjab and incalculable harm to their own community. They should not forget that they constitute only one per cent of the population of India and even if they get 100 per cent weightage they cannot expect to get more than 2 per cent representation at the Centre....<sup>12</sup>

Quaid-i-Azam asserted his authority in the Punjab that meant an overt challenge to the Unionist leaders who never prepared their allies to counter such a threatening drive. The Unionist coalition remained vulnerable against the political parties working at national level. Therefore, they could not set good traditions in the domains of politics immersed in communalism. Sikhs and Hindus of the Punjab ran to the Congress while Muslims sought refuge of the Muslim League when required. The Unionists confronted the perplex situation because trivial issues might be dealt as political gimmick but the demand for a separate homeland could never be dealt with as a routine politics therefore Sir Sikandar had to face a grievous situation created by the League.

### **The Muslim Response**

The demand for a Muslim state was taken as the best solution to the Muslim-non-Muslim communalism in India. Whether the Indian Muslims fell in the Muslim majority areas or not, they seemed enlightened with the idea of an independent, standard and prosperous life of their co-religious people. Urban as well as the rural areas stood behind the demand for Muslim state. The League’s influence in the Muslim rural areas was growing rapidly and the people were zealously ready to register themselves as the League members. In October 1940, the Muslims of Gohana (district Rohtak) wrote to the Hon. Secretary of the League that a *maulvi* (Muslim cleric) came to them and asked for the League membership fees so that the League could issue the membership forms. They complained that the people paid the asked fees to the *maulvi* but still they received no membership forms as he had

promised.<sup>13</sup> The dilemma of the League membership was that the League had poor interaction with the rural workers. Nevertheless, no evidence shows that the Muslim masses got the League membership forms and refused to fill them out. The common Muslims took part in the struggle for Pakistan as they could afford. The main hurdle was the limited franchise which debarred the mass role in the politics. Nevertheless, the processions and mass gatherings activated the commoners to fully participate in the politics. Moreover, the League plunged into the regional politics just before the 1937 elections and since the critical issues busied the leadership in coping with the newly emerged issues. The League leaders tried their level best to bring the masses into the League's fold.

According to Sir Craik, the League's resolution produced three results which elevated the Muslims to speak more forcefully for their rights, including the status of the League, unchallenged leadership of Jinnah and the unanimity of the Muslims on the Pakistan demand.<sup>14</sup> The Lahore Resolution was eventually to provide a rallying point for Muslims, from the majority and minority provinces, who had possessed different political interests. Lord Linlithgow could not afford the loss of the League's support due to the on-going war and according to Gulati, the Muslim leadership was making the full use of the "golden opportunity" given by the war "to manoeuvre for political advantage."<sup>15</sup> The Viceroy reassured the League about the minority rights and that the power could not be transferred to the Indians unless they would arrive at some mutually agreed settlement.<sup>16</sup> The Viceroy's flexible attitude towards the League further increased the Sikh apprehensions. They were sacrificing their lives for the British masters in the battlefield and in return expected a warm response in the case of their demands particularly against the League but their whole efforts were proving futile. It was really a somber picture for the Sikh community.

### **League Assures Sikh Rights**

In the Lahore Resolution, the Muslim leadership tried to determine the majority and minority rights. It accepted the cultural, economic, religious, administrative, political and other rights of the minorities. This could satisfy the Sikhs who should have come to the table with Muslims to bargain on the lines given by the League in the Lahore Resolution. But without consultation they declared 'crusades' against the Pakistan scheme. The propaganda was perilously worsening the Muslim-Sikh relations in all the areas of the Subcontinent. The

Congress leaders reacted not as zealously as the Sikhs did. During the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual gathering of the Muslim Students Federation in January 1940 at Aligarh, Liaquat Ali Khan had clarified that the League was not an adversary to its sister community's rights. He made "it perfectly clear that the League wanted freedom for every community. Congress nationalism on the other hand wanted domination of one community on all others."<sup>17</sup> On 1<sup>st</sup> April 1940, talking about the Sikh position, Jinnah said that they would be an effective community in Pakistan, while in India "their voice would be negligible." In the Muslim Punjab, they would enjoy an honourable and effective place.<sup>18</sup>

The Muslim leaders were fully optimistic about the popular response by the Muslims to the Pakistan idea. They were giving hope to the Muslims that the government would work on *Sharia*<sup>19</sup> in Pakistan as Raja of Mahmudabad shared at Lahore<sup>20</sup> since, he was well aware of the impact of the theocratic version of Islam perceived by the non-Muslims. Through a letter to Quaid-i-Azam, he indicated towards the campaign against Pakistan launched by the Hindus of Lucknow. He wrote that the biased attitude of the Hindus would create a favourable atmosphere within the Muslim community. Raja Sahib wrote that the Muslim leadership must be careful while using the term 'Islamic state' because the non-Muslims feared the repetition of the Muslim theocracy they had already experienced during the Mughal rule. He clarified:

When I say Islamic State I do not mean a Moslem State. The Hindu and other sects are really affraid [afraid] of the repetition of another Ghorī, Ghaznavī, or Moghal empire and they are perfectly justified in holding these suspicions against all Moslem domination...Their past experience...as well as our...have shown that a Moslem power may not be necessarily be an Islamic one.<sup>21</sup>

It is perfectly clear that the League's struggle for Pakistan was not to enslave any community or to revive the memories of the Mughal rule rather the League assuring minority rights had moved a democratic solution to the communal problem of British India.

