

Political Struggle of G. M. Syed 1934-1947: A Journey from Indian National Congress to Progressive Sindh Muslim League

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Abstract

G M Syed joined politics in 1920s when he was a young teenager. Germs of pan Islamic ideology and Indian nationalism rose in the blood of young politician when he saw a brutal crush of protestors in JillianwalaBagh in Amritsar on April 13, 1919. General Dyer, designer of the massacre, was the only responsible person for this act. British government did not take any serious action against him. But in the aftermath of this event a storm of protests rose by the Indians against the British government. His political struggle divided his capacity into four different ways. This paper will discuss how did he travel from pan Islamism to Indian nationalism and then to Pakistan nationalism? In this paper, the effort has been made to highlight the 10 years of his pre-partition parliamentary career, G.M. Syed, changed his political label for three times, in 1937, he was the member of Indian national Congress. In the era of 1938-45 he emerged as strong member of All India Muslim League from Sindh. After having conflict with All India Muslim League in 1945 he shifted his loyalties and formed a new party named Progressive Sindh Muslim League.

Keywords: Political Struggle, National Congress, Strong Member, Conflict, All India Muslim League

Introduction

Syed organized Khilafat conference in his home town on March 17, 1920. It was first political act of young politician. Among the attendants were Shaikh Abdul Majid Sindhi, Dr. Nur Mohammed, Shaikh Abdul Aziz, Shaikh Abdus Salam. It was chaired by Maulvi Hakeem Fateh Mohammad Sehwani. Many people decided to leave British services. Funds were raised by the people and other general strikes rose in the aftermath of the conference. He met Mahatma Gandhi at Sann Railway Station while travelling from Hyderabad to Dadu on April 27, 1921. Gandhi advised him to wear khaddar which he did in the following years. Since Syed was a minor at that time and he was under the custody of court of Wards. It was the responsibility of court of Wards to manage the estate of his family and to provide him some money every month.

His participation in Khilafat movement was disliked by the government as it was anti British so he was summoned to Kotri district. "The Government was aware of my family's

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relations with the people of Kotri Tehsil and the Kohistani areas many of them had attended the Khilafat conferences and the Government feared that the general feeling of discontent might flare up into an uprising. The Commissioner threatened that punitive action would be taken against me if I continued to participate in the Khilafat Movement. I told him that I had no intention of withdrawing into my shell” (Somoro, 2004).

He was the only male member in four member family so the court of wards decided to suspend his monthly sum and handed over his land to him so that he would engaged in taking care of his land this would obviously change his intentions from the politics. So he was sent to Bombay for getting education. In Bombay he met many Muslim and Hindu protestors and leaders who were taking part in Khilafat movement. He continued to take part in the protests until 1924. In 1924, Khilafat movement was suspended officially when Turkey’s leadership realized that the main cause of disturbance is the Khilafat herself so they abolished this institute from the Turkey. It had great effect on the politics of India and they decided to change methods of politics through constitutional means that led to Montagu Chelmsford reforms.

In the aftermath, G.M Syed started welfare work for the people of Karachi after being elected as Vice President of Karachi Local Board and President of Manjhund Tehsil Local Board. He later became the President of Karachi District Board.

Shift from Pan Islamic Ideology to Indian Nationalism

When G.M. Syed joined Indian National Congress, the Simon commission was on the assignment in India. As no local was the part of commission, Indians boycotted the commission and raised the slogan “Simon Go Back”. Syed as a member of Congress continued and pursued the party agenda from Sindh (Syed, 1993).

He took part in the movement of separation of Sindh from Bombay as a congressie. This movement was started in 1928 and local people of Sindh participated in the movement. Syed was convinced after going through intellectual depth of Sindhi history that Sindh had no connection to India and this territory was separate piece of land from its inception. The sense of nationalism for Sindhi people was arisen in the heart of Syed after participating in this movement. The British annexed Sindh after a bloody war in 1843 and a free people were enslaved. Even so, Sindh remained a separate entity for four years under Governor Sir

Charles Napier. In 1847, Sindh was made part of the Bombay Presidency for administrative purposes. The struggle was called the movement for independence from Bombay (Syed, 1993).

Syed took next stance towards his people of Sindh and clear his political line towards the betterment, dignity and independence of his people. British disliked his moves while official tour of Karachi. He focused of rural development despite the work of Congress which was later resulted in punished rewards.

