

The Role of Christians in the Freedom Movement of Pakistan: An Appraisal

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate into the role of the Christians in the freedom movement in the sub-continent in general and in the creation of Pakistan in particular. For this purpose their contribution in the deliberation of the All India National Congress and All India Muslim League has been examined. Furthermore at the verge of partition, the support provided by the Christians for the creation of Pakistan has also been viewed and analyzed. It is concluded that the support of the Christians for the cause of Pakistan was based on their belief that the Muslim society in its nature was more secular than the cast ridden Hindu society hence more permissive for the rights and safe guards of the religious minorities.

Key word: Freedom Movement; All India National Congress; All India Muslim League; Pakistani Christians; All India Christian Association

I. Introduction

If we carefully examine the history of the Freedom Movement in the sub-continent, it appears that the Indian and British Christians played a pivotal role in the process of political socialization in India. Their inclusion in the functioning of the political system, and their exposure towards western style of education made them familiar with the concept and practice of the parliamentary democracy as it was understood by the British themselves. The spread of western education led to the spread of the western concepts of democracy, liberty, equality and nationalism in India. The 19th century saw the consolidation of British rule and the impact of western ideas on the social, political and religious life of India through the English education, which was basically administered by Christians. The rise of these ideas gave a great impetus to the growth of political consciousness in India. The Indian Christians Educational Institutions played a very significant role in the political awareness and training of all renowned leaders of the freedom movement.

The Christians strongly supported Quaid-e-Azam and Muslim League at that critical time when there was lot of opposition to the formation a new Muslim state. All India Christian Association assured unconditional full cooperation to the founder of Pakistan. This crucial role of Christian population of the region was recognized by the founder of Pakistan and All India Muslim League at all levels. These Christians played

a very strong role in the creation of Pakistan. The leaders of All India Muslim League promised to give more privileges to the minorities especially to Christian community in the newly established Muslim state. The Christians vote before Boundary Commission was the only decisive vote for the true foundation of Pakistan. Christian leaders voted for Pakistan because they believed that Quaid-e-Azam would be the real protector of their rights and interests.

Following are the substantial contributions of Christian Leaders which provided a practical proof of their support and cooperation in the freedom movement of Pakistan.

II. Christians and the Birth of the Indian National Congress

As the British were alien and strangers to India, hence they needed the support and cooperation of the natives to run their colonial administration. Inclusion of the natives through Patron Client relationship made them to introduce the Act of 1861. By that time the Indian Youth was demanding more participation in the affairs of the country. At that juncture a British Christian Allen Octaviam Hume with the blessing of the Viceroy established All Indian National Congress in 1885. The first president of the Indian National Congress was a Bengali Christian Mr. Banerjee. It is worth noting that the All Indian National Congress was established and nourished by the Christians. Indian National Congress being a secular Party in Principle attracted youth from all the religious communities¹. The party demanded more and substantial participation of the natives in the affairs of India under the leadership of the British and Indian Christians.

III. Services of the Christian Leaders in the Freedom Movement

Apart from the establishment of the Indian National Congress many Christian leaders put their efforts in the deliberation and activities of the Freedom Movement. Sir Joseph Burr was the member of the viceroy's council and advisor of the Nawab of Bhopal Mr. Paythan Joseph was the editor of the *Hindustan Times* and B.G Harmony edited the *Daily Dawn*. Being a friend of Mr. Jinnah he supported the Muslim Cause and for his these activities were exiled for five years. Sir Samuel Ranganadhar, while serving as High Commissioner in London, had close ties with Mr. Jinnah. Mrs. Annie Besant was founder and president of the theosophic society (1875) and due to her substantial contribution towards the freedom Movement she was elevated to the presidency of the Calcutta Congress in 1917². Along with Bal Gangadhar Telak she pioneered the home rule agitation which gained considerable support in India. She was a great progressive thinker, speaker and writer who founded "The New Indian Daily" and was also the founder of the Home League. Rai Bahar pioneer Sakoran, was another eminent Christian leader who contributed a great deal towards the Indian Freedom Movement. K.L. Kundan Lal, a Christian MLA from Punjab was the president of All India National Congress. Raj kumari Amrit Kaur a converted Christian and the princess from the Kapurthala royal family, Raja Ragbir Singh MLA and leader of the All India Christian Association, Rev. M. Andrews, Mr. John Bright and Irish Christian Mr. Alfred are a few glaring examples of active participation in the Freedom Movement. It is interesting to note that Mr. Jinnah often quoted from the speeches of Mr. Bright. Moreover a renowned Christian professor Eric Siperian was an active member of the Communist party of India and worked for the well being of the peasants and workers. Mr. F.E Chaudary a photographer journalist of the Pakistan Movement is the living proof of the Christian's contribution towards the movement. Another well known Christian leader Joshua Fazal-ul-Din wrote in the *Daily "Inqilab"* that Pakistan having relationship with the Central Asia was a separate country

