

# FORMATION OF THE MUSLIM LEAGUE IN DHAKA

*From Consultation to Confrontation: A study of the Muslim League in British Indian Politics, 1906-1912*, by Matiur Rahman, London: Luzac, pp313, 1971.

Before reviewing this book, it is worth saying a few words about its author. Dr Matiur Rahman was born in Brahamanbaria district in British India (now Bangladesh) in around 1926. After his early education in local schools, he moved to Dhaka University where he obtained his BA and MA Degrees. As a student politician, he was elected the General Secretary of Awami Muslim Student League at Dhaka University. In due course, he became a Research Fellow in the Department of History at the same university and pursued research into the formation of the Muslim League in Dhaka in 1906. However, for some unknown reason, he was not able to complete his research at Dhaka University and was instead offered a scholarship to study at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, for a PhD Degree.

He completed his doctorate in the late 1960s and the title of his thesis was 'From Consultation to Confrontation: A study of the Muslim League in British Indian Politics, 1906-1912'. This thesis was subsequently published in London by Luzac and Company Ltd in around 1971. Thereafter, Dr Rahman served as the Warden of the Pakistan Students Hostel in Belgravia, London and was appointed an Education Officer at the Pakistan High Commission in London until the break-up of Pakistan in 1971. In addition to the book under review, Dr Rahman authored and edited several other books on historical and political topics. He was also a contributor to the London-based Impact International Magazine. He died in 1982 in London and was buried in Islamabad, Pakistan.

Dr Matiur Rahman's book, *From Consultation to Confrontation*, is a survey of the embryonic stages of development of the All-India Muslim League which, during the course of its history, emerged as a great political party championing Muslim political rights in the Indian subcontinent and, finally achieved the creation of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, in 1947. The book seeks to trace "the circumstances leading to the formation of the League, examines the evolution of the League's constitution and policy, analyses its reaction to British policy and evaluates the League's contribution in British-Indian politics between 1906 and 1912."

The book is a worthy addition to the growing literature on the history of the freedom movement in the subcontinent. Dr Rahman, a patriotic scholar, is one of the representatives of a new generation of historians whose strong nationalistic sentiment inspires him to write the story of the national political party with a scholarly zeal. He records the activities of the League with great sympathy and pleads the cause of the Muslims of British India convincingly. We shall cite a characteristic example of his argument in defence of the League. In refuting such allegations as the Muslim League was “the favourite (and) pampered child of British imperialism” Dr Rahman offers the following argument:

“It has been suggested that the Muslim League was started ‘under the inspiration of the British Government and leadership of one of its chief supporters, the Aga Khan.’ We have already noted how the Aga Khan had opposed the formation of the League and thus the hollowness of the second part of the allegation has already been exposed. The first part of the allegation is equally untenable and has never been substantiated. It was either politically motivated or made on the analogy of the (British Indian) Government’s inspiration towards the formation of the Indian National Congress. But unlike the Congress, which had been fortunate in having its father and godfather respectively in the persons of A. O. Hume and Lord Dufferin, the League was started as the initiative of and by the Muslim leaders themselves.” (p40)

Elaborating the argument further, the author demonstrates that on the contrary, the British press and the Imperial Civil Service viewed the formation of the League with disfavour. The British Colonial Government in India, despite the declared loyalty of League leaders, was always suspicious of the motives of the Muslim politicians. On the other hand, the leaders of the Indian National Congress never ceased from trying to stifle the Muslim League. The Muslim League in the early stages of its history had to work against heavy odds. Dr Rahman discusses the early history of the Muslim League with such panoramic vividness as is lacking in any known research work on the subject published in the last few decades. The descriptive analysis in this book constitutes a very good ground work on which further researches on the subsequent history of the Muslim politics in colonial India should thrive.

The nature of the sources used by the author permits him to approach the subject with authority. His sources are very largely archival records, journalistic reports and occasional publications of Indian political parties and organisations. Although a good many of these documents have also been used by earlier researchers, such as S. R. Wasti (Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement, 1905-1910) and Mollah (The Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, 1905-1911) and S. Z. H. Zaidi (The Partition of Bengal and its Annulment – A Survey of the Schemes of Territorial Redistribution of Bengal, 1902-1911), nevertheless the interpretation of these and other sources provides a considerable degree of originality.

Dr Rahman testifies that the All-India Muslim League, since its foundation in 1906, appeared as a ‘bourgeois’ political organisation having, in its positions of leadership, persons from the titled aristocrats and feudal lords, business magnates, lawyers and journalists – a complexion which it continued to retain throughout most of its history. There is also a good account in the book on the roles of great Muslim personalities, viz., Nawab Salimullah, Abdullah al-Mamun Suhrawardy, the Aga Khan, Syed

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Ameer Ali and some others in determining the course of Muslim politics in British India.

The book, originally a doctoral dissertation, has been published almost in its original form which explains the bias towards substantiation and documentation as against style. A glossary of technical terms for the understanding of non-specialist readers could also have added to the value of this informative book. Nevertheless, the book is a well-researched and adequately documented study that will be welcomed by all those who are interested in the assessment of the resurgent nationalistic forces at the twilight of the British colonial rule in India.

**By Dr Muhammad Abdul Jabbar Beg, MA (Rajshahi) and PhD (Cambridge).**

**SOURCE: Impact International Magazine**