“There were two courses open to me - either to conform to the imperial norms of the Raj or to struggle for the honor, dignity and independence of the people, no matter what the price. I chose the latter course. I undertook a whirlwind tour of Karachi District after being elected President of the Local Board and called about thirty meetings at which maps of India in which Sindh was included were garlanded. I wore khaddar dresses and exhorted others to do likewise anti-British speeches were also made at all these meetings. While I was on tour, Mr. Gibson, who was then Collector, Karachi, and who had the authority to oversee the working of the Local Board, sent me a message that what I was doing was not rural development but the subversive work of the Congress movement which I could not do” (Jones, 2000).

In 1930, G.M Syed along with his friend laid the foundation of Sindh Hari Committee at Mirpurkhas. This committee worked for the local kisans (farmers), who were tortured and deprived of their rights by brutal bureaucracy and land lords under the umbrella of British government. They continued their hard struggle in spite of all this. They achieved several successes, the most important being crop-sharing on an equal basis with the landlord and the passing of the Tenancy Rights Act (Korejo, 2000). The British policy was further pursued by after partition in order to pursue the political interest of the players. An important reason for this was the British policy to sustain the feudal lords in order to retain their loyalties. This policy was retained after partition by the civil and military bureaucracy (Korejo, 2000).

When Mahatma Gandhi launched Civil Disobedience Movement from the platform of Congress, thousands of people joined him in the struggle. Syed was that time part of Congress but was unable to play significant role in the politics. However he became interested in reconstruction of nationalism.

“I had also joined the Congress but was not able to play any significant role in the struggle against the Raj. However, I was deeply interested in national (especially the rural) reconstruction” (Soomro, 2004).

Establishment of Smith People's Party

Syed's keen interest towards rural development of Sindh insisted him to follow the model of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan. Khan was successful and focused politician towards social reforms of his people. Syed met him in 1931 during the annual meeting of Congress which was held in Karachi. Khan was the leader of khudai Khidmatgar movement and Syed was highly impressed by his province oriented nationalist ideology. So Syed came up with his own strategy of Sindhi Nationalist Ideological promotion. Syed while taking Congress into confidence established his own Sindhi party named Smith People's party in 1933. Party was led by Sir Shahnawaz Bhutto. Khan Bahadur Allah BuxSoomro and Miran Mohammed Shah were elected its deputy leaders. Soon afterwards, in the light of the recommendations of the Round Table Conference and the Government of India Act, 1935, Sindh became independent of Bombay in April 1936, and acquired provincial status. However, an advisory committee was appointed to assist the Governor until such time as elections were held. Sir Shahnawaz Bhutto was named advisor to the Sindh Governor, Sir Lancelot Graham (Malik, 2011).

Sindh Ittehad Party

On the same pattern of Punjab's non-communal Unionist Party, G.M. Syed established Sindh Ittehad Party. Seth Haji Abdullah Haroon became the president of the party. The new party took part in the elections of 1937. The party got notable success in the elections. However, the party president, Abdullah Haroon, lost to Khan Bahadur Allah BuxGabol in Karachi while deputy leader Shahnawaz Bhutto conceded victory to Shaikh Abdul Majid Sindhi in Larkana.

In a House of sixty members, the following was the party position: (Baud & Rutten, 2004).

Table 1 Party Position

Sr. No	Party Name	Seats
1	Ittehad Party	24
2	Congress	07
3	Sir GhulamHussain's Muslim Political Party	03
4	Sheikh Abdul Majid Sindhi's Azad Party	03
5	Independents	23

No absolute majority was achieved by any party. It was clear that the coalition government would set up. It was in the minds of the leaders that Sindh Ittehad Party would be

invited to form the government but the norms were violated by Governor Lancelot Graham. He invited Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah of Muslim Political Party to form a government.

