

1937-1939: The Final Phase Of Separation Between Congress And League

**Hitendra Anupam¹, Santosh Yadav²*

¹*Assistant Professor, PG Department of History, VBU, Hazaribag*

²*Research Scholar, Department of History, VBU, Hazaribag*

**email: bhaai.hitendra@gmail.com*

Key Words: *Congress, Muslim League, Bihar, British, Independence*

Provincial elections were held in British India in the winter of 1936-37 as mandated by the Government of India Act 1935. Elections were held in eleven provinces - Madras, Central Provinces, Bihar, Orissa, United Provinces, Bombay Presidency, Assam, NWFP, Bengal and Punjab. The final results of the elections were declared in February 1937. The Indian National Congress emerged in power in eight of the provinces - the three exceptions being Bengal, Punjab, and Sindh. The All-India Muslim League failed to form the government in any province. The Congress ministries resigned in October and November 1939, in protest against Viceroy Lord Linlithgow's action of declaring India to be a belligerent in the Second World War without consulting the Indian people.

The first thing to be done was to concentrate on enrolling Muslim members of the Congress. Nehru believed that with a large membership, they will inevitably play an important part in Congress work and will help in shaping Congress policy.¹ Complaints reached Congress office that notices of meetings, etc., were not always issued in Urdu and so many people remained ignorant of the activities. Therefore the district and local committees were directed to issue notices in Urdu in all areas where there is an Urdu reading population.² HasratMohani in his article stated that after the extraordinary success of the Congress in the last elections of the Provincial Assemblies the idea of the Hindu leaders has once again inclined to the question that if the Muslims too could be brought in line with the Congress like the Hindus then there nothing will remain to complete the predominance of the Indian masses against the government.

© Hitendra Anupam, Santosh Yadav

Nehru had begun practical work in the connection and a special department under Dr. Ashraf was started for this purpose. He warned in respect to this movement that the mentality and the method with which this movement was started it will create further misunderstandings in Muslim minds. He criticised Nehru for his statement that “there is no objective of any All-Parties conference before us” meant that he regarded the decision of the Congress as the final and binding decision for all peoples and thus they wanted to coerce Muslims to accept the Congress decisions. They will be proved right if in answer to this move the Muslims come and say that they, under certain conditions, are quite ready to take their part in the struggle for India’s freedom but under no circumstance the followers of Islam can tolerate the position of dual domination of the British government and the Hindu majority.

The Congress instead of the vague and ambiguous term of “PurnaSwaraj or “complete independence” should have adopted the goal of a free federal republic of “united states of India” as its creed. The federal language of this Republic of United States of India should have been termed Hindustani and both Urdu and Nagri scripts should be equally recognized in all courts, offices and schools and should be made compulsory for all. The minorities should be given the guarantee, accorded to them under the Lucknow Pack of 1916.³ In response to Zetland's interest in the settlement of the Communal disputes in Bengal, correspondence between Abdul HalimGhuznavi and the MaharajadhirajaBahadur of Burdwan (acting on behalf of the Bengal Anti-communal Award Committee) proved inconsequential.

The agreement though was the result of an effort spread over nearly a year in the course. The correspondence was released here for publication so that the proposal may be popularized during the election campaign and later may form the basis of a complete Hindu-Muslim settlement in Bengal.⁴

After Zetland received from HalimGhuznavi an account of his negotiations with the Hindus carried on with the intention of lessening the tension over the Communal Award, he noticed that the chief item in the agreement which they have come to was the appointment of an equal number of Muslims and Hindus as Ministers. But as since the appointment of Ministers was a prerogative of the Governor, who may object to having his hands tied by an agreement to which he was not a party.⁵

FazlulHaq believed that the Muslim Group will not consent to more than 4 Hindu Ministers in any proposed communal proportion for the Bengal Ministry. He assured to the Bengal Governor, that they

