

PAKISTAN'S EARLY RELATIONS  
WITH ARAB COUNTRIES IN GENERAL AND  
WITH EGYPT IN PARTICULAR - A STUDY IN PERSPECTIVE

Abdul Aziz Mehranvi  
Din Muhammad Jalbani

Pakistan, which emerged as an independent Islamic State on the 14th August 1947 with the division of the Sub-continent of India, is no doubt a new State, but an ancient country. The present Pakistan comprises some of the areas which were the cradle of one of the most ancient civilizations of the world.

The excavations at Moen-Jo-Dado in Sindh and at Harappa in Punjab give evidence that a full-fledged civilization was firmly settled in the Indus Valley between 2500 and 1750 B.C.

"In antiquity", says Dr.F.A.Khan,<sup>(1)</sup> "the Indus Valley resembled Mesopotamia, Susania and Egypt in being an alluvial plain watered jointly by the Indus and its five tributaries in the Punjab. But in areas, the Indus Valley civilization was more extensive than the civilizations of the Tigris-Euphrates, the Karun Valley in the South-Western province of Khuzistan in Iran or the Nile Valley, being roughly 1000 miles in length from North to South and more than 300 miles broad".

According to H.T. Lambrick: "Sindh was dubbed 'Young Egypt' by some of the earliest British visitors to the country, and though we may now take exception to the idea that it was far junior in civilization, the similarity between the lower valleys of the Nile and of the Indus must always impress the observer. The same three parallel tracts of arid hills, alluvial plain, and sandy desert, lie

in the same order from right to left, the central valley in each owing its fertility not to rainfall but to the annual inundation of a great river".(2)

The valleys of Sindh and Egypt have rich ancient history, with world renowned centres of civilizations as displayed in the form of Pyramids and temples in Egypt and Moen-Jo-Daro in Sindh. Like Sindh, Egypt being a fertile land attracted many conquering nations from Asia and Europe and became the seat of various cultures and civilizations throughout the ages.

The Indus Valley was singularly self sufficient for all but a few imports and while in touch with trade centres in Iran, the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia, these contacts seem minimum and indirect. Egypt, Syria and Iraq were infact very important centres of transit trade between Europe and East, although it declined somewhat after the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope route to India, still continued to yield large profits to the natives of these countries.

The fall of the Mamluke rulers of Egypt in the beginning of 1517 A.D. made the Ottoman Turks masters of almost all the Arab countries. Egypt, Aleppo, Damascus, whole of Syria and Palestine, came under the direct rule of the Ottoman Sultans and these countries were incorporated in the Ottoman Empire. These conquests increased the prestige of the Ottoman Sultans who already were renowned as the formost warriors of Islam in wars against the Christians. Yavuz Sultan Selim (1512-1520 A.D.) was honoured as the servant of the two Sacred: Cities Mecca and Medina (Khadim-ul-Harmeyn-ish-Sherifeyn),(3) a title which made him the greatest ruler of the Islamic world and 'his empire included the territories over

which no Khalifa before him had ever exercised authority'.(4)

Immediately after the conquest of Egypt and other countries, the Sharif of Mecca also recognized the supermacy of the Ottoman Sultan in whose name Khutbah was recited throughout Hejaz.(5) Thus whole Arab Land came under the Ottoman rule.

It will be interesting to mention here that Sultan Selim after the conquest of the Arab Land desired to strengthen his relations with the Muslim rulers of the Sub-continent.

The rise of the Portuguese power in the beginning of the 16th century and the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope route to India, posed a serious threat to the seaborne trade between the Indian coast and the ports of the Mediterranean and northern Europe, and had deprived the Mus'lim traders of India and Arab countries of the monopoly of the trade which they had sofar enjoyed. As the Guardians of the Holy places of Mecca and Medina the Ottoman Sultan Caliphs made several attempts to make this area safer for Muslims.

Immediately after the conquest of the Arab Land, Sultan Selim had ordered for the construction of a fleet of fifty ships in order to help the Muslim rulers of the Sub-continent in driving the Portuguese out of India. In the reign of Sultan Suleyman, the Magnificent (1520-1566 A.D.) these efforts continued and the relations between the Muslim rulers of the Sub-continent and the Ottoman Turks were further strengthened when the Turkish fleet under Amir Mustafa and Khawaja Safer sailing from the Red Sea and reached Diu with a force of 600

Turks and 1300 Arabs in order to assist the Muslims of the fort of Diu against the Portuguese aggression. This timely act of rescue not only helped the Muslims to repulse the Portuguese attack but at the time enhanced the reputation of the Ottoman Sultan in India and he was admired as the most powerful Muslim sovereign of the age.