“Three European members were instructed to support Sir Ghulam Hussain, The latter began by offering two ministries and the speakership of the House of independent Hindu members. Later, he lured the Baloch group of the Ittehad Party by offering them a ministry. As a result, we had to sit on the opposition benches under the Leadership of Allah Bux Soomro together with the Congress members. I want to state here that in order to seek the separation of Sindh from Bombay, we had to seek the support of all India parties like the Congress and the Muslim League because certain influential but selfish Hindu elements were trying to thwart us in our bid to seek an autonomous status for Sindh. The all-India parties did help us out we had to pay a heavy ideological and political price for it. The Muslim Leaguers got their price in the shape of separate electorates and weight age in Muslim minority Provinces, and the Government got political mileage by giving the Governor more powers for recovery of funds advanced for the construction of the Sukkur Barrage.” This resulted in the ideological loss of the party. Sindh Assembly despite of serving people began to indulge in power struggle between Hindus and Muslims. Syed got exhausted from this political situation and finally he joined Muslim league in order to fulfill his demands for Sindh (Korejo, 2000).

Membership of All India Muslim League; Struggle for Pakistan

G.M. Syed joined Muslim League in the retaliation of pro-Congress attitude of the second ministry in Sindh. Other prominent leaders including Hashim Ghazdar, Ayub Khuhru, Sir Abdullah Haroon and Pir Ali Mohammad Rashidi also joined League. Muslim League failed to secure seats in the government in the elections of 1937. The inclusion of G. M. Syed in Muslim League had been considered instrumental to the party's success in the province because he had huge influence in landed gentry, particularly among Syeds and Pirs members of Sindh Assembly (Malkani, 1984).

Sindh Provincial Conference of Muslim League was held on October 8, 1938. This conference was held at Karachi and was headed by Sir Abdullah Haroon. Among the prominent leaders were; from Muslim League Center Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Liaqat Ali Khan, Raja of Mehmoodabad, A.K. Fazalul Haq, Sir Saadullah Khan, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan, Maulana Shaukat Ali, Sardar Aurangzeb, Nawab Ismail Khan, Chaudhry Khaliquzzaman; from Muslim League Sindh: Allah Bakhs Soomro, Pir Illahi Bakhs, Sir Abdullah Haroon, Sir Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah, G. M. Syed, Mohammed Jamal Khan Leghari and others. The conference became successful and was blessed with the fruits

of Muslims strong majority representation. Leaders of the League expressed strong feelings against Congress and Hindus influences on the Indian politics (Jones, 2000). Muhammad Ali Jinnah invited G.M. Syed to the conference along with the members of Sindh assembly. They decided that all members of the assembly would join League but later Allah BakhsSoomro's group refused to join League. The group was formed in Sindh Assembly with GhulamHussainHidayatullah as leader and Bandeh Ali Talpur as Deputy Leader, both of them later joining Allah BakhsSoomro's group at a crucial time that left Muslim League Assembly Party stranded during no-confidence motion (Kukreja, 2005).

Satyagarh Movement

G.M. Syed launched Satyagarh movement on October 1, 1939. Sir Abdullah Haroon, AyubKhuhro, Wajid Ali Sheikh, Mohammad HashimGhazdar, QaziFazalullah and PirGhulamMujaddidSarhandi participated in the movement. Riots were occurred in Sukkur and many Muslims and Hindus died. Many Muslims occupied Manzalgah Masjid while many of them got arrested. This resulted in Hindus agitation and they presented 21 points for Allah Bakhsministry, which included Joint Electorates instead of separate, which he refused. Muslim League group agreed and with support from Hindu members of Sindh Assembly, Allah Bakhs ministry was dismantled. Mir Bandeh Ali formed new ministry with G. M. Syed, AyubKhuhro and few others as ministers (Korejo, 2000).

The communal issues were not tackled by the new ministry. G. M. Syed proposed to other group all Muslim members as a front to force some concessions out from Hindus or go to the masses, organize them and educate them so that they could eventually influence the government. Both suggestions were ignored and Maulana Azad was invited to intervene who used his influence to bring both Hindus and Muslims together and ultimately form a pact, called Azad Pact. This pact was disliked by Jinnah (Korejo, 2000).

Syed as a Member of Sindh Legislative Assembly

G.M. Syed became the strong member of Muslim League. The League went to the grassroots of Sindh with the tireless efforts of Syed. In 1943, Syed became the member of Sindh Assembly. He later moved the resolution in the support of Pakistan. No constitution shall be acceptable to them (Indian Muslims) that will place the Muslims under a central government dominated by another nation as in order to be able to play their part freely on

their own distinct line in the order of things to come. It is necessary for them (Indian Muslims) to have independent national states of their own and hence any attempt to subject the Muslims of India under one central government is bound to result in civil war with grave and unhappy consequences (Jones, 2000). Sindh assembly became the first one to support for Pakistan cause among the provincial assemblies.

