



Partition of India and the Muslims of Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

Though physically far away, the idea of Pakistan gained wide currency among the Muslims of the Presidency in general and of the Tamil region in particular. Rajagopalachari, though resigned from the Congress, was rallying the Congress leaders to his stand on Pakistan. In the long run, the scheme gained favour among the Congressmen. A section of the members of the League in the presidency was also against the partition. Leaders like Allah Pitchai, Basheer Ahmad Sayeed left the League on the issue of partition. The Congress once again tried to mobilize the support of the Muslims. But the Muslim Press wrote that the Muslims of the presidency fully allied with the League were determined to achieve Pakistan. The Congress entered into an alliance with the all India Nationalist Muslims Majlis which had its base in the North India to contest the forthcoming elections in the presidency. To demonstrate its strength the League called for "Direct Action Day" on 16 August 1946. During the meeting on the day in the presidency, many Muslims pledged to lay their lives for the sake of Pakistan. The British decided in February 1947 to transfer power. Lord Mountbatten was sent to wind up the British rule in India. Congress and Gandhiji accepted the partition of the country. Jinnah succeeded in achieving Pakistan. The Tamil Muslims far away from Pakistan had no more roles to play. They were mere witness to the happenings. Pakistan was born on 14th August 1947. India won complete Independence on 15th August 1947. E.V. Ramaswamy declared 15 August 1947 as "A Day of Sorrow", and asked his followers to observe it as a 'Day of Mourning'. As a leader who was supporting the Muslim cause all along, accepted the participation of the Muslims in the mourning. But Muslims generally kept away from the agitation and joined the national celebrations. The nationalist Muslims requested the Muslims to participate in the Independence Day celebrations. Mohammed Ismail, the President of the Muslim League appealed to the Muslims to join hands with the Congress and other friends to celebrate the Independence Day on 15 August 1947 and he declared "we are joining the Independence Day celebrations not in any spirit of compulsion but as free citizens of a Free Indian Union". The Muslims celebrated the Independence Day with gaiety in all the towns and villages in the Presidency. The Muslims of the Presidency adopted themselves to the new political climate to live in peace and harmony.

Keywords: Partition, India, Muslim, Tamilnadu.

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Introduction

The demand for Dravida Nadu, a separate state for Dravidians, was the logical culmination of Dravidian nationalism, including the territorial aspect as well. It coincided with the League's demand for Pakistan. The Dravidian movement and some Tamil Muslims saw the demand for separate states as embodying beneficial prospects for both groups. Tamil responded to the demand for Pakistan on two counts; first, as has been recently argued, Tamil Muslims showed solidarity for their co-religionists in Northern India;¹ second, they used the idiom of the Dravidian movement which ported Jinnah and the Muslim leagues as requiring support against an upper-caste Hindu congress. The Dravidian Movement perceived Indian Muslims' as yet another

subordinate social group like Dravidians'. For the Dravidian movement, the endorsement of Pakistan was opportunity to liberate such a group from congress dominance. this did not mean that Tamil Muslims would form part of Pakistan. They would stay back in Dravida Nadu to create a caste free egalitarian Dravidian / Tamil society. For these reasons, Muslim separatism, as revisited in the support that Tamil Muslims gave the demand for Pakistan, did not meet with the hostility that it did elsewhere.

Historians have demonstrated that the idea of Pakistan was not only ambiguous; it also meant different things to different people. Jinnah, it is suggested, used 'Pakistan' as bargaining tool with the congress, that he himself was uncertain about it till the end and it was the congress that helped make it a reality. Ayesha Jalal has questioned the conventional notion that congress was the party of Indian unity while the Muslim league was the proponent of division. Rather, Partition it appears was the price

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which the Congress was willing to pay for a strong Centre.² In Bengal, Joya Chatterji has argued, the Hindu minority led by an upper-caste *bhadralok* elite, developed a powerful separatist movement of their own to protect their interests, by dividing their province³.

