

Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah and the Female Leadership

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Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah was a great leader. Without his statesmanship and foresightedness the creation of Pakistan was not possible. This great leader was fully aware of the fact that participation of the women was essential in the Pakistan movement. He, therefore, decided to utilize the potential of Muslim Women in his cause. In those days Muslim women of the subcontinent were confined to their homes and their main concern was to look after their household and children. Female education was not common. Only few elite families used to send their daughters to schools and colleges that too clad in *burqah*. Having this background the first lady who took the daring steps to come forward and create an awakening about the freedom movement was Amjadi Bano, wife of Maulana Mohammad Ali.¹ She had the honour of being the first Muslim woman in the subcontinent who actively participated in the Pakistan movement. She was so influenced by her mother-in-law, Bi Amman, and husband that despite remaining in veil started generating a love for freedom and Islam and became a great fighter of Pakistan movement. She also had the distinction of being sent to jail in 1915.²

This eminent lady under the guidance of Quaid-i-Azam started a campaign to arouse Muslim women against the British slavery. Elected as member of the Working Committee of the All India Muslim League, a post she held until her death. Clad in *burqah*, she used to sit in the meetings of the Working Committee side by side with Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. After his return from London to Bombay in 1935 the Quaid nominated her as

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1. Dr. Miss Kaniz Fatima Yusuf, Dr. M. Saleem Akhtar, Dr. S. Razi Wasti, *Pakistan Resolution Revisited* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1990), p.479.
2. *Ibid.*, p.46.

member of Muslim League Working Committee and used to listen carefully to her counsel.³

Quaid-i-Azam, as leader of the caravan of freedom movement, had the Muslim women side by side with him to play their active role. All India Muslim League meeting was held in December 1938⁴ at Patna under the chairmanship of Quaid-i-Azam, to formulate a sub-committee of All-India Muslim League Women Branch. The Committee mainly comprised of those women who had a long experience of participating in the struggle for Pakistan.⁵

The constitution was made for this Committee, it was decided to have women sub-committees at Provincial and District levels as well. It was also decided that these sub-committees should start the processes of enrolling members and with the help of more and more members launch a countrywide propaganda campaign to arouse political awareness amongst the Muslim women. The ultimate aim was to provide women an equal chance and share in political, economic and cultural development of the country. The proposals, presented by Begum Habibullah and seconded by Begum Waseem, were as under:

1. Women's sub-committees be constituted at the district and provincial levels;
2. The sub-committees should increase the membership of the Muslim League;
3. The women leaders should launch a propaganda campaign on a vast scale, to arouse political awareness amongst Muslim women;
4. It is the duty of the League as a mouthpiece of the Muslim feelings that they should lead the women in such a manner that in the political, cultural and economic development of the society they get an equal share.⁶

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3. Begum Salma Tasadduq Hussain, "Tahrik-e-Pakistan main Khwateen ka Kirdar" *Jang* (Rawalpindi), 23 March 1990, Friday Magazine, p.52.
 4. Noor-us-Sabah Begum, *Tehrik-e-Pakistan aur Khawateen* (Lahore: Islami Printing Press, N.d.), p.482.
 5. *Ibid.*, p.296.
 6. The members of the Committee were: Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah, Lady Nusrat Abdullah Haroon, Begum Shahnwaz, Begum Salma Tasadduque Hussain, Fatima Begum and Begum Waqarunnisa Noon, Begum Akhtar Suleiman, Begum Raheela Sherwani, Begum Aizaz Rasool, Begum Waseem, Begum Ismail, Begum Nawab Ismail Khan and Begum Habibullah, Begum Siddiq Ali, Shaista Ikramullah, Begum

With the creation of this Organization the women of the subcontinent were enthused with a wonderful awareness. In fact, from this time onward the fight for independence of the Muslims of the subcontinent started in an organized manner. Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah was in the forefront of this fight with her full potentialities. Side by side with her brother Quaid-i-Azam, she tried to awake political, social, and educational consciousness.

