

*Comment*

## **Lahore Resolution and Pakistan**

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The Lahore Resolution of 23-24 March 1940 is invariably referred to as the basic document on the emergence of Pakistan. It is usually invoked by 'nationalists' to provide political ballast to their provincial demands and for the curtailment of central/federal authority. The present paper argues that the resolution represents the basic idea behind Pakistan's emergence only in the sense as the Magna Carta (1215) launched the devolution of power process from the all-powerful sovereign to the nobility, which process, evolving through a series of creatively calibrated stages, finally blossomed into full fledged parliamentary democracy in Britain in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It further argues that the significance of the resolution must be seen and assessed in the total context of a series of Muslim political demands and Indian developments since Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's born-again-Muslim posture of the 1880s. It seeks to show how the basic document behind Pakistan's emergence on 14-15 August 1947, and the shape in which it emerged, is the 3 June 1947 Partition Plan (supplemented by the Indian Independence Act, 1947, which was based on this plan). By then, the Lahore Resolution, having been overtaken by post-1940 political developments, had ceased to be the basic document. Indeed, it had become obsolete and dead as a doornail. Its significance, therefore, was no more or no less than that of Magna Carta in the evolution and establishment of parliamentary democracy in the British Isles. Hence, it's no more a basic text so far as the united Pakistan of 1947-71 or the post-1971 Pakistan is concerned.

First, the significance of Lahore Resolution in the context of previous demands and political developments. The separate electorate demand (1883-1906), the Lucknow Pact (1916), the Delhi Muslim Proposals (1927), the All Parties Muslim Conference Resolution of January 1, 1929 and Jinnah's Fourteen Points (1929) – all of them were meant to ensure the retention of Muslim identity on the constitutional plane in India's body politic and an equitable share in power. All these proposals must be seen in the context of political development at the

time, and each one was a response to the set of political developments at the time and raised the antenna a notch or two higher to ensure a modicum of power at that stage of constitutional development. The shift from separate electorates to representation on population basis in the Punjab and Bengal, reforms in the NWFP and Baluchistan, and separation of Sind was a direct result of the Montford Reforms (1920).

The Montford Reforms initiated the trend towards autonomization of the provinces in terms of devolution of power. This led Muslim leadership, especially Jinnah, towards territorialization of the incipient Muslim nationalism. This trend in Muslim thinking was first dramatically reflected in the Delhi Muslim Proposals, which concentrated on ensuring the substance of power to Muslims in their majority provinces (Bengal, Punjab, Sind, NWFP and Baluchistan). It became crystallized in the Muslim League Resolutions of 1927 and 1928, and Jinnah's amendments to the Nehru Report (1928), the All Parties Muslim Conference Resolution and Jinnah's Fourteen Points. Autonomization of the provinces at the constitutional level got crystallized in the 1935 Act, which conceded provincial autonomy. The various schemes put forward by Muslims since 1928 – from the demand of a consolidated northwestern Muslim province before the Nehru Committee (1928) to Nawab Zulfiqar Ali Khan's welcome address to the Khilafat Conference at Lahore in December 1929 to Allama Iqbal's Allahabad address (1930) to Ch. Rahmat Ali's scheme (1933), to Aligarh Professors' scheme (1938) to Syed Abdul Latif's 'Cultural Zones' scheme (1938) and even to Sir Sikander's confederal scheme (1939) – were all cast in the territorialization mould. Thus, in good time, the twin autonomization and the territorialization trend converged in the Lahore Resolution. To quote R.J. Moore, 'the Lahore Resolution was the necessary and logical culmination of the autonomization process of the provinces'.

The territorialization process came to be strengthened by Jinnah's deals with Fazlul Haq and Sikandar Hayat Khan, the Bengal and Punjab premiers respectively, in October 1937, and his attempts to get Sind within the Muslim League's web in October 1938. Despite Iqbal's opposition, Jinnah went in for a deal with Sikandar Hayat Khan because he had embarked upon a territorialization strategy since the middle 1920s, and with the introduction of provincial autonomy in 1937 he knew more than most others how, with Muslim demographic dominance in some peripheral but larger provinces, territorialization could provide a home to Muslim nationalism. The central part of the 1919 Act was rejected by Indian political opinion, and the federal part in the 1935 Act the League was up in arms against, for various reasons since 1937.