Tamil Muslims knew little of what Pakistan actually meant given that they were Tamil speakers who stood the risk of being isolated in a Urdu-speaking Pakistan. It was no surprise that few Tamil Muslims actually migrated to Pakistan after 1947.⁴ One hypothesis is that Muslims supported Pakistan because they believed this to be in the best interest of all Indian Muslims and, to this end, they were prepared to make sacrifices for their co-religionists.⁵ As Malang Ahmed Basha, a League leader from North Arcot, said in 1941, at the All-India Muslim League session in Madras: “We look at this from the point of view of Muslims throughout India and are ready to merge ourselves in the common cause of Islam and make any sacrifice necessary to unite to the Muslims all over the country.”⁶ However, another facet of Tamil Muslims support for Pakistan was the “Three-Nation Theory” propounded by the Dravidian movement, and, for some time, by the Muslim League.

Ramasamy and Jinnah came together on an anti-Congress platform to seek separate state for each other. The demand for Dravidian Nadu predated the demand for Pakistan. The first Dravida Nadu Resolution was passed under Ramasamy’s leadership in December 1938, two years before the more famous “Lahore Resolution”. Ramasamy saw the Muslim League as the political body for the protection of Islam and considered it ‘the complete symbol of Self-Respect for Muslims’⁷. Ramasamy’s support for the League was in keeping with his notion that every social group ought to speak for itself. The Muslim League was such a voice. Since Ramasamy’s meeting with Jinnah in January 1940, the Tamil Nadu Muslim League and Ramasamy intensified their collaboration in the politics of the region.⁸ However, it must be noted that this was not the first time the League and Dravidian Movement had come together.

Ramasamy had always drawn upon Muslim audience during his Self-Respect campaign. Later on, the League and Ramasamy collaborated on Anti-Hindi agitations. An important occasion for the increased cooperation between the Muslim League and the Dravidian movement was provided by the holding of the 28th Annual Session of the All India Muslim League in Madras during April 1941. This session was presided over by Jinnah who shared a platform with non-Brahmin and Dalit leaders such as Ramasamy, M.A. MuthiahChettiar, M.C. Raja and S. MuthiahMudaliar. Jinnah adopted the rhetoric of the Dravidian Movement while addressing the Tamil Muslims:

In this land of ours, there is another nation Dravidistan. This land is really Dravidistan. Three per cents of the high caste (Brahmins) by skilfulmanoeuvring

and by skilful methods of electioneering have secured a majority rule. Is this democracy?..... I give my fullest sympathy and support to the Non-Brahmins. I say the only way for you is to come to your own life, according to our own culture, language and ideology..... I shall do all I can to establish Dravidian and we Muslim will stretch our hand of friendship and live with you on lines of equality, justice and fair play.⁹

It was at this session that Jinnah expanded his two nation theory to include Dravida Nadu as well by asking ‘Hindustan for Hindus, Pakistan for Muslims and Dravidiastan for Dravidians’.¹⁰ Ramasamy took the idea of a three-nation theory seriously throughout his propaganda campaign and mobilisation for Dravida Nadu / Pakistan. However, Jinnah did not reciprocate Ramasamy’s seriousness and only referred to it in passing in his speeches and debates on partition. He did not include it in his final demands and negotiations with the Congress and the British. Jinnah’s attitude was clearly based on political expediency.¹¹ In fact, Jinnah’s attitude to Dravida Nadu and Ramasamy’s subsequent disappointment, by 1944, are said to explain why the latter sought to consolidate his political resource in the form of the D.K.¹² Ramasamy and Jinnah achieved their Mutual goals in so far as they wished to show a multiplicity of voice representing different segments of the Indian nation. This was important for them to lay to rest congress claims that it had a monopoly over the Indian nation.¹³ In an atmosphere charged with expectations of a transfer of power from the British to a congress leadership, Ambedkar for Dalits, Jinnah for ‘Indian Muslims’ and Ramasamy for Dravidians sought to challenge the claims of the congress.

Ramasamy and the Dravidian movement endorsed the policies of the all India Muslim league in an attempt to build ideological and political solidarity among varied groups perceived as having in common a contestation of the power and claims of the congress. In the early 1940s, both Jinnah and Ramasamy did not clarify which of the ‘three nations’ Tamil Muslims would occupy. Later, they expressed the view that Tamil Muslims would form part of the Dravidian nation. Jinnah and the central league leadership were not much bothered about the Muslims of Tamil Nadu. Not only were they small in number, they were not as politically significant at an all-India level as the Muslims of Bengal, Punjab and the United provinces. Ramasamy, on the other hand, was very clear that Tamil Muslims were and ought to remain integral to his vision of a Dravidian / Tamil Nation.

