

## ***Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah and the Cripps Proposals (March-April 1942)***

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The Cripps Proposals of 1942 brought the Pakistan Movement to a critical phase. Their acceptance meant that the Pakistan Movement should be shelved, though there was a “veiled” reference to the Pakistan idea. It was tactful handling of the situation by meeting Sir Stafford Cripps on a number of occasions and discussing his proposals on the basis of the Pakistan demand, that he proved that Cripps proposals were detrimental to the cause of Pakistan. In his presidential address at the Allahabad session of All India Muslim League on 5 April 1942, Quaid-i Azam said that Cripps proposals were a plan to “kill” the Muslim nation by stages.<sup>1</sup> He also maintained that the Cripps proposals have deeply disappointed the Muslims who “feel that the entity and integrity of the Muslim nation has not been expressly recognised.”<sup>2</sup>

Many scholars have interpreted the Cripps Proposals differently but the reality has not so far emerged in its total perspective. For instance, Ayesha Jalal maintains that these proposals were an attempt to bring “settlement on provincial rather than communal lines”.<sup>3</sup> I.H. Qureshi has developed the notion that the Cripps’ offer was read as an admission that the British

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1. *Star of India*, 6 April 1942.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.79.

government was prepared (at least) to consider “the Pakistan plan as a solution of the Communal impasse.”<sup>4</sup> Khalid bin Sayeed has opined that at the time when the Cripps proposals were discussed the Muslim League “was not in a very strong position”.<sup>5</sup> K.K. Aziz has gone to the extent of saying that “the British government had officially and publicly accepted the spirit of Muslim nationalism and agreed to its political manifestation — Pakistan”.<sup>6</sup> These statements are, as a matter of fact, half truths. Therefore, an attempt has been made in this paper to present the real developments of the Cripps Mission along with its implications and Jinnah’s thoughtful reactions thereon. This can be better judged if we first go into the details as to why the Cripps proposals were made in early 1942. The very fact of time selection indicates a number of factors to be discussed hereafter.

In his statement before the British Parliament (House of Commons) on 11 March 1942, the Prime Minister Churchill declared that “the crisis in the affairs of India arising out of the Japanese advance has made us wish to rally all the forces of Indian life”.<sup>7</sup> As approved by the British War Cabinet, the Draft Declaration was prepared for discussion with the Indian leaders which was published on 30 March 1942. Sir Stafford Cripps, Leader of the House of Commons, “friend” of the Prime Minister as well as of the Congress leaders was deputed to carry the draft declaration to India, discuss with Indian leaders and report back to the British War Cabinet as well as the Parliament. Cripps arrived at Karachi by air on 22 March and reached New Delhi on 23 March 1942,<sup>8</sup> the day celebrated by All India Muslim League as the

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4. I.H. Qureshi, *The Struggle for Pakistan* (Karachi: University of Karachi, 1988), p.158.
  5. Khalid bin Sayeed, *Pakistan: The Formative Phase 1857-1948* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.121.
  6. K.K. Aziz, *The Making of Pakistan: A Study in Nationalism* (Lahore: National Book Foundation, 1989), p.62.
  7. *India (Lord Privy Seal’s Mission): Statement and Draft Declaration by His Majesty’s Government with Correspondence and Resolutions Connected Therewith*, London: April 1942, British Library (OIOC), London L/PJ/10/2, and Stanley Wolpert, *Jinnah of Pakistan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p.197.
  8. *The Indian Annual Register January-June 1942*, Vol.I, (Calcutta: The Annual Register Office), p.219.

Pakistan Day, came directly into contact with the Indian leaders by personally meeting or writing them letters. On 30 March 1942 the draft declaration was published in the newspapers.<sup>9</sup> Though he gave undue importance to the Congress leaders, yet he could not ignore the Quaid as leader of the Muslim League. On 25 March 1942 he had a meeting with Jinnah in which five clauses of the draft declaration were discussed.<sup>10</sup> Jinnah suggested some changes in the last clause which were accepted with slight modifications. This was conveyed to Jinnah on 26 March 1942.<sup>11</sup> Text of the draft declaration finalized as a result of discussions with Jinnah and other Indian leaders was published in the Indian newspapers on 30 March 1942.<sup>12</sup>

The Draft Declaration is particularly known as the Cripps Proposals which became the basis for discussion with Indian leaders in order to chalk out the nature of British policy involving Indian opinion for running the Indian affairs. In this also Jinnah handled the situation tactfully.