Keeping in view the increased responsibilities of Quaid-i-Azam, Fatima Jinnah decided to ease the burden of her brother by playing a pivotal role in awakening the Muslim women of India from the slumber of their indifference. She therefore started participating in each and every meeting of the Muslim League. In 1938 she was appointed as member of the provincial branch of Bombay Muslim League. In the same year, on 10 July, a committee of the office-bearers of the Bombay Muslim League elected her as member of the committee. During the course of the annual session of the Bombay Provincial Muslim League on 8 October 1938, her name was on the top of the list of those 30 delegates who were elected in it. In 1939 she became a permanent member of the All-India Muslim League Council and retained this honour until the success of the freedom movement.⁷ During all this period she toured almost the entire of the subcontinent along with Quaid-i-Azam, and rendered valuable services in the task of awakening the Muslim women.

After this session Mohtarmah Fatima Jinnah, a bacon of guidance for the Muslim women, toured all over the subcontinent and constituted a number of committees for women. During her visit she addressed thousands of meetings organized by the Women's wing of the Muslim League in which she threw light on the objectives of the Muslim League and effectively repudiated the false allegations levelled by the opponents of the League against this party. This also enlightened the womenfolk about the concepts of freedom movement.

Iqbal Hussain Malik, Begum Anjum Ara, Noor-us-Sabah Begum, Begum Qaisara Ali and Begum Abdul Hafeez. *Ibid.*, 482. See also proceedings of All India Muslim League Annual Session of Patna, 1938, *Muslim League Papers*, Archives of Freedom Movement, Karachi, vol. IV, 20

7. Dr. Miss Kaniz F. Yusuf, p.481.

In 1939, addressing the general meeting of the Women's Sub-Committee of Muslim League held in Qaiser Bagh, Bombay, Fatima Jinnah while describing goal of the Muslim League, awakened the Muslim women and gave them political consciousness. Moreover under the dynamic leadership of Fatima Jinnah Muslim women could gather on one platform and in a short period of time their party was recognized as the only party of Muslim women all over the subcontinent.

The sub-Committee of the All India Muslim League though had started its membership campaign since 1938 but accelerated the pace of its activities and work when on 23 March 1940 Muslim League organized its historic meeting at Minto Park Lahore. Fatima Jinnah along with Quaid-i-Azam participated. Begum Mohammed Ali as president of the subcommittee attended and on behalf of the Muslim women of the subcontinent supported the Pakistan Resolution.

The next day, the sub-Committee of the Women's Muslim League⁸ held a separate session of their own at Habibia Hall, Islamia College, Lahore. Three thousand women participated in this session. A large number of women delegates had already come from the length and breadth of India to participate in the annual session of the Muslim League and all of them were present in this meeting. Begum Shahnawaz introduced the permanent delegates that included Fatima Jinnah also. Begum Muhammad Ali attended the meeting in her capacity as the President of the Sub-Committee. In her presidential address, she said that the Muslim League was the only representative party of the Muslims, and it was their special duty to work for it with diligence, to spread its message to every household in the country and make it strong.⁹ A resolution was also passed in this meeting calling for the constitution of subcommittees of the Women's Muslim League in all districts and cities, so that Muslim League could be popularised amongst the

8. The members of the Sub-Committee were: Begum Hafizuddin (Surat), Lady Haroon (Sindh), Begum Ismail Khan (Meerut), Begum Habibullah and Begum Aizaz Rasool (Lucknow), Begum Rahman and Begum Razauallah (Delhi), Miss Nadir Jahan, Begum Khursheed Ara Siddiq Ali Khan (Nagpur), and Begum Waseem particularly deserve a mention here.

9. Dr. Miss Kaniz F. Yusuf, p.489.

womenfolk. Consequently, all the women who had attended the 1940 session of the Muslim League went back to their respective areas, held meetings there and apprised the local women of the demand of Muslims of the subcontinent. Their speeches tried to clarify the point that until and unless the Muslims attained a separate homeland, they could not maintain their religious, cultural and economic freedom. And also that even if they got rid of the British, they would be ruled by the Hindus. These speeches endowed the Muslim women of the country with a new fervour to work for the freedom movement.

