

BAHAWALPUR STATE: EFFECTIVE INDIRECT PARTICIPATION IN PAKISTAN MOVEMENT

The people of Bahawalpur did play a positive role towards the Pakistan Movement inspite of the ban on the political activities in the Bahawalpur State. Some local organizations were formed which were true sympathizers of the All India Muslim League and its cause. These organizations carried out the aims & objectives of Pakistan Movement in covert and overt fashion while remaining within the ambit of law. The people of the State knew that their future laid in the hands of the Nawab and their views or choices would not matter much. Yet there was massive frustration and obstacles at the creation of the new Muslim homeland. The State of Bahawalpur join Pakistan within 50 days of its creation. Even before that the ruler of Bahawalpur provided extremely valuable financial and logistic support during the 1st need of the life of Pakistan. At the same time they were confident that their ruler was aware of the pulse of the people. that Bahawalpur was a Muslim State, the public at large did not feel the pinch of the direct foreign rule.

Introduction

Bahawalpur region comprises the former Bahawalpur State which was merged in the Province of West Pakistan on 14th of October, 1955. On disintegration of One Unit in 1969, the territory comprising the former Bahawalpur State became an Administrative Division of the Punjab Province with Bahawalpur City as its headquarter. The region consist of three districts, namely, Bahawalpur, Bahawalnagar and Rahim Yar Khan, covering an area of 28013 square kilometre between

latitudes 27.42 north and 30.25 north and longitudes 69.31 and 74.1 east.

“Bahawalpur is the size of Denmark lying between the Punjab and Sindh.”¹ It is bounded on the north and west, first by the Sutlej which separates it from the Pakpattan, Vehari, Lodhran and Multan districts, then the combined waters of Sutlej and Chenab which separate it from the Muzaffargarh District and finally, from the point where the joint streams meet the Indus which divides it from the districts of Rajanpur in Punjab and Ghotki in Sindh. On the north-east lies the district of Ferozepur of India and on the south the States of Bikaner and Jaisalmer of Indian Union, and the Province of Sindh.

Bahawalpur region consists of a flat alluvial plain merging into desert towards south. Devoid of hills and watercourses except for pools and backwaters of the rivers in the north, the region can be roughly divided lengthwise into three tracts. Of these, the southern most and broadest is part of the great Desert, largely sand dunes, locally known as Rohi or Cholistan. It is separated from the adjacent tract by a depression called the Hakra which is the ancient bed of some great river probably the Ghaggar or Drishadwati. The central tract is chiefly flat desert but a large portion of it now has been colonized and brought under cultivation by canal irrigation. The northern strip which lies on the north of the railway tract is a fertile, irrigated and narrow alluvial tract in the river valley.

“Except for the northern riverain strip where sweet water is found, the sub-soil water in other parts of the region is brackish, uncertain and unfit for irrigation and drinking purposes. Now a days for agricultural, economic and other aspects the Division can be divided into three zones each having different characteristics. The Riverain or Mahal or Hithar area is inhabited by the old settlers, the Colony or Uttar area is inhabited by the immigrants ‘Abadkars’ while the Cholistan area is inhabited by the nomads.”²

Bahawalpur has been the cradle of many civilizations. Its vast desert areas of Cholistan form part of the ancient Indus Civilization. Its towns & villages which once flourished on both sides of River Hakra (old Drishadwati) are now no more; Hakra itself has long since dried up. Investigations carried out by archaeologists have; however, brought to light remains of pre-Harappa (Kot Diji) culture and various phases of Harappa culture from 4000 B.C. to 2000 B.C. Dr. Rafiq Mughal during his archaeological survey of Cholistan has concluded in his findings the discovery of a new cultural assemblage called "Hakra Ware", which chronologically pre-dates the Kot Diji related early Harappan phase of Indus Civilization.³ Cholistan is the only place in the Indus Valley which survived the demise of Indus Civilization-Some of its settlements remained intact the reason being the inaccessibility of the area.⁴

Role of Bahawalpur in Pakistan Movement:

Before the independence of Pakistan for over two centuries Bahawalpur remained under the State rule and like other States the political activities over here were negligible. The public was kept away from the political process, in those days the States were ruled in a dictatorial style, but with passage of time and changing circumstances, changes occurred in the cultures and politics of areas.

The Bahawalpur State in the sub-continent possessed a distinct cultural identity. The political development process was extremely slow but it is to be noted that the few organizations, which were established as social and religious organizations, had political motives behind them. The political movement emerging in various parts of sub-continent left affects, even though very less, on Bahawalpur also. In 1942, a State law was implemented which was regarding the political activities within the State. This was the Public Societies Act according to this act it was forbidden in the Bahawalpur State to establish a political party. This Act also laid restrictions on the establishment of any branch of any political party of India in the State.⁵ But still Bahawalpur State was not politics free, political associations like, Hizb Ullah

was associated with Ehrar, Jamiat-ul-Muslameen with Muslim League and Khudaam Watan with Congress.⁶ The presence of these, however, did not mean that there was political awareness amongst the general public of the State, as the subjects of the State were not allowed to participate in any political activity. The movements for the independence of the sub-continent and political happening, did impact the people of Bahawalpur but only as a point of information rather than as some actual local political activity.