(Later, in order to induce Muslim cooperation in the war efforts, the British scuttled the federal part on 8 August 1940.

At another level, since the Delhi Muslim Proposals, Muslim federalism vs Hindu 'centralism' had unleashed the most acrimonious and acerbic controversy in Indian politics. In those proposals, as well as in the subsequent All Parties Muslim Conference Resolution, Jinnah's Fourteen Points, and Iqbal's Allahabad address (1930) Muslims had pled for a genuine federation. In contrast, the Nehru Report (1928), the Congress blueprint for India's future constitution, had put the Hindu seal on centralism, and on a more or less unitary state. Nine years later, in 1937, the Congress rule in the Hindu provinces had provided Muslims with a foretaste of what Hindu unremitted centralism really meant. Instead of regarding India as bi-national and bi-cultural, the Hindus opted for a uni-national dispensation and a uni-cultural approach.

Nor was the penultimate British Indian constitution under the 1935 Act a genuine federation. It had vested special powers in the Governor-General, and, by implication, in the Centre. Should the Congress, with its track record in the Hindu provinces, come to power at the Centre as well, which it was bound to, if only because of its 'brute majority', what would befall the Muslim provinces? The two most populous of them, the Punjab and Bengal, were already the target of a mounting Congress onslaught, the Hindu manipulations had disabled Muslim Sindh from forming a stable ministry, while the Sahibzada Qaiyyum's ministry in the NWFP had been routed and replaced, with the support of the Khan Brothers, in September 1937, by a Congress government. After presenting a well-documented litany of Muslim grievances against the Congress *raj* in the Hindu provinces (the Pirpur Report and the Sharif Report), Jinnah told the Sindh Muslim League Conference on 8 October 1938, 'if this is the foretaste on the threshold of the limited and restricted authority and power enjoyed by the Congress, I shudder to think what would be the fate of ninety millions of Mussalmans in the country if the Congress were incharge of full and plenary powers of the Government of India...' No wonder, the Muslims were alarmed at the prospect of a Hindu-dominated Centre coming to power under the 1935 Act. And that was precisely the reason why the Muslims demanded the scrapping of the federal part of the 1935 Act in September 1939.

The twin trends of autonomization of provinces (in India's constitutional framework since 1920) and territorialization (as the core Muslim political demands since 1927) fed by Muslim 'sufferings' under the Congress *raj* (1937-39), which served both as an eye-opener and as a catalyst, led Muslims to raise the antenna of their demands a notch

higher and to demand outright physical separation of Hindu and Muslim majority areas, and division of India – if only to ensure Muslims identity and untrammelled power in their demographically dominant regions. And this was done in the Lahore Resolution.

This was the background to the anti-Centre and anti-(pseudo) federation orientation of Muslims in the late 1930s, and it had fashioned and determined the AIML leadership's attitude. This explains why at the 4 February 1940, AIML Working Committee meeting, the clause concerning the Muslim majority zones' federal relationship with an Indian federation which was so vociferously advocated by Sir Sikander Hayat Khan, was deleted after two hours' discussion, retaining in the original resolution only the demand for the separation of Muslim zones. This version, given by Choudhry Khaliqzaman in his *Pathway to Pakistan*, was corroborated by Sir Sikandar in the Punjab Assembly on 11 March 1941. To it may be added the explanation of Fazlul Haq (the mover of the Lahore Resolution): 'To those who proposed amendments in the Subject Committee yesterday [March 22] for providing a central government in the [Lahore] Resolution my reply is, we assumed power on behalf of Muslims and other people in Bengal in 1937. We have been given the opportunity by the Almighty to serve our people after a couple of centuries and we are not going to barter away that power and opportunity to an imaginary and an unknown central authority.'