### **Conclusion**

Many rave against the League leadership that they were confused about the demand passed on 23 March 1940 but the factual position is that the Leaguers from top to bottom were very much clear about what had been demanded at Minto Park, Lahore. The noise raised by the Hindus and Sikhs also testifies to the clear meanings of the Lahore Resolution in their minds. It was that what they had understood therefore they started castigating the League's demand. Not a single non-Muslim

leader said that he would need details to comment on it. Instead, they issued anti-League and provocative statements against what the League pledged on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1940. Moreover, every demand has its ideological background and long history of actions, so the non-Muslim reaction to brush aside the Muslim demand simply commenting it a 'confused' move, was unnatural. Actually, the League leadership comprehensively worked out the idea of Pakistan as Quaid-i-Azam wrote a letter to J. G. Laithwaite, Private Secretary to Viceroy, on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1939, that the British would have to concede the idea of a Muslim state.<sup>22</sup> Although the word 'States' was replaced with 'State' in 1946 but, according to M. A. H. Ispahani, the word 'States' was a 'typographical error' as enunciated by Quaid-i-Azam:

...Quaid-i-Azam replied that the word 'States' was a mistake and had cropped up, probably as a result of a typographical error...what really mattered was the intent and not the word in fact.<sup>23</sup>

Quaid-i-Azam always talked of single Muslim state that testifies to the above-mentioned quotation.

Two resolutions passed at Lahore significantly impacted the course of the Punjab politics. The first Lahore resolution of 1929<sup>24</sup> concluded by the Congress aimed to please the Sikhs while the Lahore Resolution of 1940 managed by the Muslim League was to please the Muslims. To solve the communal issue, the Muslims and Sikhs seemed quoting both the resolutions from time to time in the subsequent years. The Ravi Pledge of 1929 restored confidence between Hindus and Sikhs while the Pakistan Resolution declared the political objective of the Indian Muslims. The League utilized the Resolution in achieving the Muslim state while Sikhs used the Ravi Pledge as an evidence of the Congress' betrayal. They also reminded the Hindu leadership about the pledge regarding Sikh consent before any communal patch-up with the Muslims. Despite deviation from the Ravi Pledge, the Congress succeeded in securing the Sikh sympathy though the Sikhs kept on crying against the Congress' attitude. The Lahore Resolution widened the gulf between the Muslims and non-Muslims who opposed the idea of Pakistan tooth and nail.

The year 1940 proved turbulent in the Punjab politics pushing the regional and national politics to the new chapter of the communal contests. The communities living in the Punjab started thinking in the perspective of the new political and communal tussle. The good days

when the communities used to live with compromising attitude seemed to have gone forever. The World War-II and the Lahore Resolution created uncertainty among the minorities. The communalists started projecting negative elements of the combined society. The press and writers started comparative analysis of the communities in the light of the bitter past and new political trends. The Sikhs and Hindus complained against the oppressive treatment of the so-called cross-communal government of the Punjab dominated by the Unionist Muslims. Quaid-i-Azam had turned to the regional politics before the elections of 1936-37 and according to Nijjar, within about an year he won favour of the top Muslim Unionist leadership which pleased the Muslim masses throughout India.<sup>25</sup> After the win over the Muslims, he announced what the Muslims desired as a settlement of the communal tangle. The League demanded a separate homeland for the Muslims as a sole solution to the constitutional and communal problem while the anti-Muslim organizations and political parties construed it as a 'civil war.' The Hindu and Sikh communities started breathing fire against the partitioning proposal of India. It created a "civil war" mentality throughout the society.<sup>26</sup> The Sikhs highlighted the historical bitterness of the Muslim rule in India and propagated that Pakistan would eliminate the Sikhs and Sikhism from the earth.

