

The Manzilgah Masjid Agitation 1939

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Masjid Manzilgah is a two-domed building near the bank of the river Indus, opposite to the island of Sadhbela between old and new Sukkur.¹

Syed Muhammad Masoom Bukhari, a notable person in the Durbar of Akbar the Great, constructed it presumably as a mosque.²

In the middle of the river Indus, opposite Sukkur on a small island at a distance of about a quarter mile, a Hindu Sadhu built a temple in 1800 A.D. known as "Shree Sadhbela Tirath".³

In 1839 A.D. British troops occupied Sukkur and temporarily their officers, for want of suitable buildings took their residences in mosques and tombs. According to Sir Richard Burton, tombs were pierced for windows, furnished with mud verandhas and converted into Bungalows by the first military settlers. The Manzilgah ground together with the building was also occupied for residential purposes for a number of years and it was called 'Residency'. In 1882 the Collector of Sukkur reported that the building and compound had been flooded by the unusual rise of the Indus, and the officers living in it had been forced to abandon it. Again in 1883 the Superintending Engineer made a report to the Commissioner in Sind that it was not possible to make a portion of the Residency habitable, and recommended that it should be pulled down.⁴

The settlement was vacated and the British officials shifted to the new constructed houses elsewhere. All such religious buildings formerly occupied were given up in 1884. Masjid Manzilgah was not, however, handed over to the Muslims, but they continued to enjoy the right of offering their prayers in the building whose possession remained with the authorities.

The first claim by the Muslims of Sukkur for restoration to them of the two-domed building was made in the year 1920. There was not any communal disturbance on this account up to 1940.⁵

The communal disturbances followed in Sukkur and the Hindus objected to the Muslims using the building as a mosque, on the ground that it was situated in the vicinity of Sadhbela. The authorities decided to meet Hindu objection by saying that the Muslims should erect a wall around the mosque in order to avoid the possibilities of hurting Hindu feelings.⁶ However Hindus were not satisfied and the agitation continued.

In 1932 the authorities decided to put a lock on the mosque due to the pressure of the Hindus and the mosque was locked and the key remained with the authorities.

When the Muslims of Sukkur saw that the Hindu agitation had succeeded in the demand for the restoration of Hanuman Mandir in Karachi although it had been clear case of a very recent and un-lawful encroachment, the Muslims believed that if they too intensified and organised their agitation, they would also succeed like the Hindus in winning back their place of worship.

From 1932 to 1936 Muslim Association of Sukkur carried on agitation for the removal of the lock. Khan Bahadur Allah Bux (then member of Bombay Council) himself made public promises on certain occasions to get the mosque restored, if he was ever placed in a position to do so.

The first election under the Act of 1935 for Provincial Assembly was held in Sind in 1937. There were two Muslim parties, one headed by Sir Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah known as Muslim Political Party and the other called United Party. The Muslim League started in Sind in the year 1937, but it had little importance till the later half of 1938.⁷

The Muslims of Sukkur had renewed their demand for the restoration of the Manzilgah Mosque soon after the Provincial autonomy was granted. The renewal of this demand seems to have been occasioned by the hope that, whereas the old government had failed to appreciate the Muslim feelings in this matter, the popular Ministers might be better able to do so to render justice to the Muslims of Sukkur.⁸

The first autonomous Government under the premiership of Sir Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah came into existence in April 1937.

In January-February 1938, a deputation of Sukkur Muslims met the Premier Sir Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah and requested him for the early restoration of the mosque, but there was no satisfactory response.⁹

When the local Muslims of Sukkur saw that their continued agitation had failed to produce any fruitful results particularly on account of the hostile attitude of the Hindus, who strained every nerve to oppose the Muslim demand, they were forced to the realisation that unless they pressed their demand through some recognised political organization, their agitation would not lead them any where.

All the local Anjumans and Associations of the Muslims of Sukkur pooled all their energies, but they found it difficult to achieve their object in the teeth of organised opposition of the Hindus.¹⁰

By 23rd March, 1938 the Ministry of Sir Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah was dissolved and Khan Bahadur Allah Bux succeeded him on 3rd April, 1938. Khan Bahadur Allah Bux reopened the matter and made a note showing his inclination to restore the building.