© Hitendra Anupam, Santosh Yadav

will be able to get Hindu Support to this 6:4 ratio, although he admitted that the 6:5 ratio would be more welcome to the Hindu Community. Therefore Haq was of the opinion that if the Hindus agreed to the 6:4 ratio, there was no need for any increase in the size of the Cabinet to placate a section of the people who wanted all the advantages for themselves without coming forward to share the difficulties of the task before them. He also supported the idea that all the ten Ministers should get a salary of Rs. 2500 a month and no discrimination of any kind will be taken to put the brand of inferiority on a section of the Cabinet. There existed a distinction between Front Rank Ministers and Junior Rank Ministers in England.⁶

For various reasons the problem of increasing the Muslim element in the Congress received considerable attention. Nehru felt that Muslim masses inevitably was thinking more and more in terms of common economic problems and common burdens together with others. The Congress was a political organization dealing also inevitably with economic problems. Also the objective of the Congress was political independence, irrespective of their religion. And ultimately it was this order, which shall remove the crushing poverty and unemployment of Indians. Some people had suggested that semi-communal nationalist parties should be formed, like a Muslim Congress party. Nehru or Gandhi believed that will encourage communalism and injure the larger cause. Nationalist Muslim Party was formed in 1929 and it had failed. Such half-way groupings confused the masses.⁷

Sir Syed WazirHasan advanced a powerful plea for the Muslims joining the congress and on 20th June, 1937 declared his own resolve to resign from the Muslims League. Another reason was that for the purpose of carrying on a successful political and constitutional agitation, it was always advantageous that there should be one united front and one platform which presented by a powerful, well organised and disciplined body as the Indian National Congress. Syed Hasan held that the congress was union of all anti-imperialist classes and forces in the country. Every class participating in the anti-imperialist struggle may have its independent class organizations for its own specific class purposes but all of them unite in the congress for the attainment of the common goal of national independence.⁸

KhaliqZaman responded to Nehru's letter of 27 June, in which Nehru had referred to the Bundelkhand by-election when a statement was issued, signed by six or seven person including Khaliq-uz-Zaman supporting the Muslim League candidate. He appreciated that Nehru had pointed out the objectionable nature of some of the leaflets that were issued under khaliq's signature along with others. He said that he

© Hitendra Anupam, Santosh Yadav

will not disown his responsibility as the Secretary of the League Board for anything that was done in its name. He regretted that though his name was associated it was not approved by him, and after which he had refused to go to the constituency. He showed his concern about the problem of religious minorities. He told that after 20 years of service to the Congress he associated himself with the League.⁹

In response to KhaliqzZaman's letter Nehru shared his views with him. Nehru lamented that the situation had arrived at its culminating point and the attitude of Muslim League had become more intensely communal than could be conceived. Nehru knew that Khaliq did not intend to the various notices and leaflets that had been issued in Bundelkhand. But the fact remained that some of them were issued in his name. In the eyes of the public he must inevitably be held responsible for the extreme limit of communalism and political reaction even if the circumstances forced him to act in that way. The identical process had taken place in the political field with the growth of the national movement in India. The reactionaries joined hands and tried to form a joint front between themselves and British imperialism. That did not force Congress to give up national movement or to tone it down because reactionaries gained strengthened and organized. The Bundelkhand election had thrown this flashlight on the real conflict, that conflict had nothing to do with the minority question but was a political conflict. On the one side there was progressive thought in action and with every desire to solve the minority problem fairly and in cooperation with those concerned. On the other there was sheer communalism, religious bigotry and political reaction. The League no more remained a democratic organization, rather had become a close preserve of certain individuals.¹⁰

Nehru responded to Jinnah's denial for having issued any statement to the Jhansi-Jalaum-Hamairpur Muslim voters. But the Khilafat newspaper had given prominence to such a statement and various other newspapers had published English translation of it. Nehru suggested that Jinnah might find out who was responsible for this misuse of his name and should dissociate himself from the statement in question. Jinnah had complained of misrepresentation of the Muslim League and of himself by many Congressmen and by the Congress press. Nehru pointed out that there was no such thing as the Congress press.¹¹ In May and June of 1937 serious communal riots had broken out in the country. M.N. Roy, who had joined the Congress party and led a section of the radicals in it, characterized these riots as the outcome of the

