

South Asia Analysis Group

Published on *South Asia Analysis Group* (<http://www.southasiaanalysis.org>)

[Home](#) > The Ghost of Muslim League- Still haunting?

The Ghost of Muslim League- Still haunting?

Submitted by asiaadmin2 on Sat, 09/22/2012 - 12:15

Paper No. 865

19/12/2003

by R.Upadhyay.

Arif Mohammad Khan, the defeated hero of secularist-Muslims in famous Shah Bano case in an interview (Times of India dated November 18, 2003) was forthright when he said, "the name Muslim League is anathema to this country". But as a man of conviction he should have launched assertive movement and generated collective concern among the Muslim leaders and masses on the issue. He has not done so far.

After Partition of India, it was expected that a large number of Muslim leaders who belonged to the All India Muslim League, and who remained in India would bury the ghost of Muslim league once and for all and yet it was not to be.

Mindset of Separate Identity.

Still responding to the call of Ibrahim Khan's 'Red Pamphlet' in 20th century - "Ye Mussalman arise awake! Do not read in the same school with Hindus" (Struggle for Freedom by R.C.Majumdar, Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan 1988, page 106. Quoted from Muslim League's Unfinished Agenda, 2003) –a majority of Muslim masses are not sending their children in government's secular schools. This shows that the communal legacy of AIML has kept the mental under-current of larger section of Indian Muslims stirred and made them contemptuous towards majority rule. Such attitude of the Muslims remained a major source of the prevailing mistrust between the two major religious communities in India. To dilute this mindset is certainly a difficult task but not impossible if the Muslim leadership initiates introspection with a realistic approach.

Contrary to all the earlier emigrants in India, who got their respective cultural identity dissolved in the cultural cauldron of Indian civilisation, which is popularly known as composite culture, the Muslims maintained their distinct cultural identity as the main ingredient of their religion. Muslim invaders while converting their subjects either forcefully or through allurements compelled them to forget their cultural heritage and past and linked them to their religious identity. This identity became the basis for separatist movement only to revive political domination of Muslim elite in the Indian sub-continent. From Shah Waliullah onward the successive political Islamists like Sir Sayed Ahmad, Sir Iqbal and Mohammad Ali Jinnah and movements for their avowed objective like Deoband, Aligarh and Pakistan was only a protracted battle for the political domination of Muslim elite in the name of religion. It had nothing to do with the spiritual aspect of Islam.

Political eclipse of Muslim ruling class, declining cultural supremacy of Islam and consolidation of British power in India became a rallying point for them. Becoming more and more restive they and their successive generations carried forward the medieval psyche of domination and gradually created the bogey of the distinct identity of their community. Hindu-Muslim relation underwent psychological changes with these developments. While the Hindus accepted the British regime as change of master, for Muslims it was a loss of power. The parallel movements of respective cultural revivalism by both the Hindus and the Muslims further widened the gulf between the two. While the Muslim orthodoxy launched Deoband movement "in reaction to the challenge posed by British power and Hindu demographic superiority to Indian Muslims" (Al Qaeda - Casing a Shadow of Terror by Jason Burke, 2003, Page86), Sir Sayed Ahmad launched Aligarh movement to modernise the Muslims with loyalty to the alien government. Both these movements however, had a common goal to ensure the separate identity of Muslims and their supremacy over the Hindus. Besides, they also viewed the formation of Brahmo Samaj by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in Bengal and Arya Samaj in Punjab as a movement against them.

The foundation of Indian National Congress in 1885 was an attempt to narrow the Hindu-Muslim divide and place the genuine grievances of all the communities in the country before the British. But Sir Sayed and other Muslim leaders like Ameer Ali projected the Congress as a representative body of Hindus and thus, thwarted the first genuine attempt in the country for Hindu-

Muslim unity. Poor participation of Muslims in Congress proves it. "Of the seventy-two delegates attending the first session of the Congress only two were Muslims" (From Consultation to Confrontation by M.R.Rahman, page 4,1970). Muslim leaders opposed the Congress tooth and nail on the plea that Muslims' participation in it would create an unfavourable reaction among the rulers against their community (Ibid. page 5).