In N.W.F.P., the job of motivating the women was quite difficult because of the strict cultural values and way of life of women folk. They observed *pardah* very strictly and the education amongst the women was very poor. They were not allowed to come out of their houses. Therefore the job of persuading women to participate in the freedom movement seemed difficult.¹⁰ On the instruction of Quaid-i-Azam, a delegation under the leadership of Lady Abdullah Haroon and other Muslims Begum M. A. Hakim, Begum Salma Tasadduq Hussain, Fatima Begum, Zubaida Shah and Begum Karimdad Khan were sent to N.W.F.P. to collect fund and to motivate and create awareness among the women of N.W.F.P. They were also to be encouraged to participate in the freedom movement. The delegation reached Peshawar on 17th. Two meetings were held on 18th and 19th October.¹¹ The Quaid-i-Azam, while addressing Muslim women in Peshawar, said:

I am very glad that our women are coming forward...women can always play a great part. It is said that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the nation... Our Islamic history shows that women have always worked shoulder to shoulder with men... No nation can ever achieve any big thing unless we take our women with us.¹²

After having success in their mission the delegation moved to Naushehra on 20th October. In Mardan Begum Zari offered every possible help. Zari Sarfraz a young student of N.W.F.P. who had

10. Aziz Javed, *Quaid-i-Azam aur Sarhad*, (Lahore: N.p., 1978), p.310.

11. Sarfraz Hussain Mirza, *Muslim Women's Role in the Pakistan Movement* (Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, 1969), p.76.

12. *Ibid.*

participated in the session of Muslim League Lahore along with her father, after listening the speeches and watching the enthusiasm of Muslim women felt that she could prepare the Muslim women of her province to work for the creation of Pakistan. In Mardan she persuaded her friends and relatives and made them members of the League. The gathering at the residence of Begum Zari was of special importance, for it was for the first time in the history of the North-West Frontier Province that such a large meeting of women was held. Pathan women gathered under the banner of the Muslim League in an overwhelming number and worked incessantly for the League election campaign. It was during this period that Begum Zari Sarfraz provided enough financial assistance to set up the Frontier women's Muslim League and organized the women's Muslim League National Guards. She regularly contributed financial help to make it a success.

Quaid-i-Azam ordered Fatima Begum, an active member of the Women's Muslim League working committee, to go to N.W.F.P along with Begum Salma Tasadduq and Begum Zubaida Shah and other leading Muslim League workers to persuade the women of this province to work for Muslim League. These ladies not only persuaded the educated girls and women but also organized a meeting in which Begum Qazi Mir Ahmed was made Provincial President and her daughter Shirin Wahab as General Secretary. The members in this meeting were hardly thirty.¹³ These eminent ladies made speeches and requested other ladies of the province to come forward and take an active part in the freedom movement.

Begum Zari Sarfraz, Begum Qazi Mir Ahmad, Shirin Wahab Nazir, Niaz (Nazir Tila Mohammad) and Begum Kamaluddin and many other started their practical work, and began to introduce the objectives of the movement to the women of the N.W.F.P.¹⁴

Another important and crucial province was Punjab where Muslims were in majority, but the Unionist party with a powerful non -Muslim element held sway. The League had to concentrate its

13. *Ibid*, p.305.

14. Dr. Miss Kaniz F. Yusuf, p. 491

forces to demolish this citadel. Muslim women side by side with men held meetings in different parts of the Punjab provinces. Muslim Women took the task more fervently. The work done by the Muslim women was much appreciated by Quaid-i-Azam. On 17th January, the Muslim League Women's sub committee provincial branch meeting was held at the Habibia Hall, Islamia College, Lahore. Quaid-i-Azam while addressing this meeting, expressed satisfaction at their work and enthusiastically remarked that "there was fusion of new life and vigour since his first address to Punjabi Muslim women in 1936."¹⁵