© Hitendra Anupam, Santosh Yadav

fanatical propaganda indulged in by the reactionary communalists who had been frightened by the spectacular successes the Congress had achieved during the elections.¹²

After a week, Congress ministries were installed in seven provinces, bitterness aroused during the Jhansi by-election. The Muslim League demanded 33 per cent representation in the ministry and agreed to cooperate with the Congress to implement its general programme. Azad wanted Khaliqzaman to sign an agreement under which the League would accept the principle of joint responsibility, dissolve its parliamentary board in the province (as Congress had already done), and cease to function as a separate group. The draft was endorsed by Nehru and Gandhi and the talks continued. The U.P. talks failed on July 28, 1937. Two days later Khaliqzaman issued a statement, 'I am afraid I was trying, to accomplish the impossible.'¹³ Though the Muslim masses were apathetic. There were signs that they were getting out of the rut of communalism and developing awareness of the economic issues. Nehru was impressed by the apparent change which was coming over the younger generation of Muslims. After drawing the resemblance between the Hindu and the Sikh demands in NWFP and the Muslim demands in the minority provinces, M.N. Roy strongly believed that communalist whether belonging to the Hindu or the Muslim fold is essentially the same, betraying the same type of mentality and interest in securing the same kinds of concessions. Essentially, they dealt over the loaves and fishes of office. The logic of communalism led its advocates to the imperialist camp, whether they sailed under the colours of a Hindu Mahasabha or a Muslim League.¹⁴

By the time the Ramgarh Congress session met on 19 March 1940, the Congress leaders had painfully foreseen the coming event—the Lahore resolution by the League session on March 23. Azad devoted the best part of his presidential address to the communal question. He blamed the British for pursuing a policy of divide and rule and emphasizing internal differences for consolidating their own power. In fact throughout the history of the Congress, it had never underrated the communal problem and had pursued a policy based on two principles — fullest guarantees to the rights and interests of the minorities in any future Constitution, and leaving it for the minorities to decide the form of safeguards needed by them. It was absurd, Azad observed, for the minorities to be apprehensive about their rights and interests in democratic India.

© Hitendra Anupam, Santosh Yadav

Any constitution for an all-India federation would provide full autonomy to the provinces and arm the federal centre with only all-India matters such as foreign relations, defense, customs, etc. Under such a Constitution there would be no issues such as majority or minority.¹⁵ Independent Muslim groups in Bihar assembly were satisfied demanding Muslim representation to the Constituent Assembly through separate electorates and settlement of the question of Muslim rights and interests through mutual agreement in the Constituent Assembly itself was accepted by the Congress party. Jinnah, however, was not so successful in Bihar where he converted the small factions but his talks with the largest group known as the Bihar Muslim Independent Party broke down. He was greatly disappointed to find that all the Muslim legislators in Bihar supported the amended Congress resolution for repeal of the 1935 Act and convening of a Constituent Assembly.

The resolution of the Bihar assembly was thus unanimously passed. On the other hand, in the U.P. assembly, the Muslim League party moved amendments which were un-acceptable to the Congress and the League legislators staged a walk-out before the main resolution was passed.¹⁶ Pirpur Committee was established in 1938 by the All India Muslim League to prepare a detailed report regarding the atrocities of the Congress Ministries (1937-1939) formed after the elections under the 1935 Government of India Act in different provinces. Its report charged the congress for interference with the religious rites, suppression of Urdu and propaganda of Hindi, denial of legitimate representation and suppression in economy of the Muslims. But when Viceroy Linlithgow declared India at war with Germany on 3 September 1939. The Congress objected strongly to the declaration of war without prior consultation with Indians. The Congress Working Committee suggested that it would cooperate if there were a central Indian national government formed, and a commitment made to India's independence after the war.

