Rais Ghulam Mohammed Bhurgri

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Undoubtedly one of most brilliant stars on the political firmament of India in the early decades of the twentieth century was Rais Ghulam Mohammed Bhurgri. His early death at the age of about forty five at the height of his career in 1934 deprived India as a whole and Sind in particular of the leadership of a wise and moderate nationalist. What course politics of India would have taken remains one of the 'ifs' of politics. The tragedy is that almost no work has been done on the life and work of this great man and he awaits a genuine biographer and also to be given a place of honour in the pantheon of national leaders. I offer here an outline of his career with the hope that it will be filled in by our young scholars.

Rais Ghulam Mohammed was by any definition a front ranking leader of the Indian National Movement but very little is generally known about him. He was a practising lawyer and a prolific correspondent but almost no papers survive him. He is mentioned in documents and books here and there but no account of his life exists apart from the Dictionary of National Biography published in Calcutta in 1972. Therefore we must be particularly grateful to Janab G. M. Sayed who has made invaluable research and given us a fairly full account, although still in outline, in his *Janab Guzarian jin seen*, Vol. I, 1967. My paper is based on G. M. Syed's researches, such scattered material from other books, and on the evidence of those who knew him even slightly, including my distinguished father.

Rais G. M. Bhurgri was born in 1878 in village Dengan in Jamesabad taluka of Sind. His ancestors were Baluch from Dera Ghazi

Khan settled in Sind for many generations. Ghulam Mohammed's father died while he was only about 10 years old and the property was administered by the Court of Wards. After and early education in the village Madressah he went to Mission High School in Hyderabad and then to Navalrai Hiranand Academy also in Hyderabad. He spent some time at the Sind Madressah Karachi and then went to Aligarh where he matriculated. On his return to Sind Rais Ghulam Mohammed settled down to being a progressive but average zamindar when a remarkable event changed his life. One night he was occupying a Dak Bungalow near the Shadi Palli Station in Jamesabad when he was asked to vacate it as a British officer wanted to come in. Rais Bhurgri refused to leave the Bungalow much to annoyance of the Assistant Collector who decided to teach Bhurgri a lesson by prosecuting him under section 110 Cr. P. C. Friends advised Bhurgri to leave the country and consequently he went to England where he stayed for three years returning in 1908 after having become Bar-at-Law.

Immediately on his return G. M. Bhurgri set up his law practice in Hyderabad where he was soon very active in politics. Hyderabad was at that time the very hub of the political and intellectual life of the province. Many of the most distinguished figures in the social and political life of the Province were living and working in Hyderabad at this time. Among the well known figures were Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi who had set up his Darul Rushd in the village of the Pirs of Jhanda very near Hyderabad. The sanyasis of Gurukal Ashram of the Punjab had opened Brahama Acharya Ashram to produce young Hindu workers. The elder brother of the famous Congress politician Acharya Kripalani had been converted to Islam and was preaching Islam among the educated Hindus and there were many others active in different spheres. Bhurgri soon created a wide circle of friends and co-workers, both Hindus and Muslims. Among these were Santadas Mangharam, Jethmal Parsram, Jairamdas Daulatram, Abdul Qadir Hafiz, Abdul Rahman Barrister, Mr. Abdul Jabbar, Shaikh Abdul Majid Sindhi who had just converted to Islam. He came to live with Mr. Bhurgri and became editor of his paper Al-Amin. Among the political associates of G. M. Bhurgri were Seth Harchandrai Vishindas,

Ghulam Ali Chagla, Seth Yousifali Alvi, Ghulam Hussein Qassim, Jaffer Fidou and others. Most of these politicians were based in Karachi. One of the centres of activity was the Islam Club which was near Gandhi Gardens and where distinguished visitors also came and stayed.

By 1909 G. M. Bhurgri was member of All India National Congress. He was also elected one of the four members that Sind sent to Bombay Legislative Council. G. M. Bhurgri was elected as representative of Zamindars and Jagirdars and with him went Seth Harchandrai as representative of Sind Municipalities. Both these men joined the non-official party in the Bombay Legislature under Sir Pherozeshaw Mehta.

During his tenure as member of the Bombay Legislature Bhurgri concerned himself with different measures to ameliorate the condition of the masses in his Province and with improvement of the condition of the Muslims of India as well as the political problems of the Indian National movement.