The political activities amongst the students began at Sadiq Eggerton College, Bahawalpur, by laying the foundation of Anjuman Rafeeq Talba. Its first president was Muhammad Hussain Kanju, who was also known as the Sir Syed of Bahawalpur. Later on the active members of this association formed Sadiq State Student Society, whose aim was to provide educational facilities to the poor students.

Although according to the Public Society Act, the political activities in the State were prohibited but even then Muslim Board was formed which was purely based on the Muslim League's ideology. The active members included Dewan Aziz-ur-Rehman, Hayat Tareen, Shahab Delhvi, Mir Zahid Hussain and Malik Muhammad Din. Muslim Board from Bahawalpur started a newspaper "Nawai Muslim". The other newspapers associated with Muslim Board were "Insaf" and "Musalman". Muslim Board was in fore front in helping Muslim league in the independence movement.⁷

During the independence movement and at the time of partition the whole of sub-continent was under communal riots, and its affects were also felt in Bahawalpur like other States. The Muslim population as well as Sikh and Hindus in the States were feeling insecure. The Muslims felt that their interests and rights need to be protected. For this purpose a representative party of the people of States was formed and named as All States Muslim League, whose president was Nawab Bahadur Yar Jang of Hyderabad.

The population in Bahawalpur state in 1945, distributed according to the principal religions was as under:-

Religion	Number	Percent
Muslims	10,98,814	81.93%
Hindus	1,74,408	13.07%
Sikhs	46,945	3.50%
Jains, Christians and others	21,042	1.05%

Source: *Report on the Administration of Bahawalpur State, 1945-46* (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette, 1947), p.92.

Before the partition, the most important issue before the Bahawalpur State was to decide whom to join, India, Pakistan or declare to remain independent. The people of all the States were worried for their future, they realized that whatever decision is taken by their rulers, is going to affect their lives. They felt that no hasty or sentimental decision should be taken regarding this. In Bahawalpur State due to these concerns the two political associations Jamiat-ul-Muslameen and Muslim Board came closer to each other and decided to work together. They started campaigning by holding rallies and printing posters, in which they warned the people of the intentions of Congress and supported joining with Pakistan. In this campaign Nawai Muslim and Insaf, the two newspapers played a very effective role, these news papers were great supporters of Muslim league and projected its views.

“Bahawalpur had bigger resources in population and revenue than any of the other States, but even this State was too small to remain independent. Of its population of less than two million, 83 percent were Muslims. Its prosperity depended upon the Sultej Valley Project, which was essentially an extension of the irrigation system of West Punjab. The economic interests of

West Pakistan and Bahawalpur were closely allied. The North Western Railways, which linked the North-West Frontier Province and West Punjab with Karachi, passed for a considerable portion of its length through Bahawalpur. If there were any serious threat to its security internal or external, Bahawalpur would have to turn to Pakistan for protection. These ties pointed towards inevitably of the accession of the State to Pakistan. Nevertheless, there was hesitation and delay caused by the desire of the Nawab and his Prime Minister, Mushtaq Ahmad Gurmani, to "Maintain a quasi-independent existence". But events were moving too fast for these dilatory methods. In the second half of August, 1947, the Punjab disturbances overflowed to Bahawalpur and although the State authorities took vigorous measures to protect the non-Muslim minority, a fairly complete evacuation of Hindus and Sikhs from more than half the State had taken place by the end of September. On October 3, Bahawalpur acceded to Pakistan."⁸

"When on 14th August 1947 Pakistan came into existence, in whole of Bahawalpur State there were jubilations. Muslim Board, which was very effective in those days, held meetings took out procession and hoisted Pakistan's flag on many buildings. After Juma prayers people thanked God in their prayers and prayed for a strong Pakistan and long life of Quaid-i-Azam. But at the same time the people of the State were anxiously waiting for the decision of Nawab regarding the future of State. The people of the State were in favour of joining Pakistan and delayed decision had brought anxiety amongst the people."⁹

Penderal Moon giving an account on this issue writes that,

"the people of Bahawalpur had assumed that the State would accede to Pakistan, they knew nothing of any other possibility. The majority of them, being Muslim were well content with the prospect, and throughout most of the State even the minority communities had accepted it philosophically and without undue alarm.

Despite the uncertainty of the times the Nawab insisted on going off for the summer to England where he had a house near Farnham in Surrey. He promised, however, to return if any big issues regarding the future of the State had to be decided. With the announcement in June that the date for the transfer of power was to be put forward to August 15th these issues could no longer be postponed. Accordingly when towards the end of July Lord Mountbatten called the Ruling Princes to Delhi to talk to them about the future of their States the Nawab flew back to India to attend the meeting. Lord Mountbatten's object was to persuade all the rulers to 'accede' external affairs and communications – in other words to subordinate themselves in some measures to India or Pakistan. Gurmani informed me that the Nawab was being advised in certain quarters to accede to India. Gurmani himself seemed hardly less astonished and perplexed. The reason for this perverse advice was not far to seek. The Muslim League leaders had been offering tempting concession to some of the Hindu rulers in the hope of inducing them to join Pakistan. Some people thought that the Nawab might extract similar concessions from India if he agreed to accede to India instead of to Pakistan. These calculations were quite unfounded. The Congress leaders were not interested in enticing Bahawalpur into the Indian Union. Moreover, since Bahawalpur was a Muslim State with a Muslim ruler and lay right astride the rail and road communications between Karachi and Lahore, its accession to India would be a deadly blow to Pakistan and must produce a violent Muslim reaction. After a day or two all talk of acceding to India ended as the Nawab decided that Bahawalpur should in due course accede to Pakistan.”¹⁰