and had no connection with the rest of India and that he was in harmony with Choudhry Rehmat Ali regarding the separation of this territory from India as it was in accordance with the voice of God³. It is worth noting that at the time when the idea of Pakistan was considered as the Brainchild of Ch. Rehmat Ali and many prominent Muslim leaders treated it as childish and impracticable, Ch. Rehmat Ali impressed by the statement of Joshua Fazal-ul-Din wrote in a latter article that Pakistan would be a democratic country and all of its citizens irrespective of their colour, race or religion would be equal in the affairs of the government.

When the Government of India Act 1919 was incorporated three seats were reserved for the Christians in the Punjab Legislature Assembly Dr. W.C.A Overman (European) W.R. Mafferson (Anglo-Indian) and K.L Ralia Ram (Indian) were nominated against these seats. They participated very actively and efficiently in safe guarding the rights of the people of India.

IV. Freedom Movement and Role of the Christian Educational Institutions

The Christian Educational Institutions played a very significant role regarding the training of the Hindu, Muslim, Parsi, schedule caste, Buddhist and Christian youth in Connection with the freedom movement in India. The record shows that many leaders of the Movement belonging to these communities were educated by the Christian Educational institutions. The Christian Educational Institutions which provided education, training and awareness to the several leaders of the freedom movement included C.M.S school Karachi, Bandera Convent School Bombay, St. Stephens College Delhi, Murray College Sialkot, Gorden College Rawalpindi, F.C College Lahore, Kinnard College for women Lahore and Edwards College Peshawar. An over whelming majority of the leaders of the Pakistan Movement were educated by the said Educational Institutions. Philosopher poet Dr. Sir Muhammad Iqbal, the founder of Pakistan Mr. Jinnah, Ch Rehmat Ali who coined the word “Pakistan” and Sir Muhammad Zafarullah were product of these institutions.

V. Nehru Report: Christians and other Minorities

In 1928 all parties conference was summoned to deliberate about the future constitutional arrangement in India which could be acceptable to all concerned. This was after the failure of the Simon Commission and declaration by the British Government that since the different communities of India had failed to agree on a constitutional formula hence the British Government had no option but to give its own verdict. The said all parties conference met in Calcutta. This conference appointed a committee known as Nehru Committee headed by Moti Lal Nehru (Father of Jawar Lal Nehru) to propose a constitutional formula which could achieve agreement of all the communities. The committee presented its report which is known as Nehru Report in the history of the freedom movement. According to the provision of this report, Hindus by virtue of their overwhelming majority could dominate all other communities. Mr. Jinnah rejected this report and presented his Fourteen Points formula instead. All India Christian Conference along with other minorities also rejected this report expressing their disbelief in Hindu leadership and supporting the stance of Mr. Jinnah.

Well before the presentation of the Nehru Report when Iqbal was claiming that “Hindustan is the best in the whole world; we are its nightingales and it is our home” and Jinnah was portrayed as “Ambassador of the Hindu-Muslim unity” by Mrs. Sarojni

Naido, at that the moment a Christian leader Joshua Fazal-ud-Din was very much clear and said that those believing in Hindu-Muslim unity were living in a fool paradise as any such attempt would make India a war place.

