

First World War Its Impact on Freedom Movement in Sind

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The First World War and the emerging changes of that period struck a lasting blow to the whole structure of imperialism bringing, as they did, the issue of national self-determination and of dissolution of the old empires to the forefront.

The crippling war taxation, soaring prices and reckless profiteering added fuel to fire of Indian unrest and there were demands for greater political reforms.

The struggle which the people of India had been carrying against British imperialism with the boycott and occasional acts of 'terrorism' and 'conspiracy' as the main weapons received a new impetus from the irresistible idea of national self-determination which was brought forward by the emerging changes of that period.

The British Government realising that the weakest link in the imperialist chain, Russian Tsarism, was about to snap hastened to arrest the advance of Indian national struggle and issued on 20th August 1917 (i.e. within five months of the fall of Tsarism) what was known as the Montagu Declaration, in which the Secretary of State proclaimed the aims of the British rule in India to be "the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British empire," and promising "substantial steps in this direction should be taken as soon as possible."

Hotbed of Nationalist Activities

When the country-wide political debate started in wake of the Montagu Declaration, Sind politics was dominated by the "extremists." The Government started a policy of suppression. Dissident newspapers were hard-hit. In 1918, within less than six months (from 28th January to 13th July) as many as eight newspapers of Sind namely the *Hindvasi*, Hyderabad; the *Larkana Gazette*, Larkana; the *Sind Patrika*, Karachi; the *New Times*, Karachi; the *Home Ruler*, Karachi; the *Sindhi*, Sukkur, the *Hindu*, Hyderabad and the *Sind Advocate*, Shikapur were black-listed.¹ Their entry in the registered libraries was banned and instructions were issued to the Courts and Officers not to send them notices or advertisements.² Some newspapers including the *New Times*, Karachi; the *Home Ruler*, Karachi; the *Trade Advertiser*, Karachi; the *Hindvasi*, Hyderabad and the *Hindu*, Hyderabad were asked to furnish securities under the Press Act of 1910.³ The latter newspaper instead of depositing within required 14 days an amount of Rs. 2,000 as security in connection with the publication of 16 objectionable articles, they published all of them in a single issue, two days before the expiry of the period, with comments that what was written in them was right and justified; and informed the readers about the closure of the newspaper and the press in protest—five thousand copies of the paper were sold out instantly.⁴ The Sind Provincial Conference by a special resolution, passed on the 1st April 1918, strongly condemned Government's policy in Sind of "demanding securities under the Press Act ... without any justifiable ground" and suppression of "all out spoken Indian newspapers in Sind by putting a ban on them."⁵

Like the Sind Congress, the Sind Provincial Conference hitherto representing the moderates was completely under the control of 'extremists' in 1918. Sind became the hotbed of nationalist activities in India. A pro-Government English newspaper of Karachi had to complain in August 1918 that "the extremists in Sind being the only active political party at present and carrying off their feet by exuberance and volubility."⁶

This state of affairs scared the highest symbol of British rule in the Bombay Presidency. The Governor of Bombay declined to

accept the Hyderabad Citizen's Association's welcome address in February, 1919.⁷

Satyagraha Movement

The people of Sind played a remarkable role in the *Satyagraha* movement launched from the 6th April, 1919, to protest against the the draconian law, Rowlatt Act, made public on the 18th March, 1919. This law had intensified repression against freedom-fighters in India and empowered the Viceroy and the provincial governors among other tasks to arrest people and deport them without trial.

To express indignation against the Act an unprecedented strike was observed in Hyderabad and other towns of Sind on the 30th March, 1919. To protest against the police action in Delhi, where unarmed demonstrators had been fired upon that day, alongwith condemnation meetings at various towns of Sind, condemnation articles and editorials were published in the press. On one of such article entitled "Kalalkay Hut Kusan jo Kope Wahey" published in the *Hindvasi*, Hyderabad, its writer editor, Jethmal Parsram, was prosecuted under section 124A and sentenced to 2 year imprisonment.

Jalianwalla Bagh Massacre

The Jalianwalla Bagh massacre (April 13, 1919) added fuel to fire. There was a wave of mass unrest in Sind. To show the public anger against the brutal action of the authorities, mourning processions were taken out in various towns of Sind wherein thousands of people participated bare-headed and passed condemnation resolution in public meetings. The *Khilafat* agitation started in October, 1919, further added to agitative mood of the people of Sind. In December 1919, on the occasion of annual session of the all-India National Congress held at Amritsar, a special train of Sindhis went to pay homage to the Jalianwalla Bagh martyrs and on return blood-mingled dust was brought to display in Sind. This was the historic session of the Congress which acceded to the demand of Sindhis that their province be treated as a separate province in the all-India Congress organisation and they be allowed to form a separate Sind provincial Congress Committee.