For the purpose of deciding the future of British India, the Cripps proposals suggested:

- i. Immediately following the war “an elected body” shall be constituted for the purpose of “framing a new constitution for India”;
- ii. Indian States shall be duly represented in the new “constitution-making body”;
- iii. If any of the present “Province of British India” was not willing to accept the new constitution, it will be allowed to retain its “present constitutional position”. As far as any of the Indian States were concerned, separate treaty will be negotiated between individual state and His Majesty’s Government and the constitution-making body;

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9. For instance see *Times of India*, 30 March 1942.

10. Nicholas Mansergh and E.W.R. Lumby, *The Transfer of Power 1942-47*, Vol.I, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp.480-481.

11. Cripps to Jinnah, 26 March 1942 in *Quaid-i Azam Papers*, National Archives of Pakistan, Islamabad, F.19.

12. *Ibid.*, 30 March 1942.

- iv. After the war, provincial elections shall be held. All the members of the lower houses of the provincial legislatures shall become members of an electoral college. This electoral college shall proceed to elect constitution-making body on the basis of proportional representation. The membership of the constitution-making body shall be about one-tenth of the total membership of the electoral college. The states shall be invited to send their representatives proportionate to their population;
- v. During the war or until such time the new constitution is formed, His Majesty's Government will continue to discharge its responsibility for the control and direction of the defence of India as part of their world war effort. For this Government of India desired co-operation of both the people as well as leaders of the principal sections of the Indian people at all the internal and external forums.<sup>13</sup>

Quaid-i-Azam's strategy was not to flatly confront with or oppose Mr. Cripps or his proposals. Instead he wanted to engage in dialogue with the leading British Parliamentarians for the purpose of arguing and pleading the case for Pakistan. In this Jinnah's approach was based on logic and reason. In the whole process of dialogue he never lost his temper, but at the same he never hesitated in presenting viewpoint of the Muslim India.

Jinnah had full knowledge of the activities of the British Government as well as those of the Congress leaders who tried their utmost to damage his personality and the League. Addressing the Muslim gathering in New Delhi on 23 March 1942, the Quaid said: "Attempt is being made to disrupt the Muslim League by the Muslim agents of the Congress and the Muslim agents of the British".<sup>14</sup> They tried to weaken his AIML by promoting other dummy parties. But all these underhand activities failed. In the official confidential reports this "failure" was admitted. In the report for the quarter February-April 1942 it was admitted by the Indian Government that in early quarter an effort was made "to diminish the importance of the League by exploiting the All-India

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13. "Draft Declaration for Discussion with Indian Leaders" in *India (Lord Privy Seal's Mission)*, London, 1942, British Library (OIOC), London, L/PJ/10/2.

14. *Star of India*, 24 March 1942.

Azad Muslim Conference”. But this “was a failure”.<sup>15</sup> The British Government also encouraged Fazlul Haq’s revolt in Bengal against AIML and Jinnah but that also “weakened”.<sup>16</sup> It was also admitted in this report that “Jinnah so played his cards during the negotiations with Sir Stafford Cripps as to avoid blame for the breakdown and at the same time to escape the unwelcome responsibility of office”.<sup>17</sup>

Stafford Cripps remained in British India during 22 March – 12 April 1942. Apart from active dialogues with Cripps, Jinnah kept up building political pressure on the Government by taking a number of political steps. Pakistan Day on 23 March 1942 was celebrated in a befitting manner, public meeting in New Delhi held under the auspices of AIML, which Jinnah termed as “the only representative body for the ten crores of Muslims”. He was bold enough to declare:

Sir Stafford Cripps is now here as representative of the British Government. We must wait and reserve our judgement on the proposals which he has brought with him.