Like the self-Respect Movement, the movement for a Dravida Nadu assumed that Muslims were part of its fold. The Dravidian press repeatedly reminded Muslims that they belonged to a Dravidian community, that their mother tongue was Tamil and if their religion was Islam, this was in any case, an Arabic name for the Dravidian region.¹⁴ Among these writers, PulavarIlakonar differentiated between the Muslims of North and South India and advised Tamil Muslims to

stand by the League in matters connected by religion and to stand by Dravidians in the matter of national separation.¹⁵

In the few months before partition, Ramasamy believed that the success of Pakistan depended on the fruition of the Dravida Nadu goal and sought Tamil Muslim support for it. He addressed the Muslims of Kayalpattinam in April 1947:

Jinnah has justice on his side when he attempts to liberate his people and their culture from the hands of upper-caste Hindus..... However, Jinnah's goals of protecting his people (Muslims) cannot be said to completely fulfilled if he achieves a separate home land for the Muslims of North Indian regions but leaves the South Indian Muslims at the mercy of Brahmin Hindu groups..... We need not stress that the good life of the Dravidian Muslims lies in Dravida Nadu.¹⁶

It was again Attur in Salem that provided the most significant response to Ramasamy's position that Muslims were an integral component of the Dravidian Community. P.A. Ismail of Attur denied that there was any distinction between Muslims and Dravidians. To him:

We became Muslims to escape Shudra title. Even though the changes religion from Hinduism, we have not changed our community. We are Dravidians by Community and Muslims by Religion. We belong to the lineage of *Moovendars*..... the basic principle of Dravidianism and Islam are the same, '*OntreKulam, OruvaneDeivam*'... We should stand by E.V.R and accept his leadership... we should not forget that we are belong in the *Moovendars Family*.¹⁷

The image of the *Moovendars* or the three ancient Tamil kingdoms the Cheras, Cholas and Pandya was the clearest delineation of a Dravidian sense of self among Tamil Muslims. Further the slogan of the Dravidian Movement, *ontreKulam, OruvaneDeivam* (One Community, One God) was intended to connote the similarities between Islam and Dravidianism on questions of monotheism, equality and communal unity.

Mohammed Ismail (later Qaid e Millath), leader of the Tamil Nadu Muslim League, endorsed the Dravida Nadu demand on the count that Muslims Were also Dravidians by community, history and habits, Ismail held that Muslims would be lacking in community-consciousness if they did not endorse it. The Provincial Muslim League, he Suggested, would endorse it if its separation from the rest of India was endorsed by most south Indians¹⁸.

Besides Ramsasmy, the endorsement of the idea of Pakistan from 'non-Muslim' quarters came from C. Rajagopalachari, congressman and author of the 'C.R Formula'. He was, in Fact, among the first to accept the idea of Pakistan and to advocate that the congress accept it. As early as 23 April, 1942, he convened a meeting of the madras congress Legislature party and arranged a resolution to be passed for a congress-league accord. However, when he subsequently moved the same

resolution at a meeting of the A.I.C.C, it was rejected by 120 Votes to 15. Rajagopalachari resigned from the congress and gave up his seat in the madras legislative Assembly. ¹⁹The rationale behind his support for Pakistan was, in his words: 'I stand for Pakistan because I do not want that state where we Hindus and Muslims, are both not honoured let Muslims have Pakistan. If was agree then our country will be saved'.²⁰ Jinnah famously rejected the Rajaji formula in April 1944 as 'a shadow and a husk, maimed, mutilated and moth-eaten Pakistan'.²¹ On his home-ground Tamil Nadu itself, it met with a similar response when both Dravidian and Muslim groups rejected the proposal. Abdul Hameed Khan of the Tamil Nadu Muslim League believed that the C.R. formula was different from the Pakistan resolution of the Muslim League, and that just as *swaraj* meant self-determination for the whole country, Pakistan heralded self-determination for the Muslim nation in the country.²² The response of the Dravidian movement to the C.R. formula was to contextualize the Hindu- Muslim problem as part of a larger problem. It perceived the issue as a question of nationalities. S. Ramanathan a former congressman himself presented the position of the Dravidian movement He stated:

While C.R formula serves a jumping-off ground to start with, it is far from complete. It has to provide for many other claims besides that of the Moslems and Sikhs and for the claim that is put forward for ...Dravidisthan.... the problem is no less urgent and insistent than that of the Hindu-Muslim problem. The Hindu-Muslim problem has crystallised itself into a sharp anti-thesis in the North... the anti-thesis between the Brahmins and Non-Brahmins is as acute as the Hindu-Muslim problem.²³

A more vivid response came from Dr. A. Krishnaswami who believed that the League would have committed a "cardinal mistake", if it had accepted the formula. Presenting the inaugural address at the Economics and History Association of the Muhammadan College on the subject, 'India - A Multi-National State', he said, 'In one sense, it was an attempt to divide Muslims from Dravidians and other nationalities and Mr. Jinnah would have been untrue to himself, untrue to the Muslim League and to other interests if he had accept the (C.R.) formula'.²⁴ Two points emerge from to critique by Dravidian leaders of the C.R. formula: first it was no longer a business of two or three nations but a question of many nations or nationalities; ²⁵second, sympathisers of the Dravidian movement were mistaken when they believed that Jinnah was concerned with more than the Hindu-Muslim problem, or what was defined as such, at the all-India level. In other words, their exaggerated hopes were that Jinnah would also represent the concerns of Dravidians and other communities by linking them to the demands of the Muslim League.

The contemporaries of Rajagopalachari were divided about whether the formula was in the interests of Indian Muslims. Mohammad Raza Khan, a Madras Muslim leader, believed Rajagopalachari and sacrificed

his own position in the Congress due to his empathy for Muslims and that he had sought to accommodate them within the Indian nation. ²⁶Others like Krishnaswami, provided a harsher analysis, calling it a ploy which had no parallel in the history of political chicanery' and stated:

Mr. Gandhi gave his assent to the proposals (C.R. formula) but at the same time has provided an exit for himself so that once Jinnah has made a false step, namely that of coming to an agreement with Mr. Rajagopalachari, Mr. Gandhi can forthwith retract had talk infantile nonsense about his being not even a 4-anna member or a representative of the Congress. ²⁷

The 1941 league session at Madras offered real impetus to the mobilisation of Muslims in Tamil Nadu. Revived in 1938, the Tamil Nadu Muslim League consolidated and expanded its branches at the primary and district levels. Through the run-up to partition, these League branches held conferences at various levels and endured the idea of Pakistan and Jinnah's leadership. Leaders from north India attended some of these meetings to provide a fillip to mobilisation, and excited the region's Muslims a greater sense of pan Indian Muslim reality. Chowdhry Khaliqzaman presided over the Tanjore District Muslim League Conference in the summer of 1944 which attracted a gathering of 30,000 Muslims from all over the province.

Around the same time, the All-India Muslim League Committee of Action, headed by Nawabzada Liaqat Ali Khan, visited Madras and addressed a mammoth meeting at the Biq mosque. Khan also presided over the Tirunelveli district League Conference, which was attended by more than 50,000 Muslims and where the Nawabzada was taken in a procession through the town. ²⁸The League's Direct Action Day on 16 August, 1946, saw a huge mobilisation in Madras city with processions and mammoth meetings culminating in the gathering of more than 50,000 Muslims. ²⁹

The League leaders presented the attainment of Pakistan as panacea for all the problems of Muslims in India. The appeal to the Muslim populace, in the words of Abdul Latif Farookhi, a Dakhni Muslim Leaguer of the time, was: "Pakistan, that we would be having Pakistan Some Paradise some great gift from God where all Muslims would be happy, Did not the Muslims and the prophet make exodus from Media to Mecca and lose their lands....?" ³⁰Such propaganda does seem to have been effective because the 1940 saw a rapid increase in the number of publications in Tamil espousing the League cause especially from the southern districts of Tamil Nadu. Tamil biographies of Jinnah sought to present the leader in glorious terms to Tamils and the regions Muslims ³¹ League literature in Tamil warned Muslims about the implausibility of the congress scheme for a future India and how it represented a conspiracy to establish *Ram Rajya*. ³²Such efforts over the 1940 ended in a successful League campaign in interior Tamil Nadu, where, by 1947, it began to attract widespread Muslim

support for its programme.