To check this 'unrest', Prevention of Seditious Meetings Act 1907 was applied to Sind in April 1919,⁸ but it failed to help the imperialist strategy.

The *Hindvasi*, Hyderabad; the *Hindu*, Hyderabad; the *New Times*, Karachi; the *Sind Samachar*, Karachi and the *Sind Advocate*, Shikarpur continued criticising the Government. The period saw widening of the horizon of Sindhi press of Hyderabad, Mirpurkhas, Sukkur and Larkana which dealt with "all-India topics and high politics almost to the exclusion of the local affairs".....a few years earlier they were concerned "almost entirely with local affairs."⁹

Some of the Sind newspapers including *Sind Advocate*, Shikarpur,¹⁰ were issued show cause notices for depositing security for printing objectionable matter and some of them including the *Sind Samachar*, Karachi, were directed to deposit security under the provisions of the Indian Press Act 1910 for publishing "seditious" articles. The action against the letter was taken in connection with the publication of two articles, namely, "Jindagi ya Maut" (Life or Death) and "Satyagraha" in its issue of 26th April, 1919.¹¹

Police Raids

In April 1919, the police made raids and searches at the houses, offices and premises of political workers and a number of them were arrested. In Hyderabad, the raids and searches were made at Mukhi Jethanand Partabrai's house, Lokram and Vishnu Sharma's house, Brahamcharya Ashram and Tilak Home Rule League office. Office of the *Hindvasi* and house of its editor Jethmal Parsram, offices of the *al-Amin* and its editor Shaikh Abdul Majeed Sindhi, Ghulam Muhammad Bhurgri's office and bungalow, office of Shaikh Noor Muhammad (pleader), residence and dispensary of Swami Govindanand, Prof. Ghansyam's house and Besant Home Rule League office were also searched. As a result of these searches Mukhi Jethanand, Jethmal Parsram, Dr. Choithram, Shaikh Abdul Majeed Sindhi and Swami Govindanand were arrested but later released on bail. Mukhi Jethanand was required to give two sureties for Rs. 25,000 each and last four of Rs. 5,000 each.¹² In Karachi, also, police raids were made at the houses of political workers including H.O. Marwala and at the office of the *Home Ruler*.

On April 11, 1919, after public announcement at a mass meeting held at Hyderabad after a successful procession attended by about five thousand people, three Sindhis sold proscribed literature.¹³ A newspaper, *Satyagrahi*, published without declaration, was also sold by its editor.¹⁴ A "seditious" leaflet entitled the *New Call* was written and published by H.D. Mariwalla and printed by D.B. Advani at the press of the *Home Ruler*, Karachi. Consequently, three Sindhis including Mariwalla and Advani were arrested in Karachi. In Hyderabad, European guard was kept at the Bank of Bombay and the local authorities were directed to be ready to face any eventuality. The Europeans were advised to keep two day's provisions in hand.¹⁵ The Superintendent of Police and the Commanding Officer, Hyderabad contacted with political leaders of the town, including Ghulam Muhammad Bhurgri, to exert their influence for keeping the situation under control.¹⁶ Towns in Sind other than Karachi too remained much agitated. In Karachi, non-occurrence of violence and bloodshed, in the opinion of Commissioner-in-Sind, H.S. Lawrence (1916-1920), was "solely due to" presence at Karachi of "a strong military force of British and Indian troops."¹⁷

Khilafat Movement

October 17, 1919, was observed throughout Sind as the *Dua jo Deehun* (Prayers Day) in favour of Turkey. This day is known as "First Khilafat Day." Anti-British meetings, rallies and demonstrations were organised all over Sind.

The Khilafat movement, a protest against the injustices of the 'victorious Britain and her allies to Turkey, became a rallying point of Muslim mass unrest and agitation against imperialism. The broad masses of the Muslim population, however, saw the anti-colonial aspect of the movement, rather than the religious one, as the most important. The rank and file of the movement often referred to it simply as the *Khilafat* movement directed against Britain. Participation of Sind in this movement was outstanding.