We are prepared to face all the consequences if any scheme or solution, which is detrimental to the interests of the Muslims, is enforced and we, by all our might and resources at our disposal, shall oppose that. We shall resist any intrigue resorted to by Hindu leadership or British leadership until we are all dead.<sup>18</sup>

In his Urdu address to the open session of AIML at “Jinnah Chaman”, Allahabad on 3 April 1942, the Quaid said that the Working Committee of AIML is considering the Cripps proposals:

What the Committee will decide no one knows but one thing I want to announce in clear words. Rest assured that our aim is Pakistan and whatever the proposals might be. If they are such that we cannot achieve Pakistan we will never accept them. There may be shortcomings in the Proposals — and there are many — but our firm

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15. Report for the Quarter February-April 1942, British Library (OIOC), London, F.125/144.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Star of India*, 24 March 1942.

determination and our only goal is one — Pakistan — Pakistan — Pakistan.<sup>19</sup>

The Quaid also added with determination:

Now it is not a question of their giving it (Pakistan) but we will take it. This voice was being raised throughout India and in every language. In Bengal, in Bombay, in Madras whether it is a Tamil Telugu, Gujarati, Punjabi, Urdu or Pashto there is only one cry from every corner of India - 'Pakistan Zindabad'. This is our decision and there can be no change in it.<sup>20</sup>

The 'veiled' recognition of Pakistan by the Cripps offer could not satisfy Jinnah who was vigorous for the demand for Pakistan.<sup>21</sup> However, as part of his strategy, he wanted to continue dialogue with Cripps in the hope of convincing him for the cause of Pakistan. In his main address at the Allahabad Muslim League session on 5 April 1942, the Quaid thoroughly scrutinized the Cripps offer which was in the nature of 'Draft Declaration'.<sup>22</sup> Jinnah's main objections to this Declaration were:

1. Though the provinces have been given option to remain out of Indian Union if they do not agree to the new constitution, it has not been cleared in the proposal about the status of such one or more provinces, whether they were to remain independent or form another Union.
2. 16,00 members of the provincial legislatures will elect 160 members of the constitution-making body. If any province disagrees with them, the legislature of the province will decide with a vote of 60% members about its future course of action.
3. Will the decision of the constitution-making body be taken by a bare majority or not, has not been clearly mentioned in the Proposals?
4. In this situation Mr. Gandhi will come to this constitution-making body with a dead certainty of getting a constitution which will emerge for an All-India Union. "Now when that is done, the province or provinces who would feel that has been

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19. *Ibid.*, 4 April 1942.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*, 6 April 1942.

done, then they are given the consolation, no, no, you have yet another chance before you are killed”.

5. The Muslims feel deeply disappointed that the entity and integrity of the Muslim nation has not been expressly recognised. Muslim India will not be satisfied unless their right of national self-determination is unequivocally recognised.
6. It must be realised that India was never a country or a nation. India's problem is international in this subcontinent and differences cultural, social, political and economic are so fundamental that they cannot be covered up, concealed, or confused but must be handled by all as realists.
7. The document is illusory as “Hindu India will dominate the decision in favour of one All-India Union in all the provinces and the Muslims in Bengal and the Punjab will be at the mercy of the Hindu minority in those provinces who will exert themselves to the fullest extent and length for keeping the Muslims tied to the chariot wheel of Hindudom”.<sup>23</sup>

On the basis of these points of objections Jinnah called upon Sir Stafford Cripps to revise the draft declaration and come out clearly in favour of Pakistan.<sup>24</sup> But it was not accomplished.

It would be better if we analyse the attitude of Indian National Congress towards the Cripps Proposals. Despite the fact that Sir Cripps was personal friend of a number of Congress leaders<sup>25</sup> and on reaching India he gave special protocol to the Congress leaders by writing various letters to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad,<sup>26</sup> the Congress President, the Draft Declaration could not satisfy the Congress leaders as they were bent upon capturing power by making Jawaharlal Nehru as Defence Minister of the British War Cabinet. By this the Commander-in-Chief of British India was to be put under the overall command and control of the Indian Minister,<sup>27</sup> a matter neither acceptable to Sir Cripps nor to the

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23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*

25. Stanley Wolpert, p.198.

26. See text of the letter in *India (Lord Privy Seal's Mission)*, British Library (OIOC), London, L/RJ/10/2.

27. *Star of India*, 4 April 1942.

