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MELANGE OF PRESS, URUDU –TAMIL MUSLIM DIVIDE AND LUCKNOW PACT- A TAMIL NADU CHAPTER



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Short Profile

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ABSTRACT:

Once the initial shock of the outbreak of war had worn off, there was a resurgence of interest, at least within the Tamil region. Muslim League was moving towards communal rapprochement. By early 1915, patriotic fervour had begun to wane and Muslim newspapers were questioning press restrictions and suggesting that Indian loyalty warranted the post-war gift of Swa-raj. The most vociferous Madras Muslim critic of Britain's

actions in India was the Urdu daily, the *Qaumi Report*, the leading Pan-Islamic newspaper. It was edited by Moulvi Abdul Majid Sharar, son of a Madras city 'Alim' and a keen supporter of the Pan-Islamist leaders, the Ali brothers. Under Sharar, the *Qaumi Report* gave increasing support to Congress, particularly after the internment of the Ali brothers late in 1915. This paper is an attempt to focus the role of press and the position of the Urdu and Tamil Muslims regarding the Lucknow Pact and the role of th Annie Besant towards communal rapprochement between the Muslims and Hindus and the marginalisation of Tamil Muslims in the political scenario in the British indifferent attitude towards the Indian Muslims.

KEYWORDS

Hindus, Muslims, Urdu, Tamil, Lucknow Pact, British.

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INTRODUCTION :

In nationalist circles too, the initial surge of support for the war had begun to evaporate. Congress had approached the British for further constitutional reforms in return for support of the war effort. But the British response was disappointing and some prominent leaders in the Congress initiated efforts to bring more Muslims into the organisation. By broadening the base of Congress, it was hoped that more pressure could be put on the British to make realistic political concessions.

In November 1915, the Madras representatives on the Council of the All-India Muslim League voted at Lucknow to accept the invitation of Congress, which had been delivered by Mohammad Ali Jinnah, to hold the annual session of the League in December 1915 concurrently with the Congress session in Bombay. Despite considerable opposition from conservative Muslims, who opposed both Jinnah and any co-operation with Congress, the invitation was accepted. Amongst the Madras Muslims at the session, Yakub Hasan, Nawab Syed Mohamed and Walji Lalji Sait (a prominent Madras city merchant) were appointed to the committee set up to consult with Congress on the reforms scheme. At Lucknow in 1916, the Madras League's delegation supported Jinnah's plea for a communal rapprochement. Undoubtedly, Yakub Hasan, who was both Secretary of the Presidency League and a member of the All-India Muslim League Council, played a critical role in this decision. He was the best known League member in Madras and as its Secretary, he was the pivot of its organisation. More significantly, it was he, rather than the Prince of Arcot, who had the personal support of the merchant members of the Presidency League, with many of whom he had been involved in business ventures.¹ Other factors which increased Madras Muslims' susceptibility to Jinnah's blandishments, was the endorsement Jinnah received from the Aga Khan in 1915, the temporary eclipse suffered by the Pan-Islamic movement as a result of the internment of its leaders - the Ali brothers, Abul Kalam Azad and Zafar Ali Khan in 1915, and the activities of the Home Rule League in the Presidency.

The support of Aga Khan effectively neutralized the politically conservative Muslim opposition to a communal rapprochement. Further, the eclipse of the Pan-Islamic movement left the rapprochement as the only avenue available to Muslims to expend their aroused political energies and frustration with the British. Tamil Nadu was fortunate because, unlike Punjab, communal relations had not been soured by the activities of anti-Muslim organizations like Arya Samaj.

ROLE OF ANNIE BESANT

The pre-Gandhian Congress lacked clear leadership and was dragged into many directions by feuding factions. But Annie Besant had established the All-India Home Rule League outside Congress and for a time, it provided the more radical members of Congress with a model for future action. The League, at least in 1915 and 1916, worked assiduously to achieve a broader basis of popular support than Congress by establishing a national network of branches and it laid the foundation for mass political action which was to be so successfully developed by Gandhi a few years later. In an attempt to win popular support across communal lines, the Home Rule League adopted the cause of Ali brothers and communal rapprochement and temporarily attracted the support of more radical Muslim spokesmen. Thus Besant provided a bridge between the Congress and the Muslim community.

The League concentrated on winning the support of communal elites for a rapid and constitutional evolution towards independence by means of nation-wide agitation on a scale

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previously unknown in India. The League achieved mass popular involvement in politics long before Gandhi in 1919, but it lacked Gandhi's radicalism which was to push the nationalist movement beyond boundaries. Besant's attachment to Theosophy appealed to many Hindus and Muslims. But her essentially western approach to politics lost her the support of more extremist nationalists who, like Gandhi, were moving towards a rejection of political activity within the western constitutional framework.

HINDU MUSLIM UNITY

In early 1915, Annie Besant gained the approval of Mazharul Haque and Wazir Hasan, two prominent north Indian Muslim leaders, for her proposed Home Rule League and in the same year, she attempted to win the active participation of Madras Muslims and Hindus in her organization. In Tamil Nadu, she gained support from S. Kasturiranga Iyengar and his nephew, A. Rangaswami Iyengar, who came from a Brahmin family with a long association with government and the legal profession and who were successively editors of *The Hindu*, the premier nationalist newspaper in the Province. Her newspaper, *New India*, ran a series of articles on "Hindus and Mussalmans", lauding the cause of communal unity and blaming communal friction on the British.² *New India* also welcomed the decision of the council of the All-India Muslim League to hold the League's annual session in Bombay in December 1915 as "a distinct step towards common action".³ To secure a wider basis of Muslim support, Besant dropped her opposition to separate electorates in 1915 and in 1916, and made overtures to Justice Rahim of the Madras High Court in an attempt to win his approval for the Home Rule Movement.⁴

ROLE OF RAHIM

Rahim's well known sympathy for the cause of Indian advancement recommended him by Annie Besant. As a member of the Public Service Commission in 1913, Rahim had dissented from the majority report and strongly recommended that Indians be given a larger share of responsibility in the Public Service. Also, in 1913, while passing judgment against Annie Besant's newspaper, *New India*, for contravening the Press Act, he had intimated his disapproval of the scope and terms of the Act.⁵ In December 1916, Rahim became President of the Young Men's Indian Association, organised by Annie Besant. In spite of her overtures, which continued into 1917, she could not elicit more than nominal response from Rahim or the Muslim community.