In the middle of April 1938 a representative of Jamiatul Ulema went to Sukkur and obtained a letter from Chief Secretary to the Sind Government to the District Magistrate Sukkur. While at Sukkur, the Moulvies delivered open speeches expressing the nature of their mission and the purpose of their visit and promising an early restoration of the Mosque by the new Ministry. But nothing was done from April 1938 to May 1939.¹¹ The Government did not mean business and only renewed a promise as soon as its due date expired possibly for safeguarding their Ministry.¹² The Muslim League was compelled by the Sukkur Muslims to take further steps in this matter by forming the Restoration Committee. The Restoration Committee gave an ultimatum to the Government that the final decision in the matter of Manzilgah Mosque must be announced by a certain date, failing which Restoration Committee made it clear that it would be compelled to take direct action by permitting the eager Muslims to launch "Satyagrah" for the restoration of the Mosque.¹³

On 19th May, 1939 the President of the Provincial League Sir Abdullah Haroon visited Sukkur personally and tried without success to arrive at some amicable settlement with the Hindus. However, the idea of Satyagrah was dropped on the persuasion of the local Anjumans.¹⁴

In August 1939 the son of Pir Sahib of Bhurchandi was assaulted by Hindus in Sukkur.¹⁵ From June to October 1939 the Hindus carried on counter propaganda. The Congress backed up Hindus for the purpose of further elections.

On 2nd of September 1939, the Muslim League again went on requesting the Premier to settle the Manzilgah issue but nothing was done. The Government failed to announce any decision by the given date with the result that the Restoration Committee was compelled to let the Muslims start Satyagrah on the first October, 1939.¹⁶ From 1st October 1939, the Satyagrah was staged by the Muslim volunteers and over 1,000 were arrested. The police were posted to the Manzilgah Mosque to take the possession of the building.¹⁷

On 3rd October 1939, the Collector of Sukkur suddenly ordered to release all the Muslim Satyagrahies, and orders were also issued to stop all further arrests and the police pickets posted at the Manzilgah premises were withdrawn.¹⁸ From 4th October to 18th November, 1939 Mosque remained in possession of the Musalmans. During that period Hindus raised a hue and cry. From 12th to 14th November, 1939, the Hindus held the conference which was presided over by Dr. Moonje, the president of All India Hindu Mahasabha and Sukkur was chosen deliberately as the place for the conference, because of the Manzilgah question. A resolution was passed deploring the murder of Bhagat Kanwar Ram, a Hindu holy man which was attributed to the followers of Pir of Bhurchandi.¹⁹ The conference also condemned the weak and vacillating policy of Government on Manzilgah question. Another resolution called upon Government to take immediate possession of the Manzilgah and required Hindu Ministers, Hindu Parliamentary secretaries and the Hindu Deputy Speaker to resign from their offices in protest.

In this conference it was expressed that if evacuation did not take place before 17th Nov., Hindu support would be withdrawn from

the Premier. A resolution was also passed to boycott the Muslim shops and Muslim consumers.

In reply Musalmans started the agitation in the Sukkur District. This agitation was started in the name of Jihad. The religious passions of the masses were roused in the name of Islam and people came forward and offered themselves for Jihad.²⁰

On 19th November 1939 police pickets were posted at the Manzilgah. There were 5 pickets of unarmed police of 20 men in each cordon, 3 pickets of armed police of 20 men in each inner cordon and 60 men were kept in reserve before entrance into the camping ground compound. 60 armed constables were employed in ejecting the volunteers out of the Manzilgah.