At the request of the Muslim ruler of Gujerat Sultan Suleyman issued orders for despatching the Turkish fleet under the command of the Turkish Governor of Egypt to shatter the sea power of the Portuguese in India.

In June 1538 A.D. the Turkish fleet of 76 vessels under the command of Khadim Suleyman Pasha, Governor of Egypt, carrying 7000 soldiers set sail from Suez to seek the revenge from the Portuguese. The Turkish Fleet after crossing the Indian Ocean with favourable winds, arrived off Diu on September 4, 1538 A.D. The place was repeatedly attacked but the Turks could not defeat the Portuguese. At last the seige of the citadel was raised and the whole Turkish fleet set sail on the 6th November 1538 A.D. The failure of the Turkish fleet was mainly due to the apprehension of the Indian Muslim ruler of an Ottoman domination at Diu, Suleyman Pasha's unscrupulous treatment of his allies, lack of cooperation between the two allies and the stubborn defence of the fort by the Portuguese.

Thus the Turkish expedition proved abortive and the Portuguese power could not be crushed. This provided an opportunity to the Christian Maritime Powers to subjugate the Muslim India for the coming centuries.

It will be interesting to mention here that the Muslim rulers of India including Mughals had no naval force.

The relations of the Muslims of the Sub-continent were further strengthened when the Turkish Admiral of the Red Sea, Sidi Ali Reis after his fleet's disaster at the hands of the Portuguese and contrary winds was driven to the Indian coast where his men enlisted in a local rulers army and he decided to return by land route. Sidi Ali Reis came to Delhi, where he was received by the Mughul Padshah Humayun with only a few days after Humayun's death. Akbar, the Great had also given him a letter for Suleyman, the Magnificent in which he had desired to strengthen the relations and should have a close alliance between the two Muslim Emperors. Sidi Ali Reis, no doubt, is the first scholar-cum-warrior, who was responsible for introducing Hind and Sindh in the Ottoman Empire as well as in the Arab Land which was at that time under the Ottoman rules. His book 'Mirat-ul-Memalik or 'Mirror of the countries' which he wrote after his return to Turkey gives details of his adventure as well as the account of the political conditions of this part of the world. Infact his book is not only a book of travels, but a historical document, which helped a lot in introducing the conditions of the people of these areas which ultimately brought the people of both countries closer.

Infact within a few decades after the appearance of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean, the maritime power of the Muslims received a blow from which it could never recover and the Arab ships almot disappeared from the Eastern Seas.(6)

As far as the historical record regarding the relations of the Muslims of the Sub-continent with the Arab Land during the 18th and the 19th centuries is concerned, we have not been able to find any material on this subject.

From the 18th century, the West assailed the Islamic world. The 19th century was even worse when the degradation and frustration of the Muslims of the world seems to have touched its peak and the whole Islamic world was either subjugated by the Europeans or struggling for their survival. Europe equipped with the Industrial Revolution armed with modern Science and inventions, decrepited the Muslim world, which was partitioned among European Powers. The First World War witnessed the final stage in this process of subjugation. However, after the Second World War the Muslims throughout the world struggled for their independence and within few decades the whole Islamic world at last got political independences from the West but economically most of the Muslim countries are still under the influence of the Big Powers.

Being a cradle of pan-Islamic movements, Pakistan has contributed immensely towards bringing all Muslim countries closer to each other. Historically, geographically, culturally, and now even politically, Pakistan is inseparable and integrated part of the Muslim world. Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the Founder of Pakistan had always perceived the destiny of the Indian Muslims in alienably inter link with that of the rest of the Muslims of the world. He also foresaw that the politically dormant and internally divided Muslim world would be very soon jolted out of its slumber by international events and forced to mend its schisms and recapture its spirit for unity and cohesion.

The Quaid-e-Azam even before the creation of Pakistan as an independent Islamic State, was fully aware and conscious of the problems of other Muslim countries, specially the Arab countries.

During the struggle for Independence Quaid-e-

Azam was also fully supporting the cause of the Palestinians. Under his direction 'Palestine Day' was observed throughout the Sub-continent on August 26, 1938 and meetings were held everywhere condemning the unjust and inhumane policy pursued by the British Government and special prayers were offered for the complete success of their Arab brethren in their struggle for Independence. The Muslim League also sent a strong deputation to Egypt, Palestine and England to deal with the problem of Palestine.

