

Interim Government of India under Colonial Rule 1946

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Abstract- With the inception of World War II British Empire in India and His Majesty Government in the House of Commons, London showed some conditional readiness to address the problems of constitutional crisis and political impasse in India. Britain was in a dire need to win India's support in her War related efforts to combat the Axis forces. Taking ongoing World War II as blessing in disguise Indian National Congress started bargaining with the British government to further her interest of complete independence. Establishment of Interim government in the year 1946 was a natural outcome of the same.

This paper attempts to illustrate some of the important aspects related to interim government of 1946 under colonial rule in India.

Index Terms- Interim government, political impasse, INC, Muslim League, HMG, Direct Action Day, Viceroyalty.

I. INTRODUCTION

The miscarriage of Cabinet Mission plan of 1946 made British government to put the hammer on the floor by making her intension very clear to the belligerent parties of India that the British government in India has embarked on her penultimate role of solving the political impasse of the country. The British government in a master stroke demonstrated her withdrawal of imperialistic interest from India and created a flutter of restlessness in the political camps of India. This was perhaps for the first time that political parties of India could reasonably believe that British government in India and HMG means business. With the announcement of putting the things on anvil for formation of interim government in India the British government notwithstanding confusing political corridors was adroitly successful in diverting the winds of acrimonious animosity towards political parties of India thereby leaving the British government in India an elbow room for strategizing the political maneuverability.

His Majesty Government and Viceroy Wavell made up their intentions very clear that as the first thing first interim government will come into existence with the judicious combination of representatives from various political parties of India and then India's new constitution shall come into being which will address and respect the diverse shades of beliefs and opinions.

The stage was set for Indian National Congress and Muslim League for marathon negotiations with British government for establishment of Interim government and its likely face. At this crucial juncture at the behest of Gandhi Nehru assumed the responsibility as Congress President to steer the negotiations to a logical conclusion. The patriarch of Indian National Congress Gandhi always looked up to Nehru as the most befitting

negotiator for political arch rivals like Jinnah of Indian Muslim League and authorities of British Empire in India. Moreover Gandhi knew that Jinnah had developed an inexplicable abhorrence for previous president of Congress Mr.Maulana Azad which could have had a damaging impact on furthering of India's interest in formation of Interim government. There was no scintilla of doubt in Gandhi's mind about Jawaharlal Nehru's aristocracy and his ability to rub the shoulders with the rank and files of British authorities in India and in the House of Commons in London will come handy in strengthening the bargaining position of India during negotiations.

Viceroy Wavell knew that it was a litmus test of his Viceroyalty to bring the major political parties of India at drawing table to form an interim government acceptable to all. It was a tumultuous time period when Viceroy was required to show lot of gumptions to resolve the political impasse of India and to add a feather of coruscating success to his own cap.

Nehru from the saddle position of President of Indian National Congress did not mince the words and expressed his resentment with Viceroy Wavell for his silence on India's freedom. Nehru wanted British government to quit India once the interim government was established and should not wait till constitution was framed. He was quite vocal in communicating to the British government that India is capable of solving her internal problems and intervention or adjudication on the part of Britain is absolutely uncalled for.

Absolutely an antithetical school of thought was harbored in the mind of Mr. Jinnah a patriarch of Muslim League. To put the things in his perspective his mind was saturated by dominant fear psychosis that Congress had a mollified intention of grabbing the power at the centre to make the numerical minority of Muslim vulnerable under the dictating dominance of Hindus. The records of history will convince us of the fact that such fear was deeply rooted in the mind of Jinnah which made him to exploit every opportunity to lead the Viceroy up the garden path. Jinnah propagated novel school of thought that Hindu and Muslim communities are antithetical in more than one ways hence campaigning for their peaceful coexistence is not only farfetched but too far from being real. He made it very clear from time and over again that Muslims shall never come to roost under Hindu dominance hence separate Pakistan with steel frame and absolute freedom is a panacea to the perennial problem of Indian polity. In this way the idea of two nation theory came into being during colonial rule. Whereas the school of thought being propagated by Indian National Congress was such that Muslims are the ancestors of foreign rulers and over thousand years they are well assimilated in India in a mixed culture therefore the line of hardcore identity of Muslims have got largely obscured hence separate Pakistan on the ground of religious identity was highly inconceivable.