By August 1947, the League was what Jinnah wanted it to be, the sole representative for Tamil Muslims. It had gained strength over a decade from a rump body in the mid-1930s to winning, in the general elections of 1946, all the Muslim seats in the Madras Presidency. ³³The League returned unopposed in 13 of the 29 seats that it had contested. Further, it defeated the Congress in four rural seats. ³⁴Apart from the rout of the Congress in these elections, the performance of the nationalist Muslim front, the *Muslim Majlis*, was equally poor. The League defended the Majlis in a total of ten Muslim seats. ³⁵The League's successful electoral performance was testimony to the ineffectiveness and lack of political strength within the nationalist movement to counter its propaganda among the Muslims of the Presidency. It also attested the veracity of the grievances, a decade earlier, of some Tamil Muslims, that the Tamil Nadu Provincial Congress was paying inadequate attention to the Muslim Mass Contact campaign.

The victory of the League in the 1946 elections and the defeat of the nationalist Muslims did not mean that such voices did not exist. On the contrary, there were many of them but they were scattered and ineffective as counter-propaganda to the League. Basheer Ahmed Sayeed, proponent of Hindustani claimed that he sought to convince Jinnah about the futility of partition. Sayeed's opposition to the idea of partition cost him his ticket as a Muslim League candidate for election to the Constituent Assembly. ³⁶S.M. Fossil was another such nationalist Muslim leader who opposed partition, wanted a new all-India organisation superseding both the Congress and the Muslim League to be founded, and challenged Jinnah. For Fossil:

If an attempt is made to start a provincial organisation of Mussalmans, we can eventually succeed in overthrowing Jinnah. So for as our Presidency is concerned, no sane Muslim Leaguer is for the partition of India or subscribes to the Two-Nation Theory. I completely agree... that the mania for all-India leadership is responsible for all the trouble. ³⁷

Apart from Madras city, even Southern Tamil Nadu Districts had their fair springing of nationalists Muslims. In Tanjore, Mohideen Maricair and Abdul Majid, under the auspices of the Town Congress Committee in April 1940, opposed Jinnah's Two-Nation Theory and appealed to Muslims to join the Congress in large numbers to carry on the fight for *Swaraj*. Abdul Masjid assured Congress leaders that he knew the minds of the Muslims of that district, and that they would stand by the Congress. ³⁸ In Palani, Masjid Maniagar, Secretary of the Tamil Nadu Nationalist Muslim Conference Committee proposed, the convening of a nationalist Muslim conference in February 1947. In inexplicable contradiction to the political reality of the popularity of the Muslim League, Maniagar propounded.

The Leaguers are far removed from the public and as a result of their abstract and impracticable

theories they want to reduce the Muslims to the status of a commercial commodity which can be moved from place to place. This is their exchange theory.³⁹

Finally, the significance of having supported the Movement dawned on Tamil Muslims when the sub continent was partitioned and little migration occurred from among them to the new country. The reality in 1947 was that Tamil Muslims could not migrate to Pakistan for more than one reason: the language of the state was Urdu, whereas their mother-tongue was Tamil. For the Tamil Muslims, migration meant abandoning all commercial and mercantile interest in their localities which they could not afford, and, in all probability, were not inclined to do.

While the evidence suggests the growing strength of the League in the region during the partition process, what it also expresses is the significance and interpretation of particular forms of support to the movements of the time. Even though Tamil Muslims joined in the League *en masse* and participated in its propagation and mobilization, what they were in effect doing is strengthening the League at an all-India level while at the same time expressing their Indian / Tamil identity by standing back to form part of the new Indian / Tamil nation.

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