

Kurds: On the Margins of History

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As the world is getting increasingly aware of the nagging problem of the Kurds, intellectuals all over the world are undertaking strenuous efforts to understand and explain the major ethnic problem that is disturbing peace in the Middle Eastern region. An integrated history of Kurds, which is one of the most difficult tasks one can possibly undertake, is indispensable for any worthwhile study of the Kurdish problem.

Much of Kurdish history is shrouded in obscurity. It is, as such, difficult to trace out their history with indisputable objectivity. Still, it is admitted that Kurds might have been the descendants of some Indo-European tribe that descended from Central Asia into the Iranian Plateau, and settled along the Zagros mountains. Some people tend to identify the tribe with the legendary *Kardu* (*Kardu or Gutu*), who compelled Xenophon to retreat to the Black Sea in 400BC. Some others believe that Kurds are the descendents of the *Medes* tribe.

This tribe successfully ruled the terrain, along the rugged Zagros range, from *Circa* 614 BC to *Circa* 550 BC. By the time of the Prophet, along with Persians, Tadjiks, Afghans, Baluchis, they were naturalised as Iranians. The Arabs invaded the region around 7th century BC and swept the territory under the banner of Islam. It was the Arabs who referred to the people in the Zagros mountain range as Kurds and the name caught on.

Between 13th and 16th century AD, the Kurds moved northwards, spreading out to eastern Anatolia, upto Mount Ararat. During this period, the term 'Kurdistan' was used to mark off the mountainous terrain that stretched from Taurus Mountains of Anatolia to Zagros Mountains of Russia. For quite sometime (1258-1509), Kurdistan became the warring dynasties of *Safavids* of Iran and the *Ottomans* of Turkey. This made the Kurds aware of their strategic importance and made them politically assertive. The First World War led to the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and laid the foundation of the modern states in the region. The Allied policy of carving out nation states in the region had initially taken 'Kurds' into account in the Treaty of Sevres of 1920, but the later colonial policies of Britain and the aggressive nationalist policies of the Ataturk administration in Turkey, almost derecognised the Treaty, and the Kurds found themselves straddling as many as five modern states (Syria, Turkey, Iraq, Iran and erstwhile Soviet Union) and becoming insignificant minorities in all of them, with each state determined to rub out their ethnic identity through repressive nationalist measures. In Turkey, they were officially named as '*Mountain Turks*' in Iran as '*Mountain Iranians*'. In Iraq, the British colonialists kept the Kurds guessing while in Soviet Union and Syria they just became misnomers. Thus we enter the 'divided histories' of the Turks in the recent period.

Ethnic Composition of Kurds

Conventionally bracketed off under the blanket name of 'Kurd', the Kurds are divided on the basis of religion and sects. Kurds are overwhelmingly *Sunni*. However, in Turkey (northwest of Diyarbakir) there is a small concentration of Zaza-speaking *Shias* and in Iran (around Kermanshah and Khanequain) several tribes are *Ithanasi Shias* (official faith of Iran). Some Kurds also belong to the *Ahl-i-Haq* (people of the Truth), an Islamic deviation, and are found in southeast Kurdistan. There is yet another group of Yazidis, another offshoot of Islam, which seeks to synthesize all the major and minor religions of the region with their main shrine *Shaikh Adi Mosul*, found mainly in Jabal Sinjar in north-western Iraq. Apart from this, there are some Christians and Jews.

Kurdish Language

'Kurdish' belongs to the family of Indo-European language and is more akin to Persian than Arabic. However, divided as they are among different states, the Kurds do not have any common language. Kurdish language can be divided into three largely impermeable, mutually exclusive languages. Most of the Kurds in Iran and Iraq speak Kurdish, which is close to the *Lori language* spoken in Iran. Kurds in Turkey speak *Kurmanji*, which has contributed to the Kurdish literature in a big way. Apart from these two major languages, Kurds in north and north-west Iraq, as well as central Turkey and western Azerbaijan, speak Zaza. Now we will deal with the recent history of the Kurdish problem and study Kurdish movements country-wise and find out the reasons for their disunity and their failure to throw up a viable united front.