The Aligarh Movement

The Aligarh movement created a new middle class in Muslim society. But this class even with modern education carried the banner of separatism in the name of Muslim nationalism and maintained a visible social distance from the Hindus. "Middle class Muslim nationalism sabotaged the natural process of electoral democratisation" (Ameena A.Saeed in an interview in Times of India dated November 29, 2003). Internationally known historian R.C.Majumdar in his book 'Struggle for Freedom' (Page 127, 1969) maintained: "Aligarh movement gradually alienated the Muslims from the Hindus in the political field.... The anti-Hindu feeling was conspicuously shown in the Muslims attitude towards Indian National Congress since its very inception". He further said: "It occurred to the Muslims that in order to counteract the political organisation of the Hindus, particularly the Congress, they must have a central organisation of their own" Page 150, 1969). He added that "the spirit of Syed Ahmad dominated the Muslims who with rare exceptions, regarded themselves as Muslim first and Indian afterwards" (Ibid. Page 152). He quoted Sir Percival Griffiths, ICS, who "stressed the Muslim belief that their interest must be regarded as completely separate from those of the Hindus, and that no fusion of the two communities was possible" Ibid. Page153). Observations of Majumdar confirm that religious obsession of Muslims remained a potential factor during freedom struggle and formation of All India Muslim League (AIML).

Muslim orthodoxy or its patrons in elite sections in the community with the sword of 'religious identity' and slogan - 'Islam is in danger' continuously challenged the political awakening in Indian society if it directly or indirectly affected their superior status and influence. They therefore viewed the democratic and secular movement launched by the Congress - as challenge to their supremacy over the Hindus. Acceptance of Devanagari script and Hindi as an official language of United Province now Uttar Pradesh in place of Persian in 1900 by Lieutenant Governor A. Macdonnel was another significant development to stir the Muslims on communal line. No such aggressive resistance was made when the British replaced Persian with English in late thirties of nineteenth century. Sir Sayed Ahmed, died in 1898 but his followers in defense of Urdu language launched agitation against the decision of the representative of British power in United Province.

On first October 1906 a 35-member delegation of the Muslim nobles, aristocracies, legal professionals and other elite section of the community mostly associated with Aligarh movement gathered at Simla under the leadership of Aga Khan to present an address to Lord Minto. They demanded proportionate representation of Muslims in government jobs, appointment of Muslim judges in High Courts and members in Viceroy's council etc. Though, Simla deputation failed to obtain any positive commitment

from the Viceroy, it worked as a catalyst for foundation of AIML to safeguard the interests of the Muslims.

Under the active leadership of Aligarhians, the movements for Muslim separatism created political awakening among the Muslims on communal line. This ideology of political exclusivism in the name of religion gave birth to AIML in the session of All India Mohammedan Educational Conference held in Dacca (December 27-30, 1906). Nawab Salimullah, Chairman of the reception committee and convener of the political meeting proposed the creation of AIML. A 56-member provisional committee was constituted with prominent Muslim leaders from different parts of the country. Even some Muslim leaders within Congress like Ali Imam, Hasan Imam, Mazharul Haque (All Barristers from Bihar) and Hami Ali Khan (Barrister from Lucknow) were included in the committee. Mohsin-ul-Mulk and Viqar-ul-Mulk were jointly made the secrearies. After the death of Mohsin-ul-Mulk in 1907, Viqar-ul-Mulk was in full control of the League. First session of the League was held at Karanchi on December 29-30, 1907 with Adamjee Peerbhoy as its President.

Mohammad Ali Jinnah, a prominent leader of the Congress did not join the AIML till 1913 though, he supported the League movement for separate electorate for Muslims. He even successfully contested against the League candidate for the election of Viceroy's Legislative Council. Within the Congress he however always tried to bargain for one-third reservation for his community.

Formation of All India Muslim League:

The formation of AIML was a major landmark in the history of modern India. The first formal entry of a centrally organised political party exclusively for Muslims had the following objectives:

- * "To promote among the Mussalmans of India, feelings of loyalty to the British Government, and remove any misconception that may arise as to the instruction of Government with regard to any of its measures.
- * To protect and advance the political rights and interests of Mussalmans of India, and to respectfully represent their needs and aspirations to the Government.
- * To prevent the rise among the Mussalmans of India of any feeling of hostility towards other communities without prejudice to the afore mentioned objects of the League" (From Consultation to Confrontation by M. R.Rahman, 1970, page38).

