# DECLINE OF NORTH INDIAN MUSLIMS AND THE PAKISTAN MOVEMENT

Before the British Raj, the majority of rulers of India were Muslims. Though Muslims were in majority in the northeastern and north-western parts of British India, but their centre of rule was North India, which in fact was a Muslim minority area. Thus in terms of language, culture, and socio-economic position the Muslims of North India were a privileged minority with a major share among local elites.10 The privileged minority, despite being small in number compared to the Hindus, was able to steer the sociocultural and educational activities of the mainstream area according to their preferences. Thus, their language and culture became the standardized one.

Therefore, the decline of Muslim rule was more acutely felt by North Indian Muslims than those from majority areas. That sense of decline generated both moderate and conservative responses. Moderates, mostly elites, sought to become part of the system for the maintenance or recovery of their positions—a strategy of survival within the system. Therefore, they oriented themselves with western values and norms though they maintained their Muslim identity. However, conservatives adopted a rejectionist and revivalist agenda which prompted them to look into the origins of their faith and thus movements for more doctrinaire interpretations of Islamic teachings, values, and customs started there. Consequently, there was increased consciousness of Muslim identity and pan-Islamism. Thrust for revival prompted the conservatives to direct their efforts to propagate and practice ‘true’ Islamic teachings through madrasahs; to search the features of Islamic order in order to establish it in the modern time and; to strengthen linkages with the Muslims across the world. However, added emphasis on religious identity and competing interpretations of religious scripture for revivalist agenda aggravated the communal and sectarian conflicts among Muslims living in minority areas.

Alternatively in Pakistani areas, religion was used to strengthen the existing power structure. Individuals sought spiritual solace from religious *pirs* and *makhdooms*. These *pirs* and *makhdooms* were also usually feudal lords and many became the intermediaries between the Raj and the common man.11 Though, religion was a source of exploitation, but over a period of time communal normalcy became an established reality probably because there was neither a thrust for religious revivalism nor emphasis on literalist interpretation of the religious texts. This religious tolerance was sufficient to maintain peaceful coexistence among the people of different religions and sects.12

**The Pakistan Movement**

During the decolonization process, local demands for autonomy, self-rule, and independence from colonial rule were being incorporated in and expressed through the western originated concept of nationalism due to the discourse on nation states. As far as the Muslims of the subcontinent were concerned, owing to variations in interests and orientations, the expression of nationalism took three forms: territorial nationalism, Muslim nationalism, and ethno-linguistic nationalism.

Whenever the privileged Muslims from Muslim minority areas faced decline or danger of decline of their leading role, they equated it with the decline of Muslim culture and values and presented

themselves as preservers of Muslim culture. Thus they always looked towards the Muslim majority areas for help.13 There was a growing feeling of insecurity among the Muslims in northern India of Hindu domination, because the majority status of the latter gave them an advantage in the new trend for instituting elections. Hence the Muslim intelligentsia from north India created the impression that the Muslims of the subcontinent were one monolith body whose culture, as interpreted by them, was being preserved under difficult circumstances.

Being more politically conscious, they launched the AllIndia Muslim League (AIML), a political party based on Muslim nationalism, to protect their rights constitutionally. The founder party of Pakistan, the Muslim League had its roots in Muslim minority areas and was primarily a move by the elite and educated class for constitutional safeguards and to protect the rights of the Muslim population living in British India.14 Hence it was more popular where fear of Hindu domination was prevalent, i.e. Muslim minority areas, particularly North India.

Conversely on the north eastern side, East Bengal (what became East Pakistan and later Bangladesh), the Muslims were underprivileged as compared to minority Hindus owing to their better socio-economic position vis-a-vis majority Muslims. The majority of the Muslims were peasants and tenants, while the majority of the landlords were Hindus. Business and commerce were also in the control of Hindu minority. This made East Bengal a thriving ground for a left leaning orientation. For the Muslim leadership here the Pakistan Movement was a struggle against socio-economic domination of Hindus, hence they more readily espoused the AIML cause than the other Muslim majority areas that comprise Pakistan today.

In the western parts, the Muslim elite were still the privileged class and masses were also free from the fear of Hindu domination. Therefore the threat of Hindu domination was not an issue in these provinces. Hence Pakistan movement launched by Muslims of minority areas through AIML was least popular in this part. Two years before partition, Punjab was being ruled by the Unionist Party; Sindhi Ittehad was prevalent in Sindh; *Khudai Khimatgars* (Servants of God) had won the 1946 KPK provincial elections; while in Balochistan, though the Quetta Municipality voted for Pakistan, but Kalat state opted for independence through its assembly. Thus, whereas the AIML put up a good show in the Muslim minority provinces and Bengal, but apparently at that time it was least popular in the Muslim majority provinces in the west.

Ziring described the affiliation of the local elite with AIML as, ‘[being there] for the holdouts, the Muslim League was an alien organization with a message that threatened their personal independence.’15 Thus the Muslim majority areas were not apprehensive about Hindu control and the elite there were enjoying a privileged and autonomous status with amicable relations with the non-Muslim elite.

In addition to the challenge of least popularity in Western parts, AIML also faced the resistance from conservatives but on different grounds. The majority of the leadership of AIML was moderate or modernist, oriented with western values of democracy and constitutionalism. So, in the eyes of the conservatives, moderates and modernists were agents of the British Raj, hence they rejected the AIML.

In 1940, the AIML passed a resolution for separate Muslim states in the Muslim majority areas which was a major shift in its politics and may be termed as the Pakistan Movement. In order to gather support from Muslims of all regions and different orientations, the leader of AIML, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, adopted ideological ambiguity as a political tactic. Hence a vague ideology of Pakistan contained religious slogans for the appeasement of conservatives, democracy and constitutionalism for the modernists, and promises of socio-economic justice for people of left-orientation.16 In addition to a vague ideology, Jinnah convinced the elite from the majority areas that they needed a spokesperson in the centre in order to safeguard their interests and no one else could play the role of spokesman better than he. Thus near the time of partition, the AIML managed to garner support from Muslim majority areas when it co-opted local elites and propagated the incidents of violence that allegedly had been perpetrated by Hindus against Muslims in Muslim minority areas.17

Muslim nationalism was more compatible with the prevailing power structure due to its emphasis on religion. Though ethno-linguistic and territorial nationalisms had their proponents and effective voices among the Muslim population, it was Muslim nationalism (with emphasis on communal differences rather than democratic norms) that, within a short span of time near independence, enlisted the popular support of the masses and emerged victorious through a Muslim elitist party, the Muslim-League and created the new country—Pakistan.

However, neither the British Raj nor the Pakistan movement brought about changes in the social norms and internal power relations, thus Pakistan was a democratic victory but without structural changes necessary for the smooth functioning of democracy. When it came to the hilt the Pakistan movement had secured popular support, however, it was not a deep rooted affiliation but the result of a momentarily created environment of communal hatred and violence. The local ruling elite opted for Pakistan due to convenience rather than commitment and was factionalized, regionally polarized, and had authoritarian tendencies. Hence the Pakistan movement could neither bridge the ethnic divide at a mass level nor give unanimity of purpose to the regional elite.