Kurdish Society

Kurds were, traditionally, nomadic or semi-nomadic tribes controlled by tribal chiefs who sometimes confederated into larger wholes through careful alliances. The *Aghas* and the *Shaikhs* determined the course of Kurdish politics till the late nineteenth century when the confederation collapsed and western liberal values had their incursion into the Kurdish society. Earlier, while the lands belonged to few tribal chiefs, majority of Kurds languished in poverty. With the advent of industry and mechanisation of labour, Kurds migrated to the cities in search of work and this affected the system of tribal loyalty among the Kurds. The western values infused libertarian sentiments among the Kurds and the idea of a 'Kurdish nation' began to take roots. This liberating impulse gave rise to many leftist movements at the grassroots level too. Sympathies for left (Marxist-Leninist and sometimes Maoist) went hand in hand with the urge for the assertion of the national self. At the operational level, the need for unity to fight an external enemy at the political level was always affected by internal contradictions at the social level. The tribal lords (the *Aghas* and the *Shaikhs*) were at the forefront of the nationalist (often under the leftist banner) struggle, but when it came to equal distribution of resources (land, profit, whatever) they would relent. This gave rise to numerous divisions within the Kurdish struggle for a homeland, with the affluent and well off among the Kurds becoming either reactionary or collaborators and the poor and the lowly waging a disintegration struggle without any success.

Another basic problem among the Kurds has been their involuntary division through their distribution among as many as five sovereign states. As such, they have had to target different enemies in different states, which has seriously jeopardised the prospect of any common united

activity among all the Kurds in the region. Moreover, the governments of different states have taken advantage of this distribution and have treated the Kurds as pawns in their interests. Thus we see Iran playing Kurdish card against Iraq, Iraq playing Kurdish cards against Iran and Turkey. Turkey playing Kurdish card against Iran and Iraq, so on and so forth. This has inevitably, pitted Kurds against themselves. The Iraqi Kurds often find an obliging friend in the Iranian or Turkish government and set up a common front against the Iranian or Turkish Kurds. At the same time, the Iranian Kurds find the Iraqi connection too assuring and thus keep off the Iraqi-Kurdish operation against the Iraqi government. Kurds have always made themselves available for 'hire' and have become so used to acting as pawns that, their demands for homelands, autonomy or independence, have been narrowed and regionalised. The prospect of a broader Kurdish national movement, which was duly acknowledged in the Treaty of Sevres, has become almost non-existent. Now we will deal with Kurdish problem in different states in the region.

The following table gives a concrete idea about the concentration of Kurds in different states in the Middle East.

Table – I *

<i>Country</i>	<i>% of Population</i>	<i>No. of Kurds</i>
Turkey	19	8,455,000
Iran	10	3,701,000
Iraq	23	3,105,000
Syria	8	734,000
Azerbaijan (Erstwhile USSR)		265,000
Lebanon		60,000
Total		16,320,000

**(This estimate is of 1980)*

Originally the Kurds were the inhabitants of the mountainous terrain of the Zagros range, which passed off as the natural frontier between the Arab and the Persian world, and they had a dominant Persian strain in their ethno-cultural make up. But the battle of Chaldiran in 1515 divided the region and the Kurds between the Ottomans and the Persians, when the Ottomans ceded a part of the Kurdish region to their state. The Ottoman-Iranian treaty of 1639 further legitimised such division. During World War – I, the British forces dismembered the Ottoman empire and the Kurdish *velayet* (province) of Mosul was allowed to run under British supervision, along with the velayets of Baghdad and Basra, which together, came to be known as Iraq. The treaty of Sevres in 1920, recognised the Kurdish rights to nationhood. But soon, the Republican Turkey under Kemal Ataturk derecognised the treaty and later the treaty of Lussanne proved inconclusive on the status

of Mosul, which was referred to the League of Nations for final decision. The League Inquiry Commission upon investigation found out that Kurds in Mosul were reluctant to come under Turkish administration in view of the anti-Kurdish measures unleashed in Turkey at that time, and mandated the state to British-administered Iraq. Thus Kurds came to be divided further among three sovereign states, and the British promise of an independent Kurdish state was all but forgotten, once the British pulled out of Iraq in 1932. (This is not to deny the presence of Kurdish Diaspora in Syria and former Soviet Union). The spark of independence that was kindled in the Kurds, however, could not reconcile them to administrations in the three states, where they were too numerous to assert themselves. We will now discuss the history of Kurdish resistance in the three different states of Turkey, Iran and Iraq.