A comprehensive Programme for an election was chalked out in an extraordinary meeting of the Provincial Women's Sub-Committee held on 4 January 1946¹⁶ at Lahore. In one of the resolutions about 9,000 Muslim women voters of Lahore were appealed to cast their votes in favour of Begum Shah Nawaz and Begum Salma Tasadduque Hussain. During the final phase of elections, the result of all this endeavour, was that about 98 per cent of the Muslim female votes in Lahore were cast in favour of the League. The Punjab Muslim League Parliamentary Board had issued League tickets to Begum Salma Tasadduque Hussain and Begum Shah Nawaz.¹⁷

It would not be out of place to mention in brief the work of these two ladies who had rendered valuable services to the Muslim League. Begum Salma, a devoted worker of the Muslim League, greatly contributed to the cause of Muslim League. She was a woman who, besides having interest in politics, attained remarkable position as a writer and a poet. She worked hard during the Bihar riots,¹⁸ brought refugees from Bihar and provided accommodation to many of them at her residence. After the formation of the Punjab Provincial Women's Sub-Committee she became its active member and was elected its Secretary in 1940. She was nominated on Council of the All India Muslim League in 1941 and in the following year was elected Secretary of the Punjab

15. Sarfraz Hussain Mirza, p.80.

16. *Ibid.*, p.78.

17. *Ibid.*, p.79.

18. Noor-us-Sabah Begum, p.132.

Provincial Women's Sub-Committee. In April 1943, She was taken on the Central Sub-Committee of the All India Muslim League. In 1944,¹⁹ she was nominated as member of the Working Committee of the Punjab Provincial Muslim League.

Activities of Begum Salma did not confine to Punjab only. She took lot of interest in the affairs of Muslim League in other provinces as well. When the Civil Disobedience Movement spread to the N.W.F.P., she went there with her colleagues and assisted in organizing processions. In 1947, during the partition riots, she was appointed Refugees Relief Secretary in the Punjab Provincial Muslim League Office. Her duties were to receive the refugees from other areas and make arrangements for their boarding and lodging in Walton and other camps.

Begum Jahanara, commonly known as Begum Shah Nawaz, was also one of the active leaders of All India Women Muslim League. She was the daughter of Sir Muhammad Shafi. She had the distinction of starting social work for the welfare of women at the age of 12.²⁰ Jahan Ara Begum attended all the three Round Table Conferences held in England. In the first two Conferences there were other ladies as well from India but in the third Conference she was the only lady to represent the ladies of the subcontinent.

Jahan Ara Begum was the first lady who was elected as member of the All India Muslim League Council. In 1937,²¹ She was elected as a member Punjab Assembly. Jahan Ara Begum also attended the Muslim League Council meeting held in 1940, in which Pakistan Resolution was passed. In 1946 she was elected as member of the Punjab Assembly as Muslim League candidate. Same year she was sent along with M.A.H. Isphhani on a good-will mission to the US to explain the Muslim League point of view.²²

19. *The Eastern Times*, 7 November 1944.

20. Noor-us-Sabah Begum, p.56.

21. Sarfraz Hussain Mirza, p.129.

22. *The Eastern Times*, 27 Nov. 1946, *Nawa-i-Waqt*, 19 December 1946.

Another prominent lady who played an active role in the Punjab province was Begum Viqar-un Nisa Noon. She was married to Sir Firoz Khan, a leading politician, in whose company she studied the political situation quite closely. During the general elections in 1945 an effective propaganda was need of the hour. Realizing this situation she followed the guidelines of Quaid-i-Azam and organized a campaign for the Muslim League. During the Civil Disobedience Movement in the Punjab, Begum Noon was one of the leading women leaders who organized processions and demonstrations against the British-backed Khizr Ministry and courted arrest on three occasions. She was also a member of the two-member Good-will delegation sent by Quaid-i-Azam to America. In 1948,²³ she was elected as a member of the Working Committee of Pakistan Muslim League. She led many delegations abroad including delegations to Canada, New York and China.

During partition when millions of homeless and destitute refugees poured into Lahore, she rendered invaluable assistance to various refugee committees and camps. She had been very closely connected with the 'Red Cross' for many years and had the honour of representing Pakistan on numerous occasions.