On June 13, 1943 G. M. Syed was elected President of Sindh Provincial Muslim League. He was chairperson of All India Muslim League annual session held at Karachi on 24 December, 1943 where he expressed his line of thinking in the welcome address:

I welcome you all to the land of Sindhu. By Sindhu I mean that part of the Asian continent which is situated on the borders of the river Indus and its tributaries. But as time went on the name began to connote a smaller and smaller area, until now it is assigned only to that part of the land which is watered by tail end of this great river. Today again fully aware of this fact, we are moving to weld together these different parts into one harmonious whole and the new proposed name; Pakistan connotes the same old Sindhu land.... From now on well-to-do Muslims of Hind should please direct their activities in the field of trade and commerce to this land, so that it may in future, become economically independent and self-supporting... If people from Gujrat and Bombay could go out to the Frontier to establish Hindu dominance there, could we, too not repose some hope in your friends? The inhabitants of this land mostly belong to the agricultural profession, and are very backward in trade and industry. Your money and experience could remove this drawback. We are prepared to afford every facility for this with a view to making your task easier" (Baud & Rutten, 2004).

Syed got re-elected as a president of Sindh Muslim League in 1944 and during his term the membership of Sindh Muslim league grew up to 3 lakhs.

G. M. Syed vs. M. A. Jinnah

G. M. Syed was a strong nationalist, expressed priority to his Sindh province. While, Jinnah, on the other hand, was core member of center Indian politics and his priorities were different. The major reason why G. M. Syed developed serious disagreements with Jinnah was the central group of Muslim League that was heavily dominated by Muslims from minority central Indian states. Their core policies were directly in contrast to those of Muslim majority provinces.

After Sukkur riots, Allah Bakhs took charge of ministry with 21 points that included introduction of Joint Electorates. G. M. Syed planned no-confidence motion with Hindus in Sindh Assembly. After this motion, Allah Bakhs's ministry was dissolved. Mir Bandeh Ali formed a new ministry that included both Muslims and Hindus. Jinnah was against with this alliance but initially concurred. The problems arose between Hindu and Muslims with the acceptance of joint electorate. It was against the policy of Muslim League (Korejo, 2000).

This caused agitation and instability that led to the arrival of Maulana Azad. He signed an agreement called the Azad Pact. Bandeh Ali's ministry failed to stable her. Congress support Allah Bakhsh to bring him back. Jinnah didn't like Azad Pact. He gave a suggestion to the Sindh Assembly that all Muslim members should join Muslim League Sindh otherwise all League members should resign. Allah Bakhs group didn't agree with the proposal of Jinnah and refused to resign.

Jinnah insisted for the president ship of G.M Syed in regarding of his efforts in the resolution in support of Pakistan was passed from Sindh Assembly and under his leadership Sindh Hari Committee had joined Muslim League. He became President in 1943 and presided the annual session of the All India Muslim League in Karachi in the same year.

The provincial Muslim League was divided between Syed group and Mir group. In 1944, their political clash shifted into a serious row over ministry, the matter was referred to the Muslim League's Working Committee for resolving. Jinnah did not happy with G. M. Syed on grounds that he was creating clashes between League's provincial ranks and was using unconstitutional methods for his personal politics (Korejo, 2000).

He did not like with the Syed's friendly relations with congress and coalition that he had formed earlier with Hindus over joint electoral. The tussle between Jinnah and Syed slightly increased. It got severe when Syed's supporter, M. H. Ghazdar, was dismissed from the Sindh's ministry arbitrarily.

The final moment came when in a no-confidence motion, Syed's group defeated Ghulam Hussain's ministry but he managed to stay in power. Jinnah burst out over Syed for rift in the ranks of Muslim League, breaking party discipline, deflating the objectives of the league and shaking harmony of Sindhi Muslims. Syed controlled the situation with the offer of full cooperation and convinced more Muslim leaders to join Muslim League Sindh.