British Home Government.<sup>28</sup> The British Government was ready to appoint Indian Defence Member but without disturbing the command and control of the Indian defence forces.<sup>29</sup> Though there were other objections to the Cripps Proposals by the Congress Working Committee, the real issue was capturing control over the Defence.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the INC Working Committee in its meeting held on 11 April 1942 rejected the Cripps Proposals.<sup>31</sup> After a fortnight's extensive dialogue between Cripps and the Congress leaders a newspaper reported failure of the settlement as follows:

This is believed to be due to differences on the transfer of defence to Indian control on the Congress demand for a virtual end of the Secretary of States' control and on the demand that where a majority of the future Cabinet were agreed, the Viceroy should not use his power of veto.<sup>32</sup>

On the same date the Working Committee of the AIML met in New Delhi and rejected the Cripps Proposals though on different grounds, particularly on the issue of Pakistan.<sup>33</sup> The Resolution emphatically declared:

So far as the Muslim League is concerned, it has finally decided that the only solution of India's constitutional problem is the partition of India into independent zones, and it will, therefore, be unfair to Muslims to compel them enter such a constitution-making body, whose main object is the creation of a new Indian Union. With conditions as they are, it will only be futile but on the contrary may exacerbate bitterness and animosity amongst the various elements in the country.<sup>34</sup>

Sir Cripps departed from British India on 12 April 1942 with the realisation that his Mission has failed. But the Quaid became

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28. *India (Lord Privy Seal's Mission)*, British Library (OIOC), L/PJ/10/2.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *The Indian Annual Register: January-June 1942*, vol.I, Calcutta, 219-265. Also see R. Coupland, *The Cripps Mission*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1942).

31. See text of the Resolution of the Congress Working Committee meeting held on 11 April 1942 in *The Indian Annual Register, January-June 1942*, pp.224-226.

32. *Times of India*, 11 April 1942.

33. See text of the AIML Working Committee meeting held on 11 April 1942, in *Times of India*, 13 April 1942.

34. *Ibid.*



more forceful afterwards as the Cripps Mission could neither weaken Jinnah nor AIML in their demand for Pakistan. In his press interview on 15 April 1942 in New Delhi, the Quaid said:

So long as the Pakistan demand is not conceded, we cannot agree to any present arrangement which will in any way militate against or prejudge the Pakistan demand.<sup>35</sup>

Cripps' three week stay in British India was most crucial for Jinnah who read a number of newspaper reports that British government is coming to terms with the Congress by which Jawaharlal Nehru would become Defence Minister in charge of the whole of Defence of India. Even the Commander-in-Chief of British India, it was reported, would be placed under Nehru's control. The reports were certainly alarming for Jinnah's demand for Pakistan. Because, if this had happened, it would have sealed the fate of Pakistan. By rejecting the Congress demand to transfer Defence to Congress Defence Minister, the British did not favour Pakistan demand. As a matter of fact, the British Government had its own agenda and policies by which they were not ready to put Indian forces under Indian Defence Minister because, it would have affected their overall world war activities. Jinnah closely watched all these stages of dialogues between Cripps and the Congress leaders. When difference of opinion emerged between these friends, it was easy for Jinnah to relax. Otherwise, Jinnah was preparing his nation for acting on either side of the settlement. Even if there would have emerged settlement between Congress and British Government, Jinnah would have called upon the Muslim nation to revolt against the Government. In this the Muslim component of the British Indian Army which was equal to those of the Hindus, would have deserted and sided with their Muslim Indian nation. This position was fully realized by the British War Cabinet. Therefore, they preferred to reject Congress demand to transfer Defence to Indian Minister. In this whole process, certainly the Quaid succeeded in further popularising the Pakistan demand and preparing Muslim India for self-defence in the name of 'Civil Defence'.<sup>36</sup>

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35. *Ibid.*, 16 April 1942.

36. *Time of India*, 30 May 1942.

By the 'veiled' recognition of the Pakistan demand as a remote possibility, the Cripps proposals tried to allure the Muslim public opinion for the purpose of dodging the Muslim India. It was aimed at befooling them so that they may join the concept of new "Indian Union" and by taking this step they may forget their cherished demand for Pakistan. But Jinnah was there to critically analyse the Cripps proposals and tell the Muslim India about the weaknesses of these proposals. He guided them that the Cripps proposals were not going to meet Muslim demand for Pakistan. It was through Quaid's farsightedness that the Muslim India was saved and the cause of Pakistan demand progressed. The Quaid's prudent course kept the Muslim Nation well prepared to act in any direction the Cripps-Congress settlement would have chalked out. This settlement was eminent if differences between the British and Congress leaders had not developed on the issue of transfer of defence responsibility to Nehru. Other differences which came to light later were of minor nature just for the sake of public consumption.