Kurdish Resistance in Turkey

Assertion of Kurdish nationalism began in Turkey in late nineteenth century. As far back as 1878, Shaikh Obeydullah of Hakkari province urged British mediation in a letter to a British diplomat to secure an independent state for the Kurds, 'who are a nation apart'. Obeydullah revolted against the Ottoman empire in 1880. The revolt was put down by joint Ottoman-Iranian forces and Obeydullah was exiled to Mecca. Apart from Hakkari, the Ottoman province of Diyarbakir and Mosul became the centres of Kurdish cultural assertion. The next resistance came from Shaikh Sayid of Piran who drew support from zaza-speaking Kurds and gave a call for a Holy War against the Republican Turkey for the restoration of Caliphate in February 1925. In April, Shaikh Sayid was proved guilty of treason and was hanged. Then came the resistance led by Ihsan Nuri Pasha in areas near Mount Ararat in 1929. Pasha struck an effective relationship with Iran, which in turn used him to extract some territorial advantage from Turkey. The Turkish-Iran agreement of January 1932, snapped the bond between Pasha and Iran and Pasha was hounded out of Iran. The intellectuals associated with the movement were rounded up, sewn into sacks and thrown into Lake Van. Then began the open policies of repression through mass deportation of Kurds, exiling of Kurdish Aghas and Shaikhs and forceful conscription of Kurds into Turkish Army. These repressive measures provoked Kurdish resistance around Dershim in 1937-38, led by Shaikh Sayyed Reza, which had a large Kurdish following. In November 1937, Turkish Army captured Reza and his sons, executed them and unleashed a reign of terror in Dershim when his followers refused to cave in. In October 1938, Turkish Army attacked Dershim with heavy artillery bombings and poison gas and massacred the Kurdish population in the villages. To erase the memory of the bloody incident the name of Dershim was changed to 'Tunceli'. The scare of Dershim led to a period of relative quietude.

The rise of the left, which recognised Kurdish ethnic exclusivity in Turkish politics, gave a fresh lease of life to Kurdish resistance. By 1960s, Kurds were divided in many ways. There were many who sympathised with the Leftist movement in Turkey; some others who associated with KDP of Mullah Mostafa Barzani while a conservative section, a comprador bourgeoisie in Marxist lexicon, comprising of feudal lords, the Shaikhs and the Aghas, who toed the official Turkish line. The majority of the Kurds, however, had sympathies towards the left. By late 1970s the two principal leftist organisations, who divided Kurdish loyalties, were the 'Socialist Party of Turkish Kurdistan' (SPTK) and the 'Workers Party of Kurdistan' (PKK). Of the two, PKK was the most influential. It grew out of a students' organisation formed in Ankara in 1974 named, Ankara Democratic and Patriotic Association for Higher Education, led by Abdullah (Apo) Ocalan. The

organisation expanded its membership and its Diyarbakir Meet in 1977 issued a document entitled *Kurdish Devriminin Yolu* (The Path of Kurdish Revolution), which became the framework within which Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) would operate. In 1984, PKK announced the formation of Kurdish Liberation Brigade (HRK) and launched its guerrilla attacks against the Turkish Government and the Kurdish collaborators. In 1985, PKK was instrumental in organising a broad coalition of Kurdish forces, which was named Kurdish National Liberation Front (ERNK). This gave further impetus to Kurdish guerilla activity conducted by the PKK. The last twelve years of its anti-Government operations has almost claimed 22,000 lives in Turkey. Turkish government has found Kurdish problem intrac-table and has accused the governments of Syria, Greece, Bulgaria and Soviet Union of having encouraging PKK activities. After the recent Gulf wars of 1991 PKK activity was reportedly on the rise and Turkey's hot pursuits into Iraq (approved by Turkey-Iraq agreements to this effect) have not proved too effective. As such, Turkey has demanded a security belt along the Iraqi-Turkey border to curtail PKK activity, after the recent US strike on Iran on 3-4 September 1996. This was, however, opposed by Iraq and others, and in very likelihood, PKK will go ahead with its *sherhilden* (uprising).