TERMS OF LUCKNOW PACT AND STAND OF MUSLIM PRESS

Despite the fact that by the terms of the Lucknow Pact, the Madras Muslims, who formed barely 5% of the population, were conceded 15% of the elected seats at the provincial level, there was no unanimous support for the Pact within the community. It evoked no response from the Tamil Muslims and was subject to some criticism from several Urdu Muslim newspapers. The pro-British *Jaridah-i-Rozgar*, the oldest Urdu daily in the Presidency and which was subsidised by the Nizam of Hyderabad, was critical of Jinnah and it argued that the differences between Hindu and Muslim communities were insurmountable. As a result, its circulation dropped rapidly from 1500 in 1914 to 300 in 1916. On the

other hand, the anti-British *Qaumi Report*, which initially supported the Pact after months of criticising plans for communal rap–prochement, finally declared that “our (i. e. the Muslim) mode of living is entirely different and nowhere has there been any contact between the two communities”. The result was that its circulation stood at 1000 in 1916.⁶ The Pact was anathema to both newspapers, whose editors represented the extremes of the Muslim political spectrum in Madras. The volte face by the editor of the *Qaumi Report*, Abdul Majid Sharar, was due to a strong personal animosity towards Hasan and to Sharar's belief that the Pact was a farce.⁷ Sharar's relations with most Muslim leaders in Madras were strained and he was considered an *infant terrible* whose outrageous swings of tem–per and opinion both tantalized and infuriated. His pessimism regarding the Pact was provoked by bickering between Muslim and Hindu politicians in northern India over the final details of the political representation of Muslims. Sharar turned away from Congress and became a pro–pagandist for a highly personal and religious brand of Pan-Islamism.

SUPPORTERS OF THE PACT

In the mofussil, there was some criticism of the Pact as an instrument of Nawab Syed Mu–hammad Bahadur who was regarded by some Urdu Muslims as a lackey of the Hindus.⁸ Two other prominent Urdu Muslim supporters of the Pact did not suffer the same bitter criticism as the Nawab. Yakub Hasan was elected by Urdu Muslims to the Provincial Council in July 1916 and Mir Asad Ali Khan won the seat reserved for Madras Muslims in the Imperial Legislative Council, at a time when the pro-Pact views of both these men were well known. Hasan and Asad Ali Khan advocated separate electorates for Muslims “because they are an important part of the Indian nation and must have equal opportunities with the other component part to serve the mother–land”.⁹

CONGRESS – MADRAS PRESIDENCY LEAGUE UNDERSTANDING

Despite mixed feelings amongst Urdu Muslims over the Lucknow Pact, it was formally accepted by the Presidency League. Although this did not lead to any formal liaison between the Madras League and local nationalist organisations prior to the rise of the Khilafat move–ment in the early months of 1919, the meetings of the League's Executive Committee were held from January 1917 until April 1921 in the chambers of the Mahajana Sabha, a leading Congress organisation in Madras city.¹⁰

The tentative nature of the Congress-League understanding was due to two major factors: the restricted membership of the Presidency League, and the slow politicisation of the Tamil Muslims. Membership of the Presidency Muslim League was small and confined almost en–tirely to Madras city with no provisions in its constitution for mofussil branches. Between 1917-1920, the number of members increased substantially but never exceeded 300 and until 1918, there were few Tamil Muslim members.

URUDU- TAMIL MUSLIM DIFFERENCES

Apart from differences of language and culture between the two groups, the activities of Urdu Muslims during the period 1901-1916 maintained the barriers between Urdu and Tamil Mus–lims. Neither the Educational Association nor the Presidency Muslim League displayed any interest in Tamil

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Muslims. Both the organisations were Urdu Muslim-dominated and they articulated their educational and employment grievances without reference to Tamil Muslim opinion.¹¹ Neither the Pan-Islamic movement nor the pursuit of communal rapprochement stirred the Tamil Muslims as they did the Urdu Muslims. Rapprochement with the Hindus, with whom they had long lived in harmony, was regarded as unnecessary, while the Turkish bias of the Pan-Islamic movement in its early stages found only limited support in a community which traditionally regarded the Arabian peninsula as its source of inspiration. They were more responsive to concerns for the safety of the Khalif and the Holy Places of Islam, but as yet these had only been peripheral to the main thrust of Muslim political agitation.

The world view of Tamil Muslims was firmly rooted in southern India and Arabia while the world view of Urdu Muslims linked them to their co-religionists in northern India. The mélange of nationalism, Pan-Islamism and communalism which stirred the Urdu Muslims of British India during World War I, could strike a chord in the minds and hearts of the Urdu Muslims in Tamil Nadu but meant little to Tamil Muslims, until threats were posed to the Holy Places of Islam in Arabia and the office of the Khalif, by the Arab revolt against the Ottomans in 1916.

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