VI. Second Round Table Conference and Christian-Muslim Unity

At the verge of the Second Round Table Conference, all the minorities except Sikhs signed an agreement known as “Agreement of Minorities” under the leadership of Sir Agha Khan. This agreement was signed by the Muslims, Anglo Indians and European Christians. This is an ample example of the Christians support for the stance of Muslims in the history of the freedom movement.

When the congress ministries elected under the 1937 elections resigned in 1939 as an act of non-cooperation towards the war effort, Mr. Jinnah called the Muslims to celebrate the “Salvation Day” on 22nd December 1939. All the oppressed communities participated in the celebration. Though some of the historians have not mentioned about the participation of the Christians in the said events, nevertheless a renowned journalist of “Paisa Akhbar”. Maqbool Anwar Dadu reported that on the salvation day not only the Muslims but also the Christian, Parees and Millions of the scheduled castes participated.⁴

The Lahore Resolution was passed in Lahore on the 23rd of March 1940. According to the Muslim League sources some Christians, Sikhs and scheduled caste leaders were especially invited as observers. Joshua Fazal-ul-Din, Chaudhry Chandu Lal and Dewan Bahadar S.P. Singha were prominent among the invitees. It is believed that paragraph No. 2 of the resolution was included to represent their sentiments.

VII. Establishment of the All India Christian Association and Its Role in the Pakistan Movement

The All India Christian Association was established by Dewan Bahadur S.P. Singha in 1942. This association contributed a lot towards the effort and deliberation of the freedom movement. On the 18th November 1942 at the annual convention of the All India Muslim League Punjab convened in Faisalabad (then Lyall Pur) which was attended by Mr. Jinnah and Miss Fatima, All India Christian Association presented a spasmata assuring its unconditional and full co-operation to Mr. Jinnah in connection with his efforts for the freedom of India.

At the time of the partition of India the Christians opposed the partition of the Punjab and demanded that whole of Punjab be included in Pakistan. Joshua Fazal-ul-Din in a news statement warned the Congress that the division of the province would make it suffer and that the partition of the Punjab since the time of Raja Poris had produced nothing but crisis.⁵

The historical meeting held on 23rd June 1947 to decide the fate of the united Punjab was chaired by Dewan Bahadur S.P. Singha, a renowned Christian and the last speaker of the United Punjab Legislative Assembly and the first speaker of the West Punjab Legislative Assembly after 1947. The Christians had decided to vote for the inclusion of the whole Punjab in Pakistan in a pre-party meeting held on 21st of June at the residence of S.P. Singha when the resolution was voted upon on the 23rd June 1947,

all the Christian members voted for Pakistan while S.P. Singha also used his casting vote as the speaker of the legislative assembly.

VIII. Christians stand Before the Boundary Commission

When the proceedings of the Boundary commission took place, Christian leaders Dewan Bahadur s.p Singha, C.E Gibbon and Fazal Elahi, in their recorded statement, demanded that for the demarcation of the Boundaries Christian population be included and termed as Muslim population. Chaudhary Chandu Lal served as a lawyer for the Christian community.⁶

Moreover he visited Pathan Kot and Gurdas Pur districts and got a resolution passed by the Christian population to the effect that they wanted to be included in Pakistan. Mr. C-E Gibbon appeared before the commission to demand that Lahore must be part of the Western Punjab and that all the Anglo Indian Christians be transported to Pakistan as it was considered to be their final destiny. When the Red Cliff award was announced in August 1947, it was taken by the Christian as a tailored decision aimed to create problems for Pakistan economy while facilitating Indian occupation of Kashmir. Diwan Bahadur S.P. Singha raised his voice against the Red Cliff award saying that as the principle of majority had been brutally crushed hence it was one sided and unfair to Pakistan.