From 1990, the official Turkish policy has become more realistic. Turgut Ozal's recognition of diversity in Turkish society was the first step towards recognition of Kurdish identity. In 1991, Ozal repealed the law no. 2932 enacted in 1985, which banned the use of Kurdish language obliquely by recognising 'languages that are not primary, with which Turkey has diplomatic relations.' Ozal defended his step saying that Turkey has to recognise Kurds for 'one out of six Turks, is a Kurd'. One can easily establish the connection between the relaxation of official policy and the stepping up of PKK activity. Even the Socialist Democratic Party, a heir of Kemalist policy, has come to recognise Kurdish identity within Turkey. The hardening of sentiments in Turkish administration in recent years could be due to shifting emphasis of Turkish politics on Islamic fundamentalism, which has compelled some parties to run a stronger united nationalistic counter to the Islamic assertion. But in the long run, Kurds may well be accommodated only as another ethnic group within the broader Turkish nationality without any specific autonomy rights.

Kurds in Iran

Kurds in Iran did not remain unaffected by the sweeping currents of Kurdish nationalism in the late 19th and early 20th century. After World War I, Ismail Agha Simko, a Kurd of *shakak* tribe, called for the establishment of an independent Kurdistan. Simko was in total command of the region around west of lake Uromiyah and exercised authority from 1920 to 1924, till his movement was suppressed by Reza Khan (later Reza Shah of Paharvi dynasty) who rose to power through a coup in 1921.

Then came the famous *Mahabad Movement*, in the wake of World War II, when Reza Shah abdicated the throne and his son, Mohammad Reza was infirm in power. The Kurds exploited the ensuing power vacuum and under direct soviet patronage the *Komala-e-Zihan-e-Kurdistan* (Committee for Resurrection of Kurdistan) which was formed on 16 September 1941, organised the Mount Dalanpur meet that involved Kurds from Iraq and the *Pemam-e-se-Senur* (Pact of three borders) was signed to initiate the movement for independent Kurdistan, Qazi Mohammad, an influential Kurd, was invited to lead Komala, who soon formed his own Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) in September 1945 and under express Soviet blessings, on 22nd January 1946 KDPI

formally proclaimed the formation of 'Kurdish Republic of Mahabad'. Mullah Mostafa Barzani of Iraqi KDP, participated in the proclamation ceremony. But the July 1946 understanding between Soviet Union and Iran dispossessed the infant republic, of its much needed security cover and by December 1946, Shah's Army took possession of Mahabad and captured Qazi Mohammad and his friends who were later found guilty of treason and were hanged in public in the main city square, on 31st March 1947.

The anti-Shah Kurdish sympathies dragged Kurds into the Nationalist camp of Dr. Mossadiq in the 1950s. Shah, on his part, tried to co-opt Kurdish nobility, the Aghas and the Shaikhs, to divide the Kurds and succeeded in winning over many feudal chiefs from the *jaf* and *ardalan* tribes. Further, in the 1960s, much to the chagrin of the Iranian Kurds, Shah sought to destroy the Pan-Kurdish sympathies in Iraq by coopting Mullah Mostafa Barzani, by assuring him all military and material support against the Iraqi Baath government, which Shah feared, would eclipse his importance in the region. Shah proved immensely successful in setting up such opportunistic bonds and playing double-edged diplomacy with absolute finesse. By 1966, Mullah Mostafa was so much taken in by the Shah's pretentious courtship that he termed any fighter against the Shah as 'an enemy of Kurdistan', and KDP *peshmergas* (fighters) executed many KDPI rebels who sought to fight the Shah Administration in Iran.

The Kurds of Iran, thus, found an immediate ally in the movement for the Islamic Republic in Iran. This phase marked the rise of the charismatic Kurdish leader of KDPI, Abdul Rahman Qassimulu. However, Kurdish alliance with the Islamic movement was short-lived and the new spiritual leader, Ayutollah Khomeini disapproved of any Kurdish autonomy by saying: "To divide Islamic brethren as Lors, Kurds, Turks, is to destroy Islam". There was a visible division between the Kurds on the basis of sect as well, with *Shi'a* Kurds identifying themselves with the revolutionary Shia movement in Iran and *Sunni* Kurds opposing it. Iranian administration came down heavily on Kurdish movements in Iranian Kurdistan in 1979 and the infamous Khalkhali was sent in to suppress Kurdish movements. Khalkhali ordered so many hangings in Kurdistan that he earned for himself the sobriquet of 'the hanging Judge'.

