

## Importance of Separate Electorate System in the Creation of Pakistan

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the strategy adopted by the Muslims of the sub-continent in creation of Pakistan. The separate electorate system has a vital importance in the history of Freedom Movement. This paper will help the readers in knowing the efforts made by the Muslims of South Asia to retain their entity.

### Introduction

After the defeat of war of independence 1857, the Muslims were targeted by the English. The Muslims were marginalized in every walk of life. In this grave situation Sir Syed Ahmed Khan came forward and took responsibility for rehabilitation of the Muslims. Sir Syed assessing the situation advised the Muslims to acquire modern education particularly the English. He also advised them not to take part in the politics of the day. For this purpose Sir Syed Ahmed opened many educational institutions and launched Aligarh Movement. Muslims followed the advice of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and started getting modern education and thus Muslims were soon educated to some extent. In the beginning Sir Syed was in favour of unity among the two major communities i.e. (Hindus and Muslims) but with Hindi Urdu controversy sprouting he changed his mind and worked only for the betterment of the Muslims. East India Company in the meantime had transferred power immediately after the war of independence to British Government.

The British government adopted such policies which favoured Hindus only and the Muslims were deprived of their rights. The procedure of election of members for different forums was so tricky, that Muslim could not win the seats. In the following pages we would discuss how Muslims faced the conspiracies hatched by British Government and particularly the Indian National Congress.

**The Causes of Demanding Separate Electorate System:**

1. The main cause for demanding separate electorate system was to get the real representation of the Muslims of the sub-continent on different forums. The joint electorate system had deprived the Muslims in getting representation because Hindus had advantage in winning more seats separate electorate.
2. The historical and political importance of the Muslims had to be retained. They had a glorious past history and had always remained a distinctive community from the Hindus.
3. The Muslims as a distinct people were an important factor to be reckoned within the administration of the country.
4. The system of nomination had frequently failed to secure the appointment of the Muslims the community desired to be represented.
5. The principle of proportional representation was suitable for the countries where the population was homogenous and animated by common ideals and sentiments. It was not a feasible idea where various communities stood sharply divided.

**Background of the Demand of Separate Electorates**

The Muslims ruled the sub-continent several hundred years. Their attitude towards Hindus was very positive, who were treated with justice and they were free to act according to their religion. They were also given the due share in services. The Britishers who snatched power from Muslims, were afraid that Muslims can agitate against them and counted Muslims as their enemy. To eliminate the Muslims or to deprive them of their rights Hindus and British rulers established Indian National Congress in 1885 with the claim that this organization will represent all the people of the sub-continent. In the beginning Muslims also welcomed it. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan realizing the situation adopted the policy of loyalty to the British. He was also in favour of unity between the Hindus and the Muslims. In his speech which he delivered at Patna on 27 January 1883 he said, "Now both of us live on the air of India, drink the holy water of the Ganga Jamna, and we both feed upon the products of the Indian soil. We are together in life and death...". He compared the Hindus and Muslims as the two eyes of a beautiful bride whose face would be disfigured if either one or the other was injured.<sup>1</sup>

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan after Hindi Urdu controversy in 1867 realised that Hindus and Britishers were intent on playing foul with the Muslims and changed his opinion and started work only for the betterment of the Muslims. In his speech delivered in the Governor General's Council on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1883. He referred to the Muslims and the Hindus as two Separate Nations which could never be integrated into a single nation. Sir Syed in this speech maintained that it is impossible for both communities to remain equal in a Hindu dominated land. Thus, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan put forth the two nation theory.

Establishment of Congress was the conspiracy against the Muslims played by the British and Hindus. They wanted to harm Muslims in every walk of life. Sir Syed knowing their mind advised the Muslims not to join Congress.

The British Government wanted to transfer power to the local population by introducing their system of democracy, through joint electorate. Being better educated Hindus exercised greater political influence on the ruling circles. This state of affairs agitated the mind of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. To equip the Muslims with modern knowledge he founded many educational institutions and advised them to acquire modern education.

The Hindus did not like this development and to deceive the Muslims tried to invent common cultural and religious terms for Hindu-Muslim unity. Hindus succeeded a bit in this regard but soon leaders of the Muslims of the sub-continent became reluctant to accept the Hindu view point.

It was now realized by Muslims that, because of their cultural, traditional and spiritual composition, they were different from the other nations of the sub-continent. They had little in common with the Hindus Religious beliefs, values and practices. This perpetually generated and kept alive a strong sense of national identity among the Muslims.

Establishment of Alighrah college equipped the Muslims with the political insight which they urgently needed to compete with the Hindus in the field of politics. As a result of this political insight they founded their separate political party known as the All India Muslim League which demanded adoption of the system of separate electorate for the Muslims. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan had already demanded this system during his

famous speech of January 12, 1883 in Governor General's Council and thus the voice of Muslims had already reached the ruling circles.

Those Muslims who had been lured by Indian Nationalism soon changed and became the supporters of the Two Nation Theory. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan was indeed the pioneer of Two Nation Theory. After his death Allama Mohammad Iqbal revived the Two Nation Theory during his famous Presidential Address in December 1930 in Allahabad, where he said, "I would like to see the Punjab, N.W.F.P. (North Western Frontier Province), Sindh and Balochistan amalgamated into a single state having self Government within the British Empire or without the British Empire. The formation of a consolidated North Western Indian Muslim State appears to me to be the final destiny of the Muslims, at least of North West India."<sup>2</sup>

In his presidential address Allama Iqbal laid down broad based guidelines for the future leaders of Pakistan.