AIML was a culmination of Aligarh movement launched three decades before its formation. In fact this movement sowed the seed of partition in AIML and kept the movement of Muslim separatism alive for indefinite period as a part of pan-Islamic movement. Noted Muslim scholar Mushirul Hasan in his book 'Islam in the Subcontinent' (Page 254, 2002) quoted from "The Memoir of Aga Khan: "...And surely, it may also be claimed that the independent, sovereign independent nation of Pakistan was born in the Muslim University of Aligarh".

Initially AIML remained a pocket organisation of urbanised Muslims. However, the support of the British Government to the political Islamists in their non-secular intention as well as contemptuous attitude towards majority rule, helped the League to become the sole representative body of Indian Muslims. To confront the challenge of modern political system, the AIML successfully achieved the status of separate electorates for the Muslims within three years of its formation. It was the first big achievement of the party, which granted separate constitutional identity to the Muslims. Lucknow Pact in 1916 put official seal on the separate identity of Muslims, which was another landmark in the separatist movement launched by the AIML.

Despite the initial success AIML could not attract the rural Muslim masses because of the absence of Ulama from politics. But Maulana Abul Kalam Azad convinced the Ulamas to support the movement against Darul Harb (Land of war) rule of British. Formation of Jamaat-e-Ulema-e-Hind in 1919 was the first debut of Ulama in politics. Its prominent role in Khilafat movement gradually made politics subservient to Islam in India. Mahatma Gandhi supported Khilafat Movement to gain the confidence of the Muslims but Khilafat Committee did not merge with the Congress. With the Ulama stealing the show in Khilafat movement, the AIML practically became dormant for some time. But the failure of Khilafat movement however, created an internal rift among the Uemas and some of them indirectly supported the AIML, which was always dominated by political Islamists. By late twenties the gap of mistrust between the Congress and the AIML widened further when the former rejected the demand of the latter for minimum one-third reservation for Muslims in the provincial and central legislative bodies.

Enter JINNAH:

Jinnah became disgusted when he failed to bargain with the Congress in his own terms and left for England. He took political exile and started his law practice there. But under persuasion of Liaqat Ali his political ambition enticed him again to return to India in 1935. For over thirty years, Jinnah maintained his image as an ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity. He had not even supported Khilafat movement, as he did not endorse religion as part of politics. But when his intellectual genius was not recognised by his community he used the legacy of Muslim thinkers to fulfill his political ambition. He instilled a contemptuous attitude towards the system of majority rule in the mind of Muslims, which gradually became a legacy for their future generations in Indian sub-continent. Changing his strategy he decided to ignite the chord of religious feelings of his community.

Initiated by Sir Sayed Ahmad the ideology of two-nation theory gained popularity among the Muslim middle class particularly when Mohammad Iqbal justified it in 1930 session of AIML, when he supported 'Muslim India within India' on the plea that the Hindus were two different nations and they cannot live together. Moreover, with the Muslim elite interested in sharing power, the demand for separate Muslim homeland in northwest formed a major plank of the League's activities. Gradually, this theory became the ideological mascot of the AIML.

Till the first half of nineteen-thirties AIML was not a well-organised party and it had no grassroots level support of the Muslim masses. Jinnah reorganised it when Government of India Act 1935 gave an indication of the British thinking to transfer some power to the natives. He became the permanent president of the party after a brief tenure of Sir Wazir Hasan in 1936 session of the League. However, despite his aggressive communal politics the massive victory of the Congress in Constituent assembly election of 1937 was a major setback for the AIML. Jinnah demanded a coalition government with proportionate share of power to Muslims. The Congress, which got massive victory, rejected the demand, which Jinnah used as a handle to provoke the Muslim masses. He projected the growing popularity of the Congress as a symptom of impending Hindu rule over Muslims. Donning communal image and changing his political outlook overnight his main thrust of campaign against the Congress was based on the premise that the latter was a Hindu party responsible for suppression of the Muslims. Showing more and more loyalty to the British during Second World War he derived political dividend in form of his recognition parallel to the top leaders of the Congress and as an equal share-partner to rule sub-continent.