The Sikhs were dealing with the 20<sup>th</sup> century politics in the light of the Mughal history, notwithstanding, all the communities enjoyed freedom of worship during the British era therefore the Unionist government whom they usually called the 'Muslim *Raj*' hardly damaged any religion. Rather, the major problems remained of a political nature. The Sikhs saw the Muslim League as a theocratic party but they had no example to quote that the League had supported any anti-Sikh movement. They could see the League leaders' response when the Mazhabi Sikhs in March 1940 demanded rights as a separate community from the Sikh *panth*. The leaders of the Mazhabi Sikhs contacted the Muslim leaders and desired to discard Sikhism. Newspaper, *The Civil and Military Gazette*, reported that the League leaders avoiding provocation against Sikh sectarianism did not respond zealously to the Mazhabi Sikhs. They never welcomed the Sikh conversions to Islam.<sup>27</sup> This incidence was never propagated and projected either by the League or the Sikhs which testified that the League leadership did not plan any policy of religious persecution or theocracy in the proposed Pakistan. Most of the political and religious India unleashed wrath against the League's demand for the Muslim state. Although a democratic move and passed through a democratic way, the Sikhs, Hindus, Unionists,

Muslim religious organizations and British came out to oppose the Pakistan Resolution but the popularity of Pakistan scheme among the Muslim community convinced the stakeholders to endorse it as a popular demand.

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup>Romila Thapar, *The Past and Present: Forging Contemporary Identities Through History* (New Delhi: Aleph Book Co., 2014), 111.

<sup>2</sup>It is generally perceived that the non-Muslim press projected the Lahore Resolution as the ‘Pakistan’ Resolution’ but as a matter of fact, the Muslim or pro-Muslim press too used the word ‘Pakistan’ as *Civil and Military Gazette* used the same wording the very next day. *CMG*, 24 March 1940.

<sup>3</sup>Ikram Ali Malik, *Muslim League Session 1940*, 175-177.

<sup>4</sup>Secret Police Abstract of Intelligence, S-410, para 140.

<sup>5</sup>Anita Inder Singh, *The Origins of the Partition of India*, 60.

<sup>6</sup>Letter from Ahmad Yar Daultana to M. A. Jinnah on 28 March 1940, in Rizwan Ahmad, *The Quaid-E-Azam Papers 1940* (Karachi: East & West Publishing Company, 1976), 96-97.

<sup>7</sup>FR 15 December 1941, L/PJ/5/244.

<sup>8</sup>Qalb-i-Abid, *Muslim Politics in the Punjab*, 241.

<sup>9</sup>Letter from Malik Barkat Ali to Jinnah on 21 July 1941 in Rizwan Ahmad, comp., *The Quaid-i-Azam Papers, 1941-42* (Karachi: East & West Publishing Company, 1976), 63-64.

<sup>10</sup>David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (London: A.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1988), 183-85.

<sup>11</sup>External Affairs Department, Government of India to Secretary of State for India, 29 July 1943, IOR: L/PJ/8/662 (Punjab Ministry Affairs and Appreciations).

<sup>12</sup>V. P. Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, rep. (Kothrud, Poona: Sangam Books Ltd., 1979), 456-457.

<sup>13</sup>Letter from Gul Muhammad Khan, Honourary Secretary, Muslim League Gohana to Hon. Secretary, Muslim League, Delhi, 24 October 1940, vol. 132, Archives of Freedom Movement, NAP.

<sup>14</sup>Letter from Craik to Linlithgow on 1 April 1940 in Lionel Carter, ed., *Punjab Politics, 1940-1943* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2005), 108.

<sup>15</sup>K. C. Gulati, *The Akalis Past and Present* (New Delhi: Ashjanak Publications, 1974), 87.

<sup>16</sup>Ram Gopal, *Indian Muslims: A Political History, 1858-1947* (Lahore: Book Traders, 1976), 296-97.

<sup>17</sup>*CMG*, 4 January 1940.

<sup>18</sup>“The Sikh Problem,” file no. 930, QAP.

<sup>19</sup>Islamic laws

<sup>20</sup>Sharifuddin Pirzada, *Foundations of Pakistan*, 341.

<sup>21</sup>Letter from Raja of Mahmudabad to M. A. Jinnah on 28 July 1940 in Rizwan Ahmad, *The Quaid-e-Azam Papers 1940*, 111-112.

<sup>22</sup>Letter from M. A. Jinnah to J. G. Laithwaite, Private Secretary to Viceroy on 1 May 1939, MSS Eur F/125/148, Linlithgow Papers; see also, Ikram Ali Malik, *Muslim League Session 1940*, 137.

<sup>23</sup>Ikram Ali Malik, *Muslim League Session 1940*, 287-288.

<sup>24</sup>The Congress passed a resolution on 31 December 1929 (on the bank of River Ravi) at Lahore in which they assured the Sikhs that no communal settlement would be conceded without their consent. Also mentioned as Ravi Pledge of 1929 in the text.

<sup>25</sup>Bakhshish Singh Nijjar, *Punjab under the British Rule, 1849-1947*, vol. III (1932-1947) (Lahore: Book Traders, n.d.), 160-161.

<sup>26</sup>Mitra, *The Indian Annual Register 1919-1947*, vol. II, 1940, 73.

<sup>27</sup>CMG, 13 March 1940; see also letter from the President Bawa Jiwan Singh Dal (Mazhabi Sikhs' organization) to Quaid-i-Azam, n.d. file- F-930, QAP.