The Government sponsored "peace celebrations" (13th to 16th December 1919) were boycotted throughout Sind by the nationalists. The processions against it were organised at Karachi, Hyderabad and

other towns of Sind. In a small town like Larkana a mourning procession of Muslims and Hindus numbering about 7,000 carrying black flags was taken out.¹⁸

The pro-British newspaper, the *Daily Gazette*, Karachi, remarked, December 22th, 1919: "It is a sad fact that there is no political activity in this province except that carried on by the most bitter extremist agitators, whose only method of argument is abuse, whose only policy is hostility to the British administration."¹⁹

The revolutionary tide of rising mass unrest, reflected in the *Satyagraha* and Khilafat movements, was further intensified by the *Hijrat* and the Civil Disobedience movements launched in 1920. All sections of the people shared the general unrest. For the first time authorities came face to face with the labour unrest in Sind. In February 1920, Karachi Port Coolies, and in June, 1920 Railway workers at Sukkur went on strike.

No less than six Sind Provincial Khilafat Conferences at Hyderabad (January, 4), Larkana (February, 7-9), Sann (March, 17), Sehwan (April, 17), Jaccobabad (May, 22-23) and Shadi Pali (June, 25), were held in first half of 1920. In these Conferences aggressive anti-imperialist speeches were delivered such as equating the British Government of India with Nimrod who was ultimately destroyed by a mosquito, and that because the Hedjaz Railway had been blown up, the Indian railways should also be torn asunder.²⁰

Hijrat Movement

The Sind *Ulema* lent their weight to the anti-British movement and issued a *Fatwa* declaring India as *Dar-ul-Harb* (abode of war). The *Fatwa* was endorsed by the Sehwan Conference which passed *Hijrat* resolution. The Jacobabad Conference chalked out the ways and means of its implementation. Consequently, throughout India the first special train arranged in connection with the *Hijrat* movement went from Sind. Throughout India it was again a Sindhi, Ali Hassan Ghanghro, who faced first prosecution in connection with the *Hijrat* movement).

In July 1920 about 758 Sindhi led by Barrister Jan Muhammad

Junejo, having sold their property—lands, houses, crops, bullocks, household goods—worth thousands at ridiculously low prices, migrated by a special train to Afghanistan in the hope that that country would help liberate their motherland. However, most of them soon returned, for the country's fight for freedom was to be fought, necessarily, on its own soil.

Civil Disobedience Movement

In August 1920, Civil Disobedience Movement against the colonial regime started. The struggle soared to heights. The anti-British movement surged more and more as the months rolled on. In Sind this manifested itself in the following events and actions:

1. Mass rallies, demonstrations and *hartals* at Karachi, Hyderabad, Sukkur and other towns of Sind, and meetings and conferences in villages.
2. Spread of anti-British agitation in the *mofussil*. The pro-British circles in Sind were not ignorant of its vital importance. The *Daily Gazette* remarked: "The Karachi 'leaders' are mere figure-heads, wind-bags who have little real influence but whose vanity impells them to utter high-sounding words which they are perfectly ready to eat the moment the authorities show any disposition to hold them responsible. The agitation in the mofussil is far more dangerous in that its source of inspiration is obscure,..... but there can be little doubt that the propaganda is widespread and that it is none the less dangerous because no prominent Muhammadan or Hindu in the province is openly connected with it."²¹
3. Renunciation of honorary appointments and titles: These included the renunciation of *Afrin-namas* (letters of appreciation), *Parwanas* (licences) and *Kursis* (literally-Chairs), membership of Municipal and Local Boards, School Committees and Honorary Magistrateships.
4. Boycott of official receptions: Even the receptions arranged in honour of the Prince of Wales were boycotted.