The philosophical battle between INC and Muslim League hinged upon the type of interim government. Congress was not ready for parity with Muslim at the centre and it was yearning for strong centre whereas Muslim League under the leadership of Jinnah was battling for more and more devolution of power with weak government at the centre. Muslim League was too cautious as it did not want to give the cudgels of country's governance into the hands of Congress for obvious fear of ruthless dominance of Hindus over vulnerable Muslims. Jinnah had a unique temperamental problem with Jawaharlal Nehru. He would never accept Jawaharlal as his senior. He had an inexplicable animosity and idiopathic hate for Jawaharlal Nehru.

Wavell brought all his genre of conflict resolution to the table. In a fresh bid, he took an initiative for the formation of a popular government with the approval of the British Cabinet. Wavell gave identical letters to Jawaharlal and Jinnah on July 22 inviting them to form a Coalition Government of 14 members. The fourteen members consisted of six members including one representative from Schedule Caste to be nominated by Congress, five members to be nominated by Muslim League and three representatives of the minorities by Viceroy. Both the political parties found the proposal as incommensurate and summarily rejected the offer. In a nutshell, the negotiations were destined to be marred inexorably by abysmal failure.

Over a period of time quaid e azam Jinnah woke up to a dark reality that his leading the Viceroy up the garden path yielding him no positive result. On July 27, 1946 during the meet of All-India Muslim League in Bombay Jinnah announced his categorical rejection to all constitutional methods and insinuated violent measures to further his interest of separate Pakistan even at the cost of bloodshed. With such a bold and daring announcement Jinnah broke all his ties with constitutional ways and means. British government who used to sing the praise of Jinnah for being cooperator to British government got a master stroke of enmity from Jinnah.

Disenchanted Muslim League on this day passed two historic resolutions which proved to be a nemesis for ongoing indefatigable struggle to bring about conciliation between the two political parties. A black day in the course of political negotiations which were aimed at making British Government quit India gracefully was desecrated in these two resolutions of the League: The first was withdrawing its acceptance of 16 May statement and reaffirming its demand for Pakistan and the second on Direct Action to enforce the demand. Jinnah appealed the top layers of Muslims to renounce the titles conferred upon them by the British Government. Now Jinnah had nailed his colors to the mast.

The rack and ruin caused by the great Calcutta killings as a result of Direct Action Day shook the British Government in India. The activists of Muslim League literally painted the town red by a large scale bloody violence. The situation was tantamount to a Civil War. The Britain's efforts to salvage its brand image by maintaining peace in India had received a severe jolt. Wavell by now understood that the strategy of 'to rob Peter to pay Paul' would not do wonder any more.

At this stage once again the fallacy of British authorities got exposed. They failed to sense the suppressed inferno in the minds of people belonging to the separate communities. It was an abysmal and embarrassing failure of British Imperialists that they

were so weak or naïve to read the psychology of the people and possibility of catastrophe.

Britain may have enjoyed her imperialism over one third of the world yet the essence of Asia was far different than her developed subjects like New Zealand, Canada or Ireland. Britain miserably failed to study the society and culture of India. The whole world salutes Mahatma Gandhi for his immaculate leadership qualities. Gandhi was a leader of the same comrade yet he led such an exemplary ascetic life with unflinching faith on non-violence that he did not leave any scope for inferno to take birth in the minds of the people against anybody. The smart thinking management on the part of British authorities seemed to have eclipsed.