The Concept of Pakistan:

Jinnah picked up the word Pakistan first time coined by Rehmat Ali, an Indian student in Cambridge in 1933, and launched an aggressive propagation of two-nation theory. Getting the support of the political Islamists including the premiers of Punjab and Bengal Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan and A.K.Fazlur Rahman respectively, the AIML in its Lahore session in 1940 adopted a resolution demanding partition of the country with a separate state of Pakistan for Muslims.

With the demand for a separate state for Muslims, Jinnah emerged as a pan-Indian Muslim leader and was popularly known as 'Qaid-e-Azam' (Great leader). He became so popular that even the exchange of population, his most impractical solution as basis for bifurcation of the country did not find opposition in Muslim masses. Thus, we find that the political ideology of Iqbal, medieval psyche of the Muslim masses and manipulative genius of Jinnah with his obsessive egoism combined together in the sectarian aspirations of Muslim League. Gradually, his separatist movement became a binding force to unite the Muslims behind the demand for Pakistan.

The conviction of the Muslims that they are a distinct nationality due to their separate cultural and religious identity became so deep that in Constituent Assembly election in 1946, AIML "secured 425 out of 496 reserved for the Muslims. It could be said therefore, that the Indian Muslims were overwhelmingly in favour of Pakistan" (Islamic influence in Indian Society by Prof. M. Mujeeb, Former V.C. of Jamia Milia, 1972). This conviction gradually became a major source to strengthen the political ideology of AIML. Despite the pacifying effort of Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress party, Jinnah remained obdurate on the issue of Pakistan and accelerated the movement by igniting the religious and cultural distinction of the Muslims more and more violent. Under these circumstances, when Pakistan was born on August 14, 1947 after truncation of India it was the victory of Islam for Muslim orthodoxy.

"The obvious reason for the separation from India of the region, that is now called Pakistan, were the irreconcilable difference between the two major communities inhabiting it" (From Jinnah to Zia :Muhammad Munir, Chief Justice of Pakistan, Rtd, 1980, Page19, Lahore). Maulana Maudoodi, the founder of the JEI while departing for Pakistan in his message addressed to Indian Muslims said:

"Islam by virtue of which you call yourselves as Muslims, its spirit is ceaselessly at war with the unholy spirit of secular and national democracy and its foundational principles. Islam and this system can never go together. If you really believe in Islam which was revealed by God through Muhammed, then wherever you are you must resist the establishment of this nationalistic secular democracy" (Indian Muslims by Asghar Ali Engineer, 1985, page 128-29).

It is a known fact of modern Indian history that the AIML was founded to carry forward the non-secular intention of Muslim thinkers after collapse of Muslim power in India. A large majority of Indian Muslims, who stayed back in India after partition

belonged to All India Muslim League (AIML) and supported its demand for a separate land for them. It was expected that Muslims in new State of India would completely bury the separatist two-nation ideology. But the way their leadership continued voicing concern over the grievances of its community shows that the ghost of Muslim League remained haunting their mind.

"While writing in his journal 'Al Hilal' during 1913, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad had said that no Muslim need join any political party. Islam itself is a party whose name is Hizbullah. The Imam and the Sultan are rolled into one and this integrated concept was personified by the Caliph of the representative of the Prophet" (Muslim League's Unfinished Agenda by Prafull Goradia, 2003, page 30). But in changed circumstances Azad not only joined the Congress but also accepted a berth in Nehru cabinet. He projected himself as a secular Muslim leader and accepted India also as an abode for the followers of Islam. However, his co-religionists failed to cut off their mental links with the separatist agenda of Muslim League and allowed their leaders to exploit them as pawns in the communal play being played by the ruling elite to manage political power.