While mentioning leading women politicians, the name of Begum Shaista Ikramullah is on the forefront. In 1940²⁴ she joined the Muslim League and worked very hard in popularising its aims and objectives. As a member of the Women's Sub-Committee her efforts were highly appreciated. In late 1940, on the advice of Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah, Shaista began to organize Muslim girls into pro-Muslim League group. Appreciating her tremendous efforts in this regard, Raja Sahib of Mahmudabad appointed Shaista as Convenor of Muslim Women Students Federation. In 1942 she organized the All India Muslim Women Students Federation. In 1943²⁵ she was nominated to the Central Sub Committee and worked as member of the Council of the All India Muslim League as well. As a Muslim League candidate of the Legislative Assembly her work is commendable. She became an

23. Noor-us-Sabah Begum, p.59.

24. Sarfraz Hussain Mirza, p.136.

25. *Ibid.*

active member of the League sub-committees. It was through this platform that she presented before her audience the case of Pakistan. Her convincing arguments, presented fluently in English and Urdu made a lot of sense to her audience and lured them into joining the League.²⁶ The success was not without trials. A severely critical article published in *Hindustan Times* highly disturbed her. It was her first taste of criticism. She became very upset and went to Quaid-i-Azam for sympathy who consoled her by saying that, "Everyday the newspapers say much worse things about me. What would happen if I let it upset me. This is to be expected." When she rose to leave, he added, "You must not let things upset you." In later years when she encountered meanness and malice, she remembered those considerate words of the Quaid.²⁷

In the first Legislative Assembly of Pakistan there were only two elected women representatives, Begum Jahan Ara Shahnawaz and Shaista Ikramullah. Even at this forum she continued to work for the betterment of women especially the destitute ones. Her efforts were significantly rewarded through an allotment incorporated in the budget for development programmes for women.

Under the guidance of Quaid-I-Azam, Muslim Women's activities gained momentum. The members of the Provincial Women's Sub-Committee made several tours in the major districts of the Provinces and formed primary Leagues.²⁸ They, in their speeches, explained the significance of the 'Pakistan Resolution', distributed League literature and arranged women's symposiums. They also observed 'Pakistan Day' and 'Muslim League Weeks.' The number of the women members of the League increased tremendously and eventually the majority of women community, which had hitherto lived in oblivion, was awakened from slumber and lethargy. Muslim Women travelled from place to place to popularise the League cause and declared that women would be proud to face

26. Farah Gul Baqai, 'Begum Shaista Ikramullah: A Woman Who Dared', *Pakistan Journal of History & Culture*, vol. XXI, No. 2 (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, Quaid-i-Azam University), p.101.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid*, 11 May 1943, 23 August 6 and 10 February 1945, 3,13, and 16 March 1945.

every possible hardship for the cause of ‘Pakistan’ and would not retreat but would continue to march ahead undeterred.²⁹ They in their speeches stated that they were, prepared even to lay down their lives and sacrifice properties for their sole aim-Pakistan.³⁰ To familiarize the Pakistan Movement amongst Muslim women of the villages, songs were composed which were sung in the women gatherings of the rural areas.³¹ As a result of continuous propaganda, the message of the Muslim League reached the remotest villages of the Punjab.

Quaid-i-Azam in reply to the speeches made by the members and leaders of Muslim Women’s Sub-Committees, appreciated the activities of Muslim Women and urged them to play their role in the struggle for freedom side by side with men. He said, “I am glad to see that not only Muslim Men but Muslim Women and Children also have understood the Pakistan Scheme.” He further said, “No Nation can make any progress without the co-operation of its women. If Muslim Women support their men as they did in the days of Prophet of Islam, we should soon realize our goal.”³²

Thus under the able and dynamic leadership of the Quaid-i-Azam the Muslim women got a chance to discover and practice their hidden talents. This marked the inception of an era of awaking and realization for the Muslim female population of the subcontinent; which not only enabled them to play a vital role during the freedom movement but also after the creation of Pakistan .In this way they earned an unforgettable place in the annals of Muslim history in the subcontinent of British India.

29. *Inqilab*, 23 November 1942.

30. *Ibid.*

31. M. Sultana Bukhsh, p.63.

32. *The Eastern Times*, 22 November 1942.