It was a time for Congress to get all formalities done for investiture ceremony so as to enter the Interim Government. The road to freedom was already carved. It was a sigh of relief for the people of India. Scintillates of mass murders committed during Direct Action Day were permanently ascribed to nation's rich ethos. In that background formation of Interim Government by Congress was like a godsend.

The members of Interim Government were perched on unknown territory of country's governance as the newly formed Interim Government would begin functioning from September 2, 1946.

Though Gandhi appeared to be invisible on the radar, he played a crucial and vital role in guiding the players of Congress who used to be party in negotiations with Jinnah and British authorities in India and London. He was quite adroit in adopting rigid and flexible stand at appropriate times. The greatest asset of Gandhi was that he never demonstrated irrational exuberance as well as frustration at any point in time during the course of his political currency. He did never step on the gas paddle when the road ahead was foggy as he knew that was a sure way to get killed. He had uncanny knack to take himself on and off the radar of Indian polity so as to achieve the best purpose in the interest of the nation.

Jawaharlal Nehru must have felt the handicapped nature of lamed government. He must have felt the absence of charm of governing as the country was still reeling under the pool of blood bath. Muslim League's loose walk entry into interim government and absence from executive assembly had carved out a functional stigma. The pessimistic sense of glass half empty was still playing havoc in the minds of Wavell as without Muslim League into the popular government, every day would be a futile one. As a natural sequence, opinion was built up to allow assembly to meet even in absentia of Muslim League.

In the meantime, Jinnah had a sick feeling of being in a sinister isolation. Though he was a leader of minority Muslims, all eyes were set on him. The Congress being at the helm of the affair made Jinnah restless. He feared the shock of crisis credibility from his own community. Ultimately Jinnah joined the interim government with a clear message to the community for whom he was a knight in the armor that he joined Interim Government not to rub shoulder with his die hard opponent Jawaharlal Nehru but to offer him even more opposition from within the government. From such attitude of Jinnah one thing was more than clear that he had no feelings towards sacrosanct government. He had one point agenda which he carried on his back all through his life and that was of surgical amputation of

India into two nations no matter even if it turned out to be a moth eaten Pakistan.

The prime Minister of Britain in a decisive stroke careened the Viceroyalty of Wavell and roped in Lord Mountbatten as a new Viceroy of India. For Atlee, Mountbatten was a darling colleague with indomitable faith. It was for this reason alone that Atlee empowered Mountbatten with plethora of exceptional and special powers which other like Cripps or Cabinet Mission were deprived of. Mountbatten came to India with a definite plan for transfer of power to India not later than June 1948 which at a later stage got rescheduled to 1947 which is popularly known as freedom at a lightning speed.

II. CONCLUSION

It became quite clear that all the three parties- the Congress, the Muslim League and the British Government of India presented farrago of conflicting claims and counter claims of fissiparous nature which sometimes were so acrid that made British Government in India look feckless. Had there not been so much of animosity and antagonism, by this time the path to India's freedom would have been festooned. It was this morbid obesity of plethora of entangled issues which made the job truly herculean. It was a period of empty logomachies with no victors. The political impasse in India was constitutional in nature and temperamental at the same time. The front line leaders from different political parties demonstrated official posture in varying degrees. British regime was more reactionary than precautionary to Indian problems. Axis forces led by Hitler were closing in to endanger the British regime in South East Asia. Japan was close at the Bay of Bengal which made British Government in India to ask for India's support. The onset of World War II put British Empire in India in a quandary. Because British government wanted India's support in their war related efforts it started talking in terms of solving India's constitutional crisis. However the concrete commitment of granting freedom to India by definite time span was missing until failure of interim government and pronouncement of Direct action day by Muslim League.

After an abysmal failure of Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946 formation of interim government after marathon political and

diplomatic negotiations was an exercise in futile. Over the period of time the political parties zeroed down to the tragic conclusion that surgical amputation of India was inevitable. There was a tradeoff between the partition and unbridled inhuman horripilating violence on the streets of India. Naturally acquiescence was for partition to win a lasting peace.

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