As things went out of control in 1945 with Syed disagreed with Muslim League Center's practices. He criticized them for being authoritative and asked for provincial authority in decisions. This matter presented in the Working Committee's meeting when he criticized the Central committee and asked them to cooperate with Congress. Jinnah refused bitterly his suggestion and the powers of Central committee were increased dramatically to completely centralize Muslim League's parliamentary machinery functioning in various provinces. (Malkani, 1984)

This decision had great influenced on the upcoming elections. Three major groups emerged for Muslim League tickets. One was the Syed group, second was the Mir group and third was the Khuhro group. On the behalf of Jinnah, Syed originated Provincial Parliamentary Board to resolved differences among warring groups (Syed, 1993). Jinnah selected board members for this purposes. G.M Syed was also member of this board. This put Syed against four ministerial groups, who were combined against Syed. Realizing that he cannot get League tickets for his group, as President of Muslim League Sindh he suspended the proceedings and adjourned the meetings. Liaquat Ali Khan, Hussain Imam blamed Syed for all the mess.

When Jinnah called members of the suspended Parliamentary Board and asked them to give in writing to uphold the verdict of high command, Syed not only refused but also gave his resignation letter from Working Committee of All India Muslim League and his membership from the party. He along with his followers, Mohammad Ali Shah, SayedKhair Shah and Pir Bahadur Shah of Hala decided to contest elections under the banner of Progressive League.

Making of Progressive Sindh Muslim League

In 1945, things were going to heat up between G.M. Syed and Muslim League's center practice. He criticized them not to be so authoritative as to leave provincial groups to important matters and decision making. This matter lingered on in the Working Committee's meeting when Syed criticized over the Central committee's leadership and suggested them to cooperate with Congress to put joint pressure on British government. Despite Syed group's opposition; the powers of Central committee were increased dramatically to centralize Muslim League's parliamentary machinery functioning in various provinces (Malik, 2011). This decision had extensive impact on the upcoming elections. This incident emerged three

major groups amongst the Sindhi Muslims for ticket of Muslim League. These groups were divided in Syed group, Mir group and Khuhro group. He realized immediately that he could not get League tickets for his group because of vast opposition against him. (Malik, 2011) Due to differences with central committee and leadership, Syed decided to contest elections against Muslim League under the banner of Progressive Sindh Muslim League but didn't get majority.

During Sindh assembly elections, Progressive league sets its agenda against Muslim league and visited the rest of Sindh to collect votes against Muslim League. He blamed them as non democratic, feudalist mind set and exploiters of Islam. But on elections day, were held on January 21, 1946, the Muslim league won 27, the Syed group 4, the Congress 22, and the Europeans 3 seats. After the results of the elections G. M. Syed succeeded to form one Coalition Party in the assembly against the Muslim League and became the Leader of the coalition Party in Sindh Assembly. The Coalition Party succeeded to collect 30 seats in Sindh Assembly, 22 of Congress, 4 of Syed's group and 4 of Soomro group. Muslim League won 27 out of 60 seats in assembly. G.M Syed and the other leaders of the Coalition Party were hopeful that Governor would invite them to form the government. But position was entirely out of Coalition's hands when European members supported Muslim League to form government. After this, position was equal in the house, 30 members supported the Coalition Party and same number supported League. After all, Governor supported Muslim league and invited Sir Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah to form the Sindh Government. Indian National Congress and other nationalist groups couldn't digest it easily and criticized the action of the Governor. (Verkaaik, 2004)

On 5th of September 1946, session of Sindh Assembly was held G.M. Syed as the leader of the Coalition Party filled no confidence motion. His action gave tough time to Muslim league, which was resulted in tie and the Muslim League once again succeeded to survive with the help of the votes of the European members. G.M. Syed criticized Muslim league and the British Governor Sir Francis Mudie for keeping the Muslim League government afloat with the help of the European members. He declared Muslim League as power seeker, feudalist and shrewd minded party, which exploiting Muslims and Sindhi people in the name of religion (Baud & Rutten, 2004). He criticized them to take help from British government, who had been supporter of Muslim league against Congress and Coalition Party Even after G.M. Syed succeeded to set weak position for Muslim League.

His party was not in a position to keep the majority in the assembly. Governor ordered to dissolve the assembly and kept Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah as a caretaker Prime Minister. He announced the fresh elections in December 1946. New provincial elections were held on 9th December 1946 and Muslim League won all Muslim seats. G. M. Syed failed to get even one seat in the elections. He put allegations of the rigging in the elections and went to the election Tribunal.

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