The bitter hangover of the communal struggle of AIML and its violent and disturbing role continuously polluted the mental undercurrent of Indian Muslims. Maulana Azad made some effort for secular mobility of the Muslims asking them not to launch any political party exclusively for Muslims but failed to convince them decisively. "At the Lucknow conference on December 28, 1948, Maulana Azad called for a liquidation of all communal organisations. He advised even Jamaat-e-Ulema Hind to keep scrupulously aloof from political squabbles" (Secularisation of Muslim Behaviour by Moin Shakir, 1973, page 64). "After Independence the secular nationalist approach of Maulana Azad failed and the separatist approach of the Muslim League, the Jamaat-e-Islami (JEI) and a section of Jamaat-e-Ulema-e-Hind (JUH) gained ground" (Ibid. Page 65).

Emergence of Indian Union Muslim League:

The birth of Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) from the womb of AIML in December 1947 was a part of that intention, which helped in keeping the spirit of the mother organisation alive and gave a message to Indian Muslims - Muslim League is dead - Long Live Muslim league. Though, the IUML could not expand its base beyond some pockets of south India, the very existence of a political party exclusively for Muslims remained a source of agony for non-Muslims. The silence of Indian Muslims over the birth of IUML on the other hand also widened the gap of mistrust between the two communities. Thus, the greater challenge the Indian Muslims have been facing since Independence is that of Indian nationalism. "In strict sense a nationalism can exist only in a State whose citizens are all Muslims and could so behave" (Nicola A.Zidaeh: Islam in modern World, Dacca, 1964, page 164-65: Quoted by Moin Shakir in his book 'Secularisation of Muslim Behaviour, 1973, page 21).

Mohammad Ismail, the founder President of IUML, the first political party of Muslims in new State of India even bargained with Congress to "recognise the League as sole representative of Muslims" (A.G.Noorani - The Muslims in India, page 7, 2003). The

Congress did not oblige Ismail but for its vote bank politics, encouraged the Muslims to raise voice over the issues related to their religious identity. Bharati Muslims convention in November 1953 at Aligarh was the first attempt by a group of Muslims in this direction, which had a far reaching consequence in isolation of the Muslims from the rest of the population.

The British offered separate electorates, reservation of seats in municipalities and legislative assemblies to wean away the Muslim elite. The Indian National Congress while coming to power in new state of India adopted the similar tactics of the British to inculcate the habit among the Muslims for expecting special consideration from the government. It provided special privilege to the Muslims in the name of religious minority, when they were deprived of the concessions after partition. Granting new constitutional status under Article 29 and 30 and providing partial treatment to religious minority, the Congress helped the Muslims to revive the politics earlier played by the Muslim League. The same Congress party, which had rejected the proposal of Jinnah in 1937 for a coalition Government with Muslim League, joined the coalition government in Kerala with IUML. Such opportunistic design of the Congress encouraged the political Islamists to raise collective voice against the alleged injustice to their community.

AIML disappeared from Indian political scene after partition. Even the JEI remained on the periphery of Muslim politics in India. However, their separatist ideological path remained the main ingredient of Muslim politics in the country. 'Islam is in danger'; opposition to Vande Mataram song, tri-colour flag, use of Hindi at the cost of Urdu, anti-cow slaughter stand of the Hindus and the Hindu-Muslim riots in which Muslim suffered more were the frivolous charges and grievances of Jinnah against the 'Hindu-Congress'. These demands however, re-emerged as 'genuine grievances' of Muslims even after the death of Jinnah in 1948.

Demand for separate district of Malappuram on the plea of Muslim majority area by the IUML, Muslims obsession to Islamic personal law, linking Aligarh Muslim University with religious identity of Muslims exposed their non-secular intention. Are the issues like Urdu, reservation for Muslims, cow slaughter, opposition to Vande Mataram song in school prayer and call for communal solidarity in the name of distinct cultural identity etc which were raised by AIML still not relevant for Muslim politics in the country? Moin Shakir, a noted Muslim writer rightly observed, "Although politically Islam is the dying ideology of the stagnant elite, yet it cannot be replaced unless a change in the political elite takes place" (Secularisation of Muslim Behaviour, page72).