The Muslim League promised its support to the British, with Jinnah calling on Muslims to help the Raj by "honourable co-operation" at the "critical and difficult juncture," while asking the Viceroy for increased protection for Muslims. Linlithgow refused the demands of the Congress. On 22 October 1939, Congress ministries tendered their resignations. Both Viceroy Linlithgow and Muhammad Ali Jinnah were pleased with the resignations. On 2 December 1939, Jinnah put out an appeal, calling for Indian Muslims to celebrate 22 December 1939 as a "Day of Deliverance" from Congress.

© Hitendra Anupam, Santosh Yadav

Reference:

1. Nehru's Rebuttal of Jinnah's Concept of Third Party. Nehru Papers, 10 January, 1937 [Chopra P.N. (ed.) *op.sit.*, pp 24-27]
2. Nehru's Circular on Contact with Muslim Masses AICC File No. P-I/1937-38, 31 March, 1937 [Chopra P.N. (ed.) *ibid.*, pp 301-302]
3. Hasrat Mohani for Conditional Cooperation of Muslims with Congress (The statement was first published by Hasrat Mohani in his own periodical "Mustagil" and later on reproduced by the above paper. (Extract) Star of India, 22 April 1937 [Chopra P.N. (ed.) *ibid.*, pp 408-409]
4. Abdul Halim Ghuznavi to Zetland on Hindu-Muslim Settlement in Bengal L/PO/6/70 18, Canal Street, Calcutta, The 7th January, 1937 [Chopra P.N. (ed.) *ibid.*, pp 23]
5. Zetland to Linlithgow on Ghuznavi's Negotiations for the Hindu-Muslim Pact' (Extract) L/PO/6/70 18 January 1937 [Chopra P.N. (ed.) *ibid.*, pp 44-45]
6. Fazlul Huq to Bengal Governor on Proposed Communal Proportion in Bengal Ministry R/3/2/6211 March 1937 [Chopra P.N. (ed.) *ibid.*, pp 219]
7. Nehru on the Role and Nature of Congress and its Attitude Towards Muslims (The statement was issued to the Press on 25 April 1937.) AICC Papers F. No.-31/1937 [Chopra P.N. (ed.) *ibid.*, pp 424-427]
8. Rajendra Prasad to J. B. Kripalani on Proposed Agreement with Jinnah AICC Paper, F. G.-65/1937 P. O. ZIRADAI, Disstt. SARAN 10 June 1937 [Chopra P.N. (ed.) *ibid.*, pp 645]
9. Khaliq-uz-zaman's Appeal to Nehru to prevent League from Falling into the Hands of Communal Reactionaries in U.P. Assembly (Extract) AICC Papers, F.VO. G61/1937 29 June 1937 [Chopra P.N. (ed.) *ibid.*, pp 696-698]
10. Nehru to Khaliq-uz-Zaman on Congress Stand on Communal Problems U.P. Government Special Branch Records Allahabad, 1 July, 1937 [Chopra P.N. (ed.) *ibid.*, pp 702-704]
11. 346-Nehru's statement on Jinnah's Grievances (The statement was issued at Wardha on 3 July 1937.) The Bombay Chronicle, 5 July 1937 [Chopra P.N. (ed.) *ibid.*, pp 714-716]
12. M.N.Roy on Congress Goals (A speech delivered by M.N.Roy at a mass meeting held at Kanpur on 25 March 1937) Independent India, 11 April 1937.
13. B.R. Nanda, 'Nehru, the Indian National Congress and the Partition of India, 1935-47', in C.H. Philips and Mary Doreen Wainwright eds. 1997, p. 156



© Hitendra Anupam, Santosh Yadav

14. Independent India, 11th July 1937
15. Maulana Azad's Appeal to Mulims (Statement issued in Bombay on 29 January, 1937) The Hindu, 30 January 1937 [Chopra P.N. (ed.) **ibid.**, pp 80]
16. AICC Newsletter on Muslim Support for the Congress AICC Foreign Deptt. Newsletter 25 March 1937 [Chopra P.N. (ed.) **op.cit.**, pp 276]