5. Boycott of Government controlled and pro-British educational institutions including the Alighrah College outside Sind and the Sind Madressah and the D.J. College in Sind. About 150 students of the latter College, alone, left it on political grounds.²² To accomodate such students a number of schools and other educational institutions were established at different towns of Sind. In order to identify themselves with national movement, some of the educational institutions, including Mulla schools, refused to accept Government's Grants-in-aid.
6. Boycott of law courts: Parallel to British law courts, conciliation courts headed by local headmen were established in various towns and villages of Sind. The lawyers' boycott was, however, less successful, except for a few outstanding examples such as those of Jan Muhammad Junejo, who publicly renounced his degree of Barrister-at-Law, and Abdul Jabbar, who surrendered his licence of practice to Judicial Commissioner.
7. The Government and the loyalist politicians [were denounced. In October 1920 at the anniversary (*Mella*) of Shah Abdul Latif at Bhit attended by about 50,000 people, the garriwallas and camelmens refused to convey the Government officials and Co-operators to Government or else charged them much heavier rates than others. In this connection, even the prominent man like Ali Akbar Hassanally Effendi, one of the known pro-Government leaders, while returning from Bhitshah to Shahdadpur station, was shown no courtesy and had to ride on a donkey.²³
8. Elections to the legislatures were boycotted. Posters were displayed throughout Sind crying shame and dissuading people from participating in the elections. The boycott of elections by the electors was very successful. Even a staunch pro-Government newspaper like the *Daily Gazette* had no hesitation in publishing a report of its Hyderabad correspondent showing the following percentage of voters who had gone to polls: "Hala, number of voters 268, recorded 100. Matli, number of voters 300, recorded 13. Larkana, number of voters 1,957, recorded 268. Mirpurkhas, number of voters 261, recorded 168. Kotri, number of voters

500, recorded 52. Shikarpur, number of voters, 6,780, recorded 80."²⁴

9. Imported goods were boycotted. Foreign cloth became the main item of boycott. The movement was so successful that *Khadi* became the symbol of patriotism. Exhibitions of *Khadi* were organised at different towns of Sind.
10. Refusal to pay state taxes; Though no such appeal was made to the people by the leaders of the movement, a considerable number of persons in Sind publicly declared that they would refuse to pay state taxes if the leadership of the movement so desired. Even at the local Khilafat Conference held at a remote village Dhoru Naro, on the 18th May, 1920, about 42 landholders made such a declaration.²⁵
11. 'Seditious' speeches were publicly delivered, appealing to the people to "sacrifice their lives, give up Parwanas and Chairs," and also "steal police horses, tear up rails, rob officers, break railways so that troops may not be able to move quickly."²⁶
12. The rising political consciousness was reflected through a number of books. Sadhu T. L. Vaswani alone wrote a number of books on the subject, which included (i) *Indians Arise*, (ii) *Awake, Young India*, (iii) *Indian Adventure*, (iv) *India in Chains*, (v) *Secret of Asia*, (vi) *Builders of Tomorrow*, (vii) *Apostles of Tomorrow*, and (viii) *My Motherland*.²⁷
13. The mood of the people was also reflected in "the increasingly virulent tone of the vernacular newspapers."²² More and more newspapers with decided anti-British and pro-non-Cooperation movement policy came out: the daily *Alwahid* from Karachi (1920), the weekly *Vande Mataram* from Hyderabad (1931), the weekly *Azadi* from Larkana (1922), the weekly *Watan* from Shikarpur (1922) and the weekly *Hamdard* from Jacobabad (1923). Besides these, the following newspapers took very aggressive part in the anti-British current continued on at the time in the Sind press: the weekly *Bharatvasi*, Hyderabad; the

weekly *Hindvasi*, Hyderabad, the weekly *Shakti*, Nawabshah, the daily *Swaraj*, Sukkur and the daily *Hindu*, Hyderabad.

14. Many newspapers were served with show-cause notices and were asked to furnish securities for publishing objectionable articles. When the *Hindu* was called upon to furnish security of Rs. 2,000, the public immediately contributed the amount. Editors of newspapers welcomed imprisonment for publishing 'seditious' articles. Thus, editors of a number of Sindhi newspapers such as *Alwahid*, Hyderabad, *Hamdard*, Jacobabad, *Shakti*, Nawabshah, *Hindu*, Hyderabad, were convicted. The latter was the only newspaper throughout India whose more than eight editors were arrested and imprisoned one after the other, but the policy of the newspaper remained unchanged.²⁹
15. National Volunteer Corps were organised. They used to wear uniform, and march in mass formation raising slogans to organise strikes and encourage boycott of foreign cloth and wine shops. The Volunteers were declared illegal and a large number of these were arrested. However, this did not dampen the morale of the political workers. The period saw for the first time in Sind the organisation of whole-time paid student-workers engaged in political work under the auspices of the Sind National Service of Students.³⁰ Initially, around five dozen students joined the Service and went to different towns and villages of Sind for political work assigned to them. Each of them was given a stipend of Rs. 30 per month by the National Service. Later on, some of them were employed in the National schools which paid them their salary instead of stipend by the National Service.³¹
16. The authorities took special measures to keep the tense situation under their control. For instance, to spread fear and harassment amongst the people of Hyderabad, armed police platoons paraded the streets and aeroplanes fanned the skies on the occasion of the trial of the town's first two arrests, namely of Shaikh Abdul Majeed Sindhi and Vishnu Sharma, who were convicted for two years and three years respectively.
17. On the 8th July 1921, the all-India Khilafat Committee declared