He tried to bring in the Muslim education cess bill which was defeated by the antagonism of the Government. At every stage G. M. Bhurgri kept his constituents informed of his activities and of the political situation. He corresponded individually with the educated persons in the province. His efforts were thus devoted to the political education of the Sindhis. Through his efforts the Rasai commission was appointed and its findings so shocked the government that strong measures were taken to try to stop it. G. M. Bhurgri and his associates including the leading Hindu politicians made strong efforts to convince the British Government to give Sind a separate status rather than let it remain as an appendage of Bombay or attach it to the Punjab as some of the British were in favour of doing at this time.

G. M. Bhurgri organized a deputation to meet Sir Edwin Montagu, the Secretary of State for India on his visit to India at the end of the war. Montagu was impressed with their case but the Bombay civilians' pressure to keep Sind proved too strong and for the time being the status quo continued.

Apart from his busy legislative schedule for the public interest Rais Ghulam Mohammed was also participating fully in All India Nationalist politics.

He attended all the yearly sessions of the Indian National Congress, which were then held in the month of December. Under his and his friends influence the Sind delegation was a large one every year. 58 delegates attended the 1910 session and equally large number accompanied him in the following years. In 1911 he and some associates set up the Sind branch of All India Muslim League. The 1913 session of the Indian National Congress was held in Karachi at the invitation of Bhurgri, Vishindas and others. The 28th session of All India Congress duly met at Karachi from 26th to 28th December 1913 under the presidentship of Nawab Mohammed Bahadur and among the distinguished participants were the Aga Khan, Late M. A. Jinnah, Lala Lajpat Rai, Dinshaw Vacha and others. The session proved a great success despite the open hostility and propaganda of the Government which was alarmed lest the loyal ranks of Sind Mussalmans be disturbed. Soon afterward Rais Ghulam Mohammed took a large delegation with himself to the annual Muslim League Session which met at Agra on 30th December under the presidentship of Sir Ibrahim Rahimatoola. At this time a number of progressive nationalist leaders felt that the two great national organizations, the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League ought to come together and make common cause to gain constitutional advancement for India. World War I had begun in 1914, and the Allied powers were anxious to gain the cooperation of the Indians in the war effort and were in a mood to make all kinds of promises. In order to get a definite commitment from the British Government for Home Rule or Dominion Status for India it was felt that common proposals should be framed by major parties and put before the British Government. Some of the most farsighted leaders of the two parties worked for this objective among whom most important were Mr. M. A. Jinnah, Syed Wazir Hassan, Rais Ghulam Mohammed Bhurgri and Raja Sahib Mahmudabad. The result was the famous Lucknow Pact of 1916. Both Congress and the Muslim League held their annual sessions at Lucknow where both Jinnah and Bhurgri were guests of the Raja

Sahib of Mahmudabad. The Lucknow Pact was made and the joint proposals put before the Government. Their fate is a matter of history.

The 1917 General Congress Session was held in Calcutta with Annie Besant as President. Rais Ghulam Mohammed was elected one of the General Secretaries and was taken on to the Working Committee of the All India Congress – the only Sindhi Muslim even to be a Member of that body. The end of the war in 1918 saw a change in the political situation in India. The Imperial Government was no longer in a mood to appease the Indians and put into force a number of repressive laws. The constitutional reforms they effected did not come up anywhere near the expectations of Indians. The Muslims of India were agitated on account of the fate of Ottoman Empire which had been on the losing side in the war. They suspected that Allied powers wanted to dismember Turkey and abolish the Khilafat. This feeling gave rise to the Khilafat movement. It was the first mass political movement in India which was instrumental in politicizing the people of India. A wave of enthusiasm spread through the subcontinent as the Khilafatists and Indian National Congress joined hands in the non-cooperation movement. Among the most active Khilafatists were the Sindhis. Agitation spread through the Province, not only among the middle class politicians but also among the Haris and the urban working classes. The Khilafat propaganda was carried through voluntary workers and through newspapers including Rais Ghulam Mohammed's newspaper Al-Amin. Shaikh Abdul Majid Sindhi, the editor had been put into jail already in 1917. The Government of Sind was highly alarmed at the strength of the movement and tried through repressive measures and harassment to cow the people into submission. Mr. G. M. Bhurgri was in the forefront of the Khilafat agitation. Lady Lawrence, the wife of the Commissioner Sir Henry Lawrence records "Mr. B. is the arch villain and there will be amazement and consternation when they learn so influential a person is for *it*. The great Mr. B. is at the point of arrest.* Mr. B. had been the mainspring of the agitation. He was the Secretary of the Congress and in close touch with Gandhi. An energetic and clever man, a Bar-at-Law and landlord." Soon after this in 1918 he left for

*Lady Lawrence, *Indian Embers*, pp. 391-394.