The Quaid-e-Azam, similar to Allama Iqbal, was a great nationalist leader. The Allama took great pains to convince the Quaid-e-Azam of the Two Nation Theory. In his famous letters to Quaid-e-Azam he exhorted him, time and again, to remember that the Indian Muslims needed his services badly. The Quaid-e-Azam was at last convinced by the arguments of the Allama and took upon him self to re-organize the Muslim League.

This was the time when the Government of India Act 1935 had already been promulgated. The Quaid-e-Azam envisaging a new pattern of self rule and devoted himself to the work of re-organization of the League.

### **The Separate Electorates and its Acceptance**

Right from 1867, when some influential Hindus of Banaras started crusade against Urdu Language and in 1905 when Bengal was partitioned by Lord Curzon purely on the administrative grounds, the militant and aggressive attitude of Hindus had disillusioned the Muslims and they had started thinking to defend themselves from the onslaughts of the English and Hindus. It was the first major difference between Hindus and the Muslims that emerged on the eve of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

A Muslim deputation under the leadership of Sir Agha Khan met the then Viceroy Lord Minto on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1906 at Simla and presented an address to him in which they demanded separate electorates. The Viceroy listened to them attentively and accepted in principle the demand

of separate electorates. In this connection the services of Justice Ameer Ali, Nawab Viqarul Mulk and Sir Agha Khan can not be underrated.<sup>3</sup> Besides this, Syed Ameer Ali met many other British personalities, sought interviews with many responsible and prominent politicians in England and convinced them of the reasonableness of the Muslim demands.<sup>4</sup>

Credit goes to Justice Ameer Ali for promoting the cause of separate electorates and convincing every body of their inevitability for the Muslims. On 27<sup>th</sup> January 1909 he himself took a deputation to Lord Minto and submitted a memorandum to him in which he spelled out his objections to the proposed measures of the British reforms. Later on, he supplemented his arguments in an address in which he explained what Muslims meant by communal representation was the representation of the Muslims by Muslims, elected by Muslim electorates at all stages of the elective system.<sup>5</sup>

The Congress had miserably failed to accommodate the Muslims and was unable to appreciate their point of view in their demands. This alienated the Muslims from the Congress. If all the demands of the Congress vis-à-vis representation were accepted by the British government, the Indian Muslims would have been reduced into perpetual minority and in any scheme of joint electorates, every polling station would have certainly degenerated into a bloody battle ground. Lord Morley in his speech in the House of Lords, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1909 supported the idea of separate electorates, because it was not without parallel and precedence in the West. In Cyprus, the Muslims and in Bohemia the Germans used to vote separately.<sup>6</sup>

Lord Morley presented this memorandum in the House of Lords on February 1909. He discussed this issue in full details and mentioned the differences between Hindus and Muslims in their culture and religion, and the demand of the Muslims was accepted in respect of Separate Electorate.<sup>7</sup>

It was this scheme of separate electorate which made the Muslims of the sub-continent conscious of their political power. Later events testified to the truth of the observations. As a result even staunch supporters of the joint electorate system were obliged to change their viewpoint. Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah was one of those leaders. After the official acceptance of separate electorate system Hindus through Indian National Congress started campaigns to abolish this system. They pressurized British government to abolish it but the



government stood their ground and did not abolish it. Then Hindus realized the need of unity and they accepted this demand in Lucknow Pact. The Lucknow Pact was the first ever systematic bid of compromise on the separate electorates.<sup>8</sup> Once again they demanded abolishment of this system, and placed this demand in Nehru Report but Muslims rejected it. The success of this system was actually the acknowledgement of the political supremacy of the Muslims in the areas where they were in minority. This system supported Two Nation Theory, and proved it in the elections of 1945-46 when Muslims won majority positions and opened the eyes of British government. The pro Hindu organization Indian National Congress too realized that now Muslims were united, and it was this unity that resulted in the establishment of an independent state for the Muslims of South Asia in the shape of Pakistan.

### **Importance of the Separate Electorate System**

No doubt Sir Syed Ahmed Khan placed Two Nation Theory and the Muslims of the sub-continent became aware that they were a different nation from Hindus and on the basis of this theory we got separate homeland. The Muslim separatism really started after the British conceded separate electorates to Muslims in 1909. Separate Electorate System has the pivotal importance in the history of Pakistan Movement because it established the identity of the Muslims. It also established the historical and political importance of the Muslims of South Asia. This system safeguarded the rights of the Muslims and they succeeded in getting due share of power specially in executive and other councils. In joint electorate Muslims were deprived of their rights. Nawab Waqarul Mulk in one of his speeches delivered at the MAO College Aligarh in March 1907 had anticipated the Hindu domination in case the rights of the Muslims were not safeguarded. The unfriendly and unsympathetic attitude of the majority towards the minority had already driven the latter to the position of seeking shelter under the patronage of the British government. The rights which were conferred by government to the people, brought no safeguards for the Muslim. All the benefit was being taken by their countrymen and the Muslims just remained looking at them in helpless condition. Separate Electorate system safeguarded the rights, privileges, demands and claims of the Muslims, and ultimately Muslims of South Asia succeeded in getting a separate homeland for them.

### Conclusion:

Muslims were generous to the Hindu Community during their rule of several hundreds of years. After their defeat in the war of independence the role of the Hindus remained totally negative against the Muslims. Their attitude compelled the Muslims of the sub-continent to form their own organization. i.e. the All India Muslim League to fight for their rights. The separate electorate system had a great importance in the history of Pakistan movement. Separate Electorate System brought awareness of separatism among the Muslims of South Asia. This system supported Two Nation Theory and won an independent state for the Muslims of the sub-continent.

### References

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