In the last days of the United India Mr. Jinnah visited Lahore as a part of his campaign to fetch the support of the minority community for Pakistan. He met the Christian leader Ch. Chandu Lal and sikh leader Giani kartar Singh. The sikh leader turned down his offer while Chandu Lal declared unconditional support of the Christians for Pakistan. When the resolution to join Pakistan or India was moved and voted upon in the Punjab Legislative Assembly, the three Christian members voted in favour of Pakistan and saved the situation. 88 and 91 votes were casted in favour of India and Pakistan respectively.⁷ In this way the three Christian votes decided the fate of the province.

IX. Unconditional Support of Christian Leaders for the Creation of Pakistan

The Christians supported Mr. Jinnah and All India Muslim League when there was substantial opposition in and outside the country. Some Muslims especially the religious leaders did not hesitate to dub Mr. Jinnah as the British agent. The Christians paid no heed to these remarks and continued supporting Mr. Jinnah at the cost of opposing their own British co-religionists. The leaders who played a significant role in the Pakistan Movement were Dewan Bahadur S.P. Singha (speaker of the united Punjab Assembly later speaker of the western Punjab Assembly) Advocate Chaudhry Chandu Lal, Mr. Fazal Elahi, photographer journalist Mr F.E Chaudhry and B.L Ralia Ram. The Christian community as an expression of affection with Mr. Jinnah arranged many historical receptions in his honor for supporting his cause. On the 19th of November 1942 a grand reception in his honor was arranged at the king's Garden Faisalabad (then Lyall Pur). The very next day another reception was hosted at the large Hall of Loring Hotel in Lahore. Miss Fatima Jinnah, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan, Nawab of Mamdot were also present on that occasion. Mr. Jinnah said "we will never forget your favour if you have co operated with us."⁸ On the 21st of November 1942 Dewan Bahadar S.P Singha who was the Register of the University of the Punjab arranged a grand reception in the honor of Mr. Jinnah hosted by the staff Union in which he was assured about the unconditional support

for Pakistan. The teachers and students of the Forman Christian College also expressed their confidence in Mr. Jinnah's leadership. In July 1946 Mr. Ameer-ud-din, a prominent Muslim Leaguer and the president of Anjuman-e-Himayat-e-Islam contested the election for the Mayorship of Lahore. In this election some Muslim Leaguers betrayed him whereas he became successful with the support of the Christians⁹. When the general elections of 1946 were held in India, the Christians supported Mr. Jinnah and contested the election side by side with the Muslim League. Mr. Fazal Elahi and Dewan Bahadur S.P Singha were elected to the Punjab Legislative Assembly. After achieving substantial success in 1945-46 election, the All India Muslim League emerged as the sole spokesman of the Indian Muslims but was denied the same status by the congress and the British Government. At that juncture the Christian Leader Joshua Fazal-ud-Din issued a news statement saying that "When the Muslim League had achieved importance it was the duty of the British Government to accept that fact. Moreover the congress alone would bring instability in the country.

During the freedom movement Mr. Jinnah, time and again expressed his firm belief in the equal citizenship for all irrespective of colour, caste, race and religion in the forthcoming independent and sovereign state for the Indian Muslims. He fulfilled his pledge and while addressing to the first constituent Assembly of Pakistan on 11th August 1947 he categorically repeated his faith in the equal citizenship of all. He said "Pakistan is not a theoretical state we would treat the people of other religions with tolerance, we welcome all persons irrespective of caste, colour or creed as being equal citizens of Pakistan."¹⁰ Moreover a scheduled caste Hindu Jugandar Nath Mandal was appointed as the first Law Minister of Pakistan.

X. Conclusion

The above discussion makes it amply evident that the Christian community of the British India vehemently supported the cause of Pakistan and made substantial contribution towards it during the freedom movement. They opposed the dominance of the Hindu majority after the lapse of the British Raj and put their lot with the Muslims to constitute a part and parcel of the future Muslim state consisting of the Muslim majority areas of the sub-continent. They denounced and condemned the unfair distribution of the Punjab province more forcefully even than the Muslims and tried their best to get the Districts of Pathan Kot and Gurdas Pur included in the western Punjab. After the creation of Pakistan they have participated in all the constitutional deliberations to their best and have always stood side by side with their Muslim co patriots through every thick and thin.

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