All this explains why the Lahore Resolution only (and specifically) calls for grouping 'the North-western and Eastern zones of India ... to constitute Independent States in which the Constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign', and stops short of providing a central structure or authority for these two units. Nor did the speeches proposing, seconding or supporting the Resolution dilate on this central structure omission except for Fazlul Haq's brief explanation cited above.

We have seen how and why this was not inexplicable, given the political developments since 1927, which had shaped Muslim orientation. To it may be added another weighty reason. Partition was no routine proposal in the series of proposals or formulae presented and proffered from time to time to cut the gordian knot of India's constitutional problem. The Lahore Resolution's major thrust was, thus, on partitioning the subcontinent into Hindu and Muslim homelands, and the major problem the AIML leadership was preoccupied with at this juncture was slow to sell this rather unconventional solution to the other two sides in India's political triangle – the Congress and the British. Hence their speeches on the occasion dilated mostly on calling on the Congress and the British to 'consider the circumstances which had forced the Muslims to demand separation and their own Government where they

were in a majority’, to quote Khaliqzaman, who seconded the resolution. This means, for the moment they were solely concerned with arguing out the Muslim case for partition, a demand, which, in any case, prioritized over other issues, rather than presenting a viable blueprint for the proposed Muslim homeland. ‘Seek ye the political kingdom and all things shall be added unto you’, Ghana’s Nkrumah had decreed, while talking of his priorities in his struggle to liberate Ghana. In a like vein, the AIML leadership’s obsession at the moment was to get the partition principle accepted while other issues could as well wait for another day. Even so, in the excerpt cited above, the word, ‘Government’, and not governments, is extremely significant – for it provides a definite clue to their thinking. Though not explicitly spelled out, it implies a federation of two units.

And this was reaffirmed time and again in Jinnah’s speeches and statements (the earliest being dated 1 April 1940, barely a week after the passage of the resolution), in his correspondence with Gandhi in September 1944, during the critical 1945-46 election campaign and, finally, in the League Legislators’ Convention Resolution of 9 April 1946. This resolution, moved by the Bengal Premier, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, represented, at the moment, the consensus of the newly elected Muslim representatives in the central and provincial assemblies during 1945-46, with a fresh mandate to strive, struggle and wrest Pakistan.

These pronouncements, decisions and developments had overtaken the Lahore Resolution beyond redemption. It still commanded the status of the starting point, a sort of a launching pad, but its significance had been severely delimited to merely proclaiming Muslim determination for physical separation, and for carving out a Muslim homeland, in whatever shape and in however limited an area, in India’s northwest and northeast. An idea or concept, however solid and stolid, has a tendency to evolve in the light of circumstances and developments, and the concept of a Muslim homeland had also undergone several shifts, to keep pace and be in syne with the objective ground realities, giving rise to several interpretations during 1940-47. For now, however, what really matters is the ground reality that came into existence on 14-15 August under the 3 June Plan. And that plan gave the legislatures or other accredited bodies of four provinces (Bengal, Punjab, Sindh, and Baluchistan) or parts thereof and the electorates in NWFP and Sylhet District, in the northwestern and northeastern India, only the right to choose as to which of the two dominions (India or Pakistan) they would join, and *not* the right to stay independent of either of them. That’s precisely the reason why the ‘Pakhtunistan’ option – belatedly demanded

by the Khan Brothers in the NWFP, egged on brazenly by the Congress to nib Pakistan in the bud and disrupt her at her very birth – was unequivocally ruled out without much ado. That makes the 3 June Plan, and not the Lahore Resolution, the basic document, and the cornerstone of the Pakistani edifice, raised on 14-15 August 1947.

As indicated above, the Lahore Resolution had no *locus standi* after the Convention Resolution. Even that Resolution was overtaken by the 3 June Plan. In any case, the five provinces (in full or in part) and the Sylhet district having voted to join Pakistan envisaged under the June 3 Plan and the British having transferred power to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on 14 August 1947, the blue print envisaged in the Lahore Resolution has long become redundant and obsolete. And the Lahore Resolution itself is dead as a doornail, while the 3 June Plan becomes the *basic* document for the reality that emerged on 14-15 August 1947.