England to make contacts with the H. M. G. He met Sir E. Montagu and was one of the signatories of the memorial to the Prime Minister of England on behalf of H. M.'s Muslim subjects sent on 12 December 1919. Rais Ghulam Mohammed returned from England in January 1920. In February 1920 Khilafat conference was held at Bombay and in recognition of his great services to the nationalist cause Rais Bhurgri was elected President. He was proposed for the chair by Maulana Abdul Bari Farangi Mahal and seconded by Sir Fazalbhoy Karimbhoy. Among the many notable leaders present apart from Maulana Abdul Bari and Sir Fazalbhoy Karimbhoy were Maulana Abul Kalam Azaad, Maulvi Zafarali Khan Lahoree, Saifuddin Kitchlew, Mr. Gordandas, Azaad Sobhani, Hasrat Mohani, Pir Rashidullah Shah Jhandewaro, Maulana Shah Salman Phulwari, Moulvi Abul Qasim Fazal Haque, Jamandas Dwarkadas, Mr. M. A. Jinnah, Moulana Dawood Ghaznavi, Sir Abdullah Haroon, and others. In addition to the other resolutions regarding Khilafat movement, the conference also passed a resolution thanking Mr. G. M. Bhurgri for his services for the Khilafat movement during his stay in London. In keeping with the Congress resolution to boycott elections under the Reforms of 1919 Mr. Bhurgri did not contest in the elections of 1919. He was however nominated on the Council of State, a post he accepted at the persuasion of friends but which he resigned later as a protest against the Government's policy of repression. In November 1923 Bhurgri stood for elections to the Central Legislature and was elected to it. In the Legislature he joined Jinnah's Independent Party. In March 1923 the annual Muslim League Session was held at Lucknow and G. M. Bhurgri was elected President. His Presidential address was comprehensive and profound covering internal and external problems of India and what we would now call the third World. A man of vision he made a remarkably prophetic statement.

"Some people think the idea of a League of Oriental Nations to be a dream; but when I notice the aggression of Europe against Asia and Africa, the behaviour of the white races towards the coloured peoples and colour prejudice in some of the western countries, I clearly see the early realization of this dream. 'Asia for Asians' has already gained possession of the heart of this con-

tinent, and so has Africa for the Africans; it may be slowly, the maker and unmaker of nations is working out His will. India's place is undoubtedly in that brotherhood, and I feel that it will one day, by reason of her size, population and resources, have a very honoured place in it." (S. S. Pirzada, Foundation of Pakistan, Vol. I, p. 570).

The fifteenth session of the Muslim League came to an abrupt conclusion when there was disagreement on Mr. M. A. Jinnah's proposals that Council entry should be allowed. The session was adjourned sine die on 1 April 1923 and when it reassembled in Lahore on May 1924 Rais Ghulam Mohammed had already died on 9th March 1924 at the age of 45. The loss was sudden and terrible for the people of Sind, both Hindus and Muslims, and for the Muslims of the whole India. For the Muslims of Sind his death left a gap which has never been filled. The 15th Session of Muslim League reassembled under the presidentship of M. A. Jinnah and passed the following resolution on his death.

"All India Muslim League places on record its deep sense of sorrow at the sad and untimely death of the Hon'ble Mr. Ghulam Mohammed Bhurgri, and feels that in him the Mussalmans of India have lost one the greatest patriots, politicians and disinterested servants of the community, and desires that this expression of sorrow on behalf of the community may be conveyed to his family." (S.S. Pirzada, Op. Cit., Vol. I, pp. 577-578).

There was not a word of polite exaggeration in the words of the resolution as far as Rais Bhurgri was concerned.