The following officers were present at the Manzilgah directing operations for vacating the Manzilgah :

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. T. T. Kothavalla | D. M. Sukkur. |
| 2. C. H. Devmon | S. P. Sukkur. |
| 3. D. C. Barly | Add: D. M. Sukkur. |
| 4. H. Gollraith | Add: S. P. Sukkur. |
| 5. Cargill | Asstt: Collector Sukkur. |
| 6. R. H. Simpson | A. S. P. |

Inspector, Sub-Inspector and 3 Sergeants.²¹

On the arrival of the police at Manzilgah at 12.00 noon on 19-11-1939, District Magistrate Sukkur called upon the Satyagrahies to disperse and warned them that if they failed to do so, they would be dispersed with force. The Satyagrahies defied the order, where upon a lathi charge was ordered and the camping ground was cleared of a number of Satyagrahies in about eight minutes but many still remained inside the buildings and the inner enclosures. Many important personalities were arrested, among those who were detained were the following :—

G. M. Syed, the member of the Restoration Committee, Mr. Naimatullah Pathan, Dr. Muhammad Yamin, Agha Nazar Ali Khan and many others.²²

After the police cordons were posted at different points, the military arrived and commenced the work of erecting barbed wire fencing which was completed at 5 P. M.

The D. M. Sukkur then called upon the Satyagrahies inside the building to leave the place, warning them that if they failed to do so, force would be used. After some discussion a few decided to leave, but the others refused.

The District Magistrate then ordered the gas squad to eject them. After the use of gas, all the Satyagrahies left the Manzilgah building which was thus vacated and the compound locked up and a police guard was mounted within the barbed wire fencing.

150 persons were inside the building and about 300 were outside in the compound. In the Manzilgah agitation a number of Muslims and Hindus were killed and injured in the Sukkur City.

	<i>Muslims</i>		<i>Hindus</i>	
	<i>Killed</i>	<i>Injured</i>	<i>Killed</i>	<i>Injured</i>
Sukkur City	12	11	33	11
In the District	2	1	125	58

Those leaders who were arrested in connection with the Manzilgah mosque incident, were sent to Hyderabad and kept in Central Jail. They were released on 19th January, 1940.²³

This communal split that is apparent in case of Manzilgah or Hanuman Mandir in Sind could be said to be of comparatively recent origin. In fact Hindu-Muslim bitterness became manifest only during the period of British rule and could not be taken seriously during the previous Muslim rule, in spite of occasional overblown incidents such as that of Naomall Hotchand's grandfather. The conclusion is obvious that this split was the result of the British government policy of giving advantage to Hindus against the Muslims. The British policy of divide and rule was not openly followed. It operated in a subtle fashion. The civil laws introduced by the British operated in favour of the urbanised Hindus against the mainly Muslim agriculturist

population which had already been confused and bewildered by the loss of power. The education system introduced by the British also favoured urban Hindus who now became the advanced section of the Indian population. They formed the official class under the British.

In this position of power the Hindus failed to show generosity and broad-mindedness so much so that even the nationalist and anti-communal party like the Congress gave undue support to the fanatical Hindus in the Manzilgah struggle. This narrow mindedness cost the Congress dearly because after this it lost the chances of support from the Muslim population and the way was opened for the Muslim League to become the only party of the Muslims of Sind. Thus by its shortsightedness the Congress made the triumph of Muslim League inevitable.

Footnotes

1. Weston, E., *Report on the Manzilgah Buildings*, Government Press, Karachi, 1941.
2. Weston, E., *Causes of Sukkur Disturbances*, Oct. 1940.
3. Khuhro, M. A., *The Day of Deliverance*.
4. Weston, E., *Causes of Sukkur Disturbances*.
5. Weston, E., *Report on the Manzilgah Buildings*.
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7. Syed, G. M., *Struggle for New Sind*, Sind Observer Press, Karachi, 1949.
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9. Syed, G. M., *op. cit.*
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12. Weston, E., *Causes of Sukkur Disturbances*.
13. Syed, G. M., *op. cit.*
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16. Weston, E., *Causes of Sukkur Disturbances.*
17. Syed, G. M., *op. cit.*
18. Weston, E., *Causes of Sukkur Disturbances.*
19. Syed, G. M., *op. cit.*
20. Allah Bux, K. B., *Sind Legislative Assembly Debates*, March 30, 1940, p. 38.
21. Talpur, Mir Bande Ali, *Sind Legislative Assembly Debates*, Dec. 2, 1940, p. 40.
22. Syed, G. M., *op. cit.*
23. Syed, G. M., *op. cit.*