In November 1945 another "Palestine Day" was observed throughout the Sub-continent. Addressing a public meeting, the Quaid-e-Azam said: "The Muslims . . . must help their Arab brethren".<sup>(7)</sup>

In a statement given on 23rd March 1946 Quaid-e-Azam again strongly supported the cause of Arabs and demanded that "I call upon His Majesty's Government and President Truman to let us know what is their real and honest attitude towards the national aspirations of the Arabs, Egyptians and the Indonesians and other Muslim countries and towards Muslim India and their demands which they have repeatedly made clear and which means nothing but the barest justice to them".

When Egypt got Independence and Britain decided to withdraw its troops, the Quaid-e-Azam said in a statement on 8th May, 1946:

"I am glad to hear the news that the British Government has decided to withdraw troops from Egypt. Muslim World, I am sure, will rejoice to hear this news".

Quaid-e-Azam in December 1946 also visited Egypt and had meetings with Egyptian leader. Quaid-e-Azam throughout his life supported the cause of the Palestinians and other Muslim countries. Just before his death, in his Id message on August 27, 1947, Quaid-e-Azam said:

"My Id messege to our brother Muslim States is one of friendship and good will. We are all passing through perilous times. The drama of power politics that is being staged in Palestine, Indonesia and Kashmir should serve as eye opener to us. It is only by putting up a united front that we can make our voice felt in the councils of the world".(8)

The first Prime Minister of Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan, describing the main objectives of the creation of Pakistan while addressing a public meeting said in 1951:

"The underlying idea of the movement for the achievement of Pakistan was not only just . . . was also to promote closer fellowship and cooperation between Muslim countries.(9)

The same idea was envisaged in "The Principles of State Policy" in the constitution of 1956. Article 24 of the constitution stated that: "the state shall endeavour to strendthen the bonds of unity among Muslim countries". Similarly this objective was incorporated in the constitution of 1962, where the article 21 stated: "the bonds of unity amongst Muslim countries should be preserved and strengthened".(10) A similar inclusion was also made in the constitution of 1973.

This objective was basically ideological and deep-rooted in history, psyche and political thought of the Muslims of the sub-continent. Allama Muhammad Iqbal beir 3 great advocate of this idea revived the conception of Ummah, and propounded the idea of 'Muslim Nationalism. To him religion was "a power of utmost importance in the life of individuals as well as states".(11) He reminded the Muslims of South Asia that they formulate "a far more valuable asset to Islam than all the countries of Muslim Asia put to gether and they had a duty towards Asia, specially Muslim Asia".(12)

The Muslims of sub-continent were struggling for their demand of separate home-land on the basis of religion. A new era was emerging in the middle east. The fall of Ottoman Empire, abolition of Kaliphate, establishment of Turkish Republic and the rise of Egyptian Nationalism created a new political order. Egypt was the first middle eastern country, where Pakistan established its embassy. Soon after independence in October 1947, J.A.Rahim, Former Indian Commercial Delegate to Egypt, took over as Pakistan charged Affairs de Cairo.(13) Haji Abdul Sattar Saith a Former Member of the Executive Council of the Muslim League presented his credentials as ambanador on June 30, 1948 at Cairo.(14) Consequently, Egypt appointed EL Husseiny, its Council General in Bombay as charge-de Affairs in Karachi.(15) In October 1948, Mohammad ali Allouba Pasha known for his pro-Pakistan views was appointed Egypt's first ambassador to Pakistan. He worked hard to develop good relations between the two countries: Pakistan and Egypt.

Pakistan after its independence initiated relations with Egypt considering it as "one of the most impor-

tant members of the great family of the Muslim Nations and key to the Arab World".<sup>(16)</sup> But Egypt on the contrary viewed the partition of sub-continent with apprehension.<sup>(17)</sup> It was argued their in Cairo that the partitions of India could only be of service to Britain who would continue to control the South Asia "by playing India against Pakistan and being indispensable to both"<sup>(18)</sup> Soon Pakistan got an opportunity to remove some of the misunderstandings of Egypt and successfully established its credibility. Pakistan's unqualified support on Palestine issue in United Nations changed Egypt's attitude towards Pakistan.

This is the perspective of Pakistan's early relations with Arab countries in general and with Egypt in particular; and demands for further contemplations based on ideological perceptions to establish ties of love, affection and integration for future developments in the comity of nations.

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