at Karachi that no Muslim should serve in the British army or assist in recruiting. In September of the same year, the Ali Brothers (Moulana Muhammad Ali and Moulana Shoukat Ali) and other leaders including Pir Ghulam Mujadid of Sind were arrested on the charge of seditious speeches at Karachi. The trial took place at Khalikdina Hall, Karachi. Sindhis raised funds for their defence and other expenditure. However, each of them was sentenced to two years imprisonment.

18. On the 21st July 1921, the police opened fire on a crowd of people who had come to register their protest against the unpatriotic activities of those who remained loyal to the colonial administration, at Matiari village. One person was killed in this police firing and twelve persons were injured.
19. Massive demonstrations, and mass strikes were organised in which young and old, men and women, braved tyranny of 'law enforcing agencies.' Police officers on duty were abused by the people, and magistrates were compelled to hold their sittings in the prison. When Pir Mahboob Shah Rashidi, brother of the then Pir of Jhando, was sent to jail for a 'seditious' speech, thousands of people assembled in Hyderabad to offer him felicitations. Fearing the wrath of the people, his trial was held inside Hyderabad jail. Thus, the pro-Government circles were relieved of their anxiety, for "excited people have been congregated in the vicinity of the jail for the past few days and if the Pir had been brought out to stand his trial there is not knowing what disturbance might not occur during his passage through the streets in custody."³²

Repression

Infuriated by unprecedented political activity, the authorities ordered mass arrests. Imprisonment was, however, no longer feared. In fact, it became a badge of honour. The accused often pleaded guilty and declared in unequivocal terms that British rule was a foreign rule and it was their national duty to overthrow the alien domination. The arrests were followed by celebrations, in which the people displayed their joy by singing, dancing, distribution of *Kohars*

and sweet drinks. Lawyers conducted the cases of political workers without charging any fee. Demonstrations and meetings were held near the courts to offer felicitations to undertrials for their courage and readiness to welcome imprisonment. On release, political workers were given enthusiastic welcome. They were garlanded and taken in procession through the main roads on which arches had been erected in their honour.

Somersault

Despite the fact that national enthusiasm of the masses was at fever pitch, leaders were not ready to carry forward the movement because they feared mass mobilisation of the people would undermine those vested interests with which they were closely linked. As early as April 1919, they were reminded: "Bolshevism would rule the country by the most hideous form of murder and tyranny. The Government of India at present were not fighting against the comparatively harmless politician but against the forces of anarchy and chaos such as have converted unhappy Russia into a hell. Therefore the Government are entitled to sympathy and support of all law-abiding citizens."³³

The entire movement got stuck in the morbid mud of emotional frustration when Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the Indian leader, called off the movement in February, 1922 after the incident of Chauri Chaura in the Gorakhpur district in the United Provinces of India where a crowd of angry peasants after driving policemen who had been firing on them into the police-station building, set fire to it.

Conclusion

People of Sind, however, kept aloft the banner of opposition to the British imperialism. They insulted one of the highest symbols of British rule throughout the whole empire. The *hartal* which greeted the Prince of Wales on his arrival at Karachi on the 17th March 1922 was the most successful demonstration of popular disaffection Sind had yet known. Despite the fact that Government had interned about 56 persons and directed the printing presses and newspapers of Karachi not to publish anything contrary to the Government policy, the whole city was flooded with anti-British posters, black flags and enthusiastic

demonstrators making the strike unprecedented. Even the walls and roads of the city were decorated with boycott slogans. A newspaper of Hyderabad, the daily *Hindu* brought out a special boycott number on that day and its copies numbering in thousands were secretly distributed in Karachi. The strike was so successful that no *tonga* or *victoria* plied on the roads; even tea and cigarettes were not available in the whole of city.

The political situation in Sind, after the First World War, thus, went through a rapid transformation. It marked the beginning of a new phase in the development of the revolutionary advance and left a deep imprint on the evolution of Sind's political struggle for emancipation.

References/Notes

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