The Muslim elite carried forward the separatist legacy of Muslim League, which was basically meant to ensure that the Muslims are not absorbed in the Indian nation. They overlooked the historical consequences of the separatist movement launched by political Islamists like Sir Sayed Ahmad Khan, Mohammad Iqbal, Jinnah and Maulana Maudoodi and carried the burden of the League on their shoulders and thereby failed to remove politics out of the frame of religion. Had they guided the Muslim masses to join the issues, which affect every citizen of the country they could have become part of the national mainstream. Instead they encouraged them to work as pawns of the Congress to implement its vote bank policy. Later, almost all the political parties used

the same tactics for Muslim votes. Absence of any honest and assertive leader in the community for proper counseling to Muslim masses became a remote possibility.

Except in Kashmir, Muslims remained scattered and isolated in various states of India after partition. They might have realised their mistake for supporting partition but the separatist approach of Muslim organisations like IUML, JEIH, JUH, Muslim Majalish-e-Mushawarat under the control of the elite section in the community did not guide them to accept the reality of secular democracy. When the forces behind the movement for Hindu nationalism raised their voice against them, the Muslim orthodoxy aggressively propagated its reactionary design and supported the political design of the Muslim elite. Thus, they allowed the centuries old Hindu-Muslim problem to remain a permanent problem of this country.

Unfortunately, India has so far not produced any Muslim leader after Independence for the secular mobility of Muslim masses to negate Jinnah. Absence of mass scale modern education from primary level onward ghettoised them and kept them confined to their medieval shell. Even today the legacy of reservation for Muslims initially demanded by Muslim League and accepted by the British is raised by a section of Muslim intellectuals. Saleem Akhtar and Nafees Ahmad in a joint paper entitled " Reservation for Muslims: A need of hour" suggested reservation for Muslims as solution to their integration in national mainstream. They said, "the reservation policy requires urgent restructuring so that the Muslims get integrated in the national mainstream" (Muslims in India edited by S.N.Singh, Page65, 2003, Anmol Publication Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi).

The present leadership of the Muslims in stead of transforming the medieval mindset of the community into modern and liberal outlook is still promoting religious orthodoxy and cultural conservatism in the name of religious identity. In real terms, there is no problem for any Muslim in any secular polity if his or her religious identity is confined to the five basic principles of Islam which are - Kalama (There is no God but God), five times Namaz (Prayer) a day, Zakaat (Donation for welfare of the poor), Roza (Fasting) during the month of Ramdan and Haz (Pilgrimage to Mecca).

Conclusion:

In the absence of any effective and assertive leadership in Muslim society, who could play the role of an ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity, the burden of Muslim League cannot be unloaded from the mindset of Muslim masses. Only the Muslim leadership could remove the mental blockade of centuries old ruler and ruled syndrome prevailing in the community by accepting the ground reality of democratic polity. Democratic governance in the country unfortunately is still interpreted by a sizeable section of Muslims as Hindu rule. Another reason behind this psyche is that even after fifty-six years of Independence, Muslim politics is still controlled by Ulama and Aligarhians. They have not allowed it to pass through the rural and urban ghettos. In 1924 Lord Birkenhead' the Secretary of State for India understood the communal psychology of the Indian society and remarked: "All the

conferences in the world cannot bridge the unbridgeable" (Muslim League's Unfinished Agenda by Prafulla Goradia, Page 179, 2003). However, the right thinking people of this country are still hopeful for a change in the outlook of Muslim leadership. Aameena A.Saeed in a question answer column of Times of India in its issue dated November 29, 2003 has generated some ray of hope in this direction, when he said: "Their (Indian Muslims') future is bright. There is tremendous churning and soul-searching going on Muslims. Gujarat did cause a temporary withdrawal but the influx of Muslim talent into the mainstream will continue, despite the BJP". Let Arif Khan's reminder also help to transform the proxy message of AIML by IUML into - **Muslim League is dead - Long live Indian Nationalism.**

(*E-mail- ramashray60@rediffmail.com* ^[1])

Category:

Papers ^[2]

Topics:

Islamic Affairs ^[3]

Copyright ©2012. All Rights are Reserved.

(adsbygoogle = window.adsbygoogle || []).push({ google_ad_client: "ca-pub-2275491169696384", enable_page_level_ads: true });

Source URL: <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/paper865>

Links

[1] <mailto:ramashray60@rediffmail.com>

[2] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers>

[3] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/islamic-affairs>