

Pak-Affairs

Question:

Evaluate the policies of the Cripps mission. To what extent were these policies favorable for the Muslims of the sub-continent? (2000)
Why did the mission fail? (2004)

Introduction

The Cripps mission was a significant event in Indian history during World War II. Sir Stafford Cripps, a British politician, came to India in 1942 with proposals for Indian political leaders regarding self-governance and independence. The mission aimed to secure Indian cooperation and support for Britain in the war effort in exchange for post-war dominion status.

Preface

Japan joined the war against allies in 1941 and her successive victories caught British off guard. The Japanese forces occupied Burma and threatened India. England began to feel the

necessity of changing their policy towards India. In March 1942, British government sent Sir Stafford Cripps, leader of the House of Commons and a member of war cabinet with certain proposals which are known as Cripps plan.

Main Features

Cripps arrived in Delhi on March 22, 1942, and briefed the Indian leaders about his following proposals:-

a. Dominion status Proposal:-

Cripps proposed granting India Dominion status after the war, which would allow it more autonomy within the British Commonwealth.

b. Formation of Indian Constituent Assembly :-

At the end of the war, a new constituent assembly would be formed to frame the future constitution. Its members would be elected on the basis

of proportional representation by the members of the lower house of the provincial assemblies. The Indian states would also be represented in the constituent assembly. The constitution prepared by this assembly would be acceptable to the British Government. A treaty would be concluded between the Assembly and His Majesty's Government. It would resolve all the issues and problems that would crop up at the time of transfer of power from Britain to the people of India.

Co Provincial Autonomy:-

Any province would be free to keep itself out of the proposed Union and to retain its prevailing constitutional position. If such non-acceding provinces so desired they could have their own separate Union.

do Full Self-Government:-

The mission promised full self-government for India once the war ended, indicating a significant shift in British policy towards

Indian independence.

e. Interim Responsibility for Defence Control:-

During the critical period which now faces India and until the new constitution is framed His Majesty's Government must inevitably bear the responsibility for the control of the defence of India.

Muslim League Reaction

The Quaid-i-Azam called these proposals very unsatisfactory. Expressing his views on the issue he said that:

"The proposals have aroused our deepest anxieties and grave apprehensions, especially with reference to Pakistan scheme which is a matter of life and death for Muslim India. We will, therefore, endeavour that the principle of Pakistan which finds only veiled recognition in

the Document should be conceded in unequivocal terms."

[The Nation's Voice, Vol. II, p. 429]

The Muslim League passed a resolution expressing its dissatisfaction for the following reasons:

- a. There was no clear provision in the scheme for the establishment of an independent Muslim state.
- b. The declaration proposed the setting up of a constitution body with a view to the creation of one Indian union whereas the League believed in Pakistan and therefore in the establishment of two constitution making bodies.
- c. The method of electing constitutional body also went against the Muslim interests because they have been deprived of their right of separate electorate.

d. All the decisions were to be taken by bare majority which was gravely unjust to the Muslims who were in majority and could not secure more than 25% seats in the constitution making body.

e. The League kept back its opinion on the interim arrangements because their details were not included in the drafts.

f. The draft proposal contained no procedure for obtaining the verdict of the province for or against non-accession.

Positive Aspects of the mission for the Muslims

Although the All-India Muslim League rejected the Cripps proposals the Quaid-i-Azam admitted that the only positive aspect of the plan was:

a. For the first time the British Government had agreed in principle to the idea of partition.

b. Secondly, with two years of the Lahore Resolution, the British Government accepted the idea of partition as a fundamental principle of any future constitution.

It was indeed a great achievement of the Muslims. It was for the first time that the idea of the idea of partitioning India was mentioned in the British official documents. The Governor of the N.W.F.P., George Cunningham, in a report to the Governor-General also testified that

"the Muslims are obviously pleased at the thought that Pakistan is now recognised as practical parties politics by His Majesty's Government."

[The Transfer of Power 1942-47,
Vol. I, p. 712.]

Congress Reaction

The Congress basically denounced the Cripps proposals because it contained seeds of Pakistan. Moh. Gandhi was deeply distressed at the idea of breaking away of the provinces from the Union. Rejecting the proposals as totally unacceptable, he said,

"These proposals would only add to our difficulties and resolving the communal issues would become impossible."

[Quaid-i-Azam Aur unka Ehd,
Raees Ahmed Jafri, Lahore.]

"Gandhi compared these proposals to a post-dated cheque on a liquidated bank."

[India Wins Freedom, p. 58]

Conclusion

The Pakistan resolution was passed in 1940 and within exactly two years, the British war cabinet had conceded it in principle. This was a great victory for the Muslims, no matter how the draft declaration was interpreted. Anyway the offer in India was read as an admission that the British government was prepared at least to consider the Pakistan as a solution of the communal award impasse.