At the time when doubts and apprehensions were at the peak, on 18th August was Eid-ul-Fitr, there was a big huge gathering at the Eidgah for the prayer, according to the tradition of the State, a high level official of the State government wishes

Eid greetings to the public. On this occasion Prime Minister of the State Nawab Mushtaq Ahmad Gurmani in his address, thanked God for giving the Muslims of the sub-continent a separate homeland, which they are celebrating, the State of Bahawalpur is the heart of Pakistan. He further stressed for the protection of the minorities, prayed for the well being of Pakistan and Quaid-i-Azam. This statement gave some relaxation to the people of the Bahawalpur State.

On 3rd October, 1947 the Ameer of Bahawalpur declared to accede to Pakistan. In accordance with the India Act 1935, a written accession document was signed by the Nawab on 3rd October, 1947 and Quaid-i-Azam as Governor General signed it on 5th October, 1947. The most glaring feature of this accession document was its paragraph number-8, in which it was guaranteed that the Nawab of Bahawalpur shall retain the authority and control over the Bahawalpur State.¹¹

Hindu Muslim communal riots and tensions also infiltrated into Bahawalpur State. At many occasions the Hindu minority in the State had to face the hostilities of the Muslims. As a result of these communal riots nearly 99 percent of the Hindu population migrated to India from the State within three months, from August 1947 to October 1947.

During the partition of the sub-continent there was influx of refugees into Bahawalpur State from East Punjab and other areas of India. Initially the local population sympathized with the migrants and provided them food, but the amount of spirit, which was required at this crucial occasion lacked not only amongst the people but the local political parties also did not show much enthusiasm in helping the migrants. Muslim Board and Jamiat-ul-Musalmeen on a limited scale opened up few camps to provide assistance. The government of the State to deal with the problems of migrants established Ministry of Refugees on 18th January 1948, and appointed Mukdoom ul Malik Syed Ghulam as its minister in the Cabinet.

“In Bahawalpur the incoming refugees were probably settled more promptly and with less harassment than elsewhere

because it had the advantages of an autocratic government, which could take decisions promptly, and of an efficient settlement staff all of whom could be switched at once from their ordinary duties on to re-settlement of refugees.”¹²

Even though the role of people of Bahawalpur State in the independence movement was not much but still there was appreciable contribution of Nawab Sadiq towards the cause. Nawab Sadiq before the partition of sub-continent, at many times presided over the meetings of Aligarh University and used to donate lakhs to it. At the time of partition Nawab Sadiq was very generous to the newly established Pakistan.

“The Nawab had provided financial assistance to Pakistan Government just after independence when there were financial crisis and no money was there to meet the expenditure.”¹³

Just before the partition, when Quaid-i-Azam reached Karachi on 10th August, 1947, he first of all went to the residence of Nawab Sadiq “Al-Shams” at Malir. The same day on the orders of the Nawab, Bahawalpur First Infantry Battalion on the gate of Al-Shams gave royal salute and guard of honour to Quaid-i-Azam.¹⁴ The salaries of the government employees of Pakistan for the first month were provided by the Nawab of Bahawalpur. On 14th August, 1947 when Quaid-i-Azam came to take the charge of Governor General, he used the Rolls Royce BWP-72. Which was the personal vehicle of the Nawab.¹⁵

Conclusion

The Nawabs of Bahawalpur had developed very close ties with the British, at various times agreements were signed between the two, but it was ensured every time that the Nawabs will have full internal sovereignty over the State. During the 1857 War of Independence, Bahawalpur State sided with the British and also provided help to them. From that time till 1947 the whole of sub-continent was rife with political movements, the people of the Bahawalpur State did not actively participate in the movements but still the effects of these movements

infiltrated into the State, though very limited but the State did play a role in the political movements going on in the sub-continent. Even in the independence movement, the people of the State did not actively participate. There were reasons for this, firstly, the foremost factor was that in the State, political activities were forbidden by the Nawabs, through an act of the State government called the Public Societies Act of 1942, which forbade the establishment of any political party or the establishment of any branch of any political party of the sub-continent in the State. Secondly, as a result of denial of political freedom, there was no political awareness amongst the people of Bahawalpur State. Thirdly, the people of the State knew very well that their future lied in the hands of the Nawab, whatever decision was taken by the Nawab was to be the *faite accompli* for them, the opinion of the people did not matter. Lastly, another factor was that the majority of population of Bahawalpur State was Muslims and their ruler was also a Muslim thus the people of Bahawalpur State did not feel the pinch of foreign rule.

Notes and References

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