Thus, all said and done, the harsh reality is the Pakistan under the 3 June Plan. That Plan had created and recognized only two successor authorities to the British Indian empire in the subcontinent, explicitly ruling out any provincial authority or option. That's why the Frontier referendum ruled out the Pakhtunistan option, despite the mounting Congress pressure and the Khan Brother's insistent demand. While the Muslim League opposed the provincial option in the Frontier, the Congress had put its foot down on the Suhrawardy-Sarat Bose's proposal to set up a sovereign independent, undivided Bengal in the northeast, to avoid the partition of Bengal. Thus, all the three parties to the Indian constitutional settlement in 1947 – the British, the Congress and the Muslim League – had set their face against the setting up of sovereign provincial entities, in one case or another. Even the Indian (princely) states, which had long enjoyed a juridical personality/status of their own were denied the option of going in for independence, on the British withdrawal in 1947. Hence the question of the provinces or parts of provinces opting out for independence did not arise, *ab initio* and *ipso facto*. Indeed, what the various assemblies or electorates had actually voted for in June-July 1947 was which one of the two 'successor' authorities in British India, as envisaged under the 3 June Plan, they would opt to join, and *not* for sovereignty or independence of the component units.

The Lahore Resolution was, of course, the original image as the authors of the resolution had conceived, or were conditioned, if only because of their background, orientation and recent developments, to conceive, in terms of the desired future shape of things. But an image, built upon a cluster of interrelated concepts and ideas, is bound to change

with time, as the concepts and ideas undergo a process of creative evolution, if only in response to new developments and current realities on the ground. Thus, the final denouement, configuration or reality, though usually containing a substantial or core part of the original inspiration, demand or image, does not and could never approximate to it. In this case, the core point was physical separation of demographically dominant Muslim and Hindu regions, entailing the partition of India.

The ideals that men fashion for themselves in their imagination represent their aspirations towards a better future, a brave new world, at that point of time. But there comes a time when ideals formulated usually in abstract terms and in the sanctuary of great minds, untrammelled by any limitations, have got to be translated into action, into concrete terms, and all this is not in a vacuum but in the harsh face of reality, mostly in treacherous circumstances. All conduct being a matter of empirical decision, no one, not even the ideologue and the visionary, could ever claim to foresee the consequences of the impact of an ideal upon reality. For that matter, the ideals could be achieved but in the heavens; what is and what could be achieved here in this imperfect world is only an approximation to those ideals. And unlike the preacher and the political theorist, who could expostulate ideals unhindered by anything except the limitations of his own vision and imagination, the performer and the political practitioner, by the very nature of his vocation, has had to interpret and translate them, as best as he can, in the conduct of human affairs. All said and done, these affairs, by the very nature of them, are highly complex, shifting, unpredictable. And Jinnah, the political realist that he was, excelling himself in the Bismarckian sense of 'the art of the possible', knew this more than anyone else. That's why, despite having demanded six full provinces for Pakistan since March 1940, he acquiesced, despite deep reluctance, into accepting the Cabinet Mission Plan in June 1946, and a maimed and mutilated Pakistan on 3 June 1947. A truncated Pakistan comprising about two-thirds in area and population and much less in resources, with the well-developed Calcutta seaport, the Hooghly industrial complex, and the Fazilka headworks of the Punjab canal system left out on the other side of the great divide.

Finally, Pakistanis have always been prone to be past oriented, and it's time they concentrated on the present and the future. And, for now, the post-1971 Pakistan is the ground reality that exists today, and Pakistan would better do to concentrate on fashioning their present and building their future on the fundamental basis of that reality, instead of getting themselves lost in (what Iqbal calls) *riwayat*s.

And so far as the invocation of the Lahore Resolution *ad nauseum* by the 'nationalists' and neo-nationalists is concerned, it

should, at best, be put down as an exercise in futility, if only to do politics, and keep themselves afloat politically and their improvised, minuscule make shift political shops in business.