But still, the Kurdish problem raged on and the government sought the good offices of Ayattollah Taleghani the non-controversial, highly respected human rights activist, to mediate with the Kurds. On 24 March 1979, an official proclamation granted limited autonomy to the Kurds. But very soon, Kurds doubted the sincerity of the government and the agreement fizzled out. From 1980 onwards, Qassimulu developed close cooperation with PUK, the break away faction from the KDP led by Jalal Talabani of Iraq but still sought negotiations with the government and later after the overthrow of Bani Sadar, forged an alliance with him which could not quite take off. KDPI's negotiation continued in late 1980s and on the third leg of such a series of negotiations that took place in 1989, Qassimulu was assassinated along with his deputy in Vienna. It is yet to be ascertained as to who orchestrated such assassination: the faction opposed to Qasimulu in KDPI, the Komala or the Iranian Government agents? With KDPI temporarily paralysed, Komala assumed centre-stage for some time. In the recent years KDPI forces are reportedly using bases in Iraq which prompted Iran to strike a bond with Iraqi PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) and in last September 1996, an Iranian Contingent aided by PUK guerillas reportedly chased away KDPI *peshmergas* and subsequently provided them with material and moral support to attack KDPI bases.

The net situation in Iran is that the organisations like KDPI and Komala are still demanding more autonomy than Iranian Government is ready to concede. Whatever cosmetic autonomy granted to Kurdistan is nominal and has only hardened the feeling of discontent among the Kurds.

Kurdish Resistance in Iraq

The typical British style of not meddling with existing authority structure and rather extracting maximum advantages out of it without getting entangled in the tit bit of day to day administration, prompted them to groom the prominent Kurdish leader, Shaikh Mahmoud of *bazinzi* tribe as the ruler of Suleymanieh after the British General Marshall occupied Mosul in October 1918. Later his authority was extended to Irbil, Barzan, Kirkuk and Halabja. But when the British patronised several other tribal leaders and raised them as inferior centres of power, as countervailing measure, Mahmoud revolted and was deposed by British forces. After the Anglo-Iraqi treaty recognised the rights of Kurds to establish autonomous government within Iraq, Mahmoud organised his government in Suleymanieh and when he refused to accept Iraqi suzerainty, he was thrown out in 1924. After the League mandated Mosul to the British-Iraqi administration in 1925, on the condition that Kurdish rights should be guaranteed, Iraq government promptly recognised the Kurdish language, as the medium of instruction and agreed to employ Kurdish civil servants in Mosul. The concessions did not satisfy the Kurds and Mahmoud led another revolt, which was crushed and he fled to Iran only to return in 1931. When the British declaration to grant independence to Iraq in 1932 did not contain any express provision for Kurdish autonomy he rose in revolt and was again forced to flee to Iran or Turkey.

From 1937 onwards, around the time when Turkey, Iran, Iraq signed the Treaty of Sa'adbad to coordinate their defence policies to curb internal (Kurdish, for all practical purpose) disturbances, Shaikh Ahmed Barzani of Barzan* emerged as an independent nucleus of Kurdish resistance. His resistance began with his opposition to the British efforts to settle some Assyrian Christians near Barzani lands. After a prolonged encounter he was driven out into Turkey. Later he returned, was apprehended and sent into exile with his family to Nasiriyeh and then to Sulaymanieh. His younger brother Mullah Mostafa Barzani escaped from Suleymnanieh and led the Kurdish resistance for nearly five decades, which in a way he seemed to personify.

Mullah Mostafa's strategy of hit-and-run guerilla warfare proved quite effective and when the Iraqi forces failed to counter and contain such attacks, the British pressurised Iraq to negotiate with Kurds. But the talks failed on the issue of degree of Kurdish autonomy and Mostafa was pushed into Iran by joint operation of Iraqi artillery and British air force. Mostafa participated in the creation of Mahabad and fled to Soviet Union when it fell to Iranian forces. In August 1946, Kurdish Democratic party (KDP) was formed in Iraq, which grew out of an intellectual organisation Rizgari Kurd (Kurdish liberation). It had Mostafa as president and Hamza Abdullah as the secretary. Mostafa gave a call for a bi-national Kurdish-Arab federal state in Iraq to save Iraq from the imperialist rule of Hashemite Monarchy in collusion with the British. The Free Officers led by Abdul Karem Qassim ousted the Hashemite Monarch, King Faisal in 1958. Mostafa returned from Soviet Union to resume his struggle for Kurdish autonomy. Qassim, whose mother was a Shia Kurd, was sympathetic towards the Kurdish cause and there developed a symbiotic relationship between him and Mullah Mostafa till 1961, when KDP's stir against

anti-Barzani collaborators affected some close associates of Qassim, who went on to bomb Barzan, and his encounter with KDP began, which continued till the cease-fire of 1961, but before any meaningful discussion could begin. Qassim fell a victim to a Ba'athist coup. He was executed later and then began the Ba'athist assault on Ghassem's close associates, the Communists. In a matter of days 5-7,000 communists were tracked down and killed.

The coup led to the appointment of Col. Abdul Salam Aref, a non-Ba'athist as president who sought close cooperation from the Kurds, and started negotiations on the issue of autonomy. In February 1963, the Jalal Talabani-led KDP delegation could not arrive at any concrete agreement and the negotiation fizzled out. The subsequent offer of Autonomy by Aref Government in March 1963 and talks to that effect in April 1965, which led to division in the ranks of KDP leadership, were not acceptable to the Kurds. Aref's brother Abdul Rehman, who came to power in April 1965, was more amiable to Kurdish exhortations. The new Prime Minister Abdul Rehman al Bazzaz's 12-point plan was almost acceptable to Mullah Mostafa, but Bazzaz's removal in 1966 was a big blow to the process of negotiation. Aref's sincerity to implement Bazzaz plan could never override the stiff opposition from the Army.

This was the time when the Mossad-Savak combine under direction to that effect from Shah of Iran, had started their 'operation destabilisation' in Iraq by promoting Mullah Mostafa's Kurdish uprising. Shah of Iran, as has been pointed out earlier, won over Mullah Mostafa's KDP and his opportunist alliance boosted the morale of Kurdish *peshmergas* in Iraq and stiffened Kurdish position on the question of autonomy. Later the support of USA to this Iran-sponsored Kurdish uprising made KDP even more intransigent.

The Ba'athist coup of 1968, overthrew Abdul Rehman Aref and systematically purged the top echelons of power of non-Ba'athists. The 15 members Revolutionary Command Council, which had 4 Kurds in Cabinet position, declared General Amnesty on Kurds and expressed readiness for talks on the basis of Bazzaz plan. The new president, Gen. Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, however, sought to divide the Kurds by promoting the Jalal Talabani faction. In early 1969, Iraqi army took possession of vast tracts of Kurdish land, drove away Mostafa's KDP in a massive operation, and allowed Talabani to hold swat over these lands. By August 1969, Mostafa's KDP forces strengthened by Israel-Iran-US help put up a massive offensive against Iraq, which convinced Bakr about the impossibility of finding a military solution to the Kurdish problem, and accordingly negotiations were sought in December 1969. The negotiations continued till March 1970. On 11 March, 1970 the Manifesto of the agreement was published, which even went ahead of Bazzaz plan and spelt out pattern of autonomy, the structure of autonomous bodies, and the relationship between the Central Government and autonomous administration in Kurdistan. Bakr government even agreed to draw the contours of the proposed autonomous area, according to a Census, to be conducted later. Mostafa, assured of US-Israel-Iran support pitched his demands higher and demanded Kirkuk to be included in the autonomous area irrespective of Census results. Thus the Manifesto of March 1970 could not be implemented within the stipulated time frame of four years. On 11 March 1974, just on the day the Manifesto became inoperative, the Iraqi government announced a fresh plan, the Autonomy Laws, and gave Kurds 15 days to accept it.

During this time, Iraq was desperately seeking an opening with Iran to stop the Iranian aid to Mullah Mostafa, who on his part would never expect a sudden Iranian somersault. But

Syrian-Algerian mediation enabled Iran and Iraq to come together and Algiers Agreement was signed between Shah of Iran and Saddam Hussein, the then Vice President of Iraq, on 6 March 1975. The agreement recognised *Thalweg line*, the mid-channel of Shatt-al-Arab, as the border between Iran and Iraq, thus ending Iraqi absolute control over the water-way and in return Iran promised to stop all aid to Kurds. The terms were made public on 15 March 1975 and on 23 March, Mullah met the Shah and asked his *peshmergas* to lay down arms. Mullah Mostafa was granted asylum in Iran but was only permitted to stay in camps away from the Iranian Kurdistan. Later he went to US for treatment of cancer and died there in 1979 and was subsequently buried in the Iranian city of Oshnoviyeh.

Immediately after the agreement, Iraq announced amnesty on Kurds till 1 April 1975. Then Iraqi forces went on a destruction spree and targeted Kurdish villages along the border and almost 40,000 to 300,000 Kurds were resettled elsewhere, in Arab villages west of Euphrates and for Army deserters in camps in the Southern western desert. In June 1976, Jalal Talabani announced the formation of Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), from his refuge in Damascus. The KDP reorganised under the leadership of Idris and Masoud Barzani, the two sons of Mullah Mostafa and established close cooperation with Komala and KDPI, to start with.

The success of Islamic Revolution, the assertion of Shias in Iraq in response to Kohmeini's call of 'export of Islamic Revolution' made Iraq scary and led it to war against Iran. The eight years' war (1980-1988) gave yet another fillip to Kurdish movement. Kurds again chose to fall prey to Iraqi and Iranian interests. Iraq found an instant ally in Qassimulu of KDPI and so did Iran in Masoud Barzani of KDP. PUK, originally a supporter of KDPI, joined Iranian ranks and fought against Iraqi forces for some time and when it found itself marginalised in the alliance switched its loyalty to Saddam's forces (1983) only to seek Iranian assistance later (1986) again. Turkey- Iraqi coordination of border control put the Kurds in a quandary around the same time.

By 1988, Iran and Iraq, tired of fighting each other too long, agreed to UNSCR-548 of 18 July 1988, which called for immediate cease-fire. Once the war came to a halt, on 20 August 1988, Saddam ordered 'a clean up operation' of the Kurdish villages. On 25 August 1988, alleged Iraqi air attacks against Kurdish villages using conventional and chemical weapons began. Between 25 August and 1 September 1988, almost 50,000 Kurds fled to Turkey. Another report of Iraqi air force having attacked Kurdish villages around the town of Halabaja in March-April 1988, appeared in the press too, in which almost 5,000 Kurds were killed, while many others left for Iran. Massachusetts based Voluntary Agency '*Physicians for Human Rights*, ascertained through its investigation from the Kurdish refugees that such Iraqi attack with chemical weapons had indeed taken place. However, the UN team of investigators did not find any evidence and the relaxed US stance towards Iraq during Reagan's tenure, saw Iraq safely through all accusations of use of outlawed weapon against the Kurds.

Iraq, on its part, sought to wipe out all memory of Halabaja by promising to construct a new town of Halabaja within Suleymanieh governorate. Subsequently, Iraq announced general amnesty for Kurds on 2 March 1989, which remained valid till 1 April 1989. Simultaneously, Iraq went ahead with its policy of depopulating Kurdish villages along Iraq-Turkey border, to establish a 30km buffer zone. The 1989 election was boycotted by KDP and PUK resulting in Ba'ath Party win. But the KDP, PUK kept up the flames of resistance inspite of heavy crackdowns.

Then came the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the US led UN sponsored 'operation desert storm', which weakened the Iraqi defence. The Shias in the South and the Kurds in the north put up some resistance, which provoked Saddam to launch a massive attack against the Kurds, which led to yet another wave of migration of Kurds into Turkey and Iran. The Allied forces came to the rescue of the Kurds imposing no fly zone beyond north of 36th parallel and created a 'safe haven zone' for the Kurds'.

Later in 1992, under active US mediation, elections were held in Iraqi Kurdistan and the two major contenders for power, the PUK and the KDP, participated in the elections. But none of them could secure a majority and after initial hesitations, both of them agreed to form a coalition government upon persuasions from the US side. But soon the differences between them made the coalition ineffective leading to political crisis in the form of deadlocks at policy-making level. As it was well-known, the two organisations had distinct bases of operation. The KDP was firmly in control of Irbil and the route (the Ibrahim Khalil check point), which channeled Iraqi oil to Turkey and thus by taxing the lorries, which ferried the oil to Turkey, the KDP could secure huge financial gains. The PUK on the other hand, was in control of Suleymanieh and the area around it, which could not yield that much dividends. As such, there ensued a tussle between the two parties regarding the share of the revenue that accrued from the taxing of the lorries by the KDP, which was reluctant to concede such financial privilege to PUK, a certain rival, in terms of its influence in Kurdish areas in Iraq. Thus the coalition broke down over the issue in 1994, and the leaders of the two organisations, Masoud Barazani of KDP, and Jalal Talabani of PUK, seemed busy bolstering their separate fiefdoms within the province of Iraqi Kurdistan. In the meanwhile, PUK struck a deal with Iranian authorities by facilitating their anti-KDPI operations in areas around Suleymanieh, near the borders.

Towards the last week of August 1996, the PUK forces armed up with Iranian amunitions, overran KDP bases around Irbil and almost seized the town of Irbil from which the KDP's revenue flowed. The KDP had anticipated this after the Iranian forces withdrew, finishing their hot pursuits, and reportedly, informed the US authorities about the possibilities of a PUK attack. But the US perhaps, thought it wise not to interfere and thus get dragged into the Kurdish infighting. Or may be, the KDP's premonition was interpreted as a little too convoluted. However, the US inaction prompted Masoud Barzani to invite Saddam into the fray which he only felt too obliged to respond to; for on the one hand it was an unexpected show of hospitality from a sworn foe whom he was seeking to placate after the Gulf war reverses; while on the other hand it provided Saddam with a Godsent opportunity to enter into Kurdistan and punish many of his arch enemies hiding there, through an invitation from a Kurdish action which, he might well have thought, could act as legitimate waiver on the restriction imposed by US and its Allies not to move his troops beyond the 32nd parallel. Thus Saddam's immediate response to Masoud's invitation on 1st September 1996, helped the KDP reconsolidate its position in the northern areas around Irbil, and even KDP forces marched eastward to capture Suleymanieh, the PUK stronghold. However, very soon, Saddam's venture to move beyond 32nd parallel, provoked US attack on Iraq on 3rd September and compelled him to pull back his troops from Kurdistan leaving the two Kurdish organisation to fend for themselves. Then the see-saw battle went on for the whole of September and most part of October. According to press reports, towards the end of September, PUK forces were inching towards Irbil

and had almost captured it, while towards the end of October, the KDP forces were reportedly on the offensive, and compelled PUK forces to retreat from Suleymanieh.

As the recent press reports, Masoud Barzani sought US mediation to the internecine feud between the two warring factions around the last week of October, when Talabani's forces were on the rise. The US mediation was going on during this period under the US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Mr. Robert H. Pelletreau, which started with the assumption that there was no 'significant military involvement on the part of either Iraq or Iran in the present fighting between the Kurdish factions in Northern Iraq.' This was a good tactical ploy to begin with, for by discounting the external influence, the US was, in fact, simplifying the equations and making the negotiations more manageable, and at the same time emphasised the singular role of US in the mediatory efforts. Of course, the US efforts were facilitated by complimentary diplomatic inputs from the British and Turkish sides, but the impact of US diplomatic manoeuvre was unmistakable. After separate meetings with Mr. Pelletreau in Ankara, the two leaders, Masoud and Talabani, agreed to a cease fire on 23rd October. Later the two leaders met in Ankara, Turkey, under American, British and Turkish auspices for two days i.e., 30-31 October, and issued a declaration promising 'to maintain and strengthen the cease fire with a view to making it permanent,' and agreed not to 'seek intervention of any other forces, which could aggravate the conflict and raise tensions,' and to set up monitors to draw a cease fire line and report violations to American, British and Turkish officials in Ankara. The reaction of the US State department spokesman is worth quoting here: 'For the Kurds to keep talking and maintain the cease fire, is for us, useful and successful.... I don't want to oversell this. They are still adversaries, still dangerous, and need to be watched'.

While the US is still not ready to congratulate itself for having brokered an important peace negotiation between the two Kurdish factions, the recent cease fire lends a new dimension to the Kurdish issue in Iraq, for, unwittingly, it legitimises a territorial division between the two factions. All this must have given tremendous satisfaction to Saddam, for once the security cover of the Allied forces is withdrawn, any such incompatible difference urging the drawing of cease fire line demarcating distinct areas of operation, would make the Kurdish problem immensely manageable. It's like 'we divide, you rule'.

Such a detailed study shows that Kurds have no body to blame but themselves for the state they are in today. Any external sympathy for a Kurdish nation-state is certain to flounder on the numerous exclusive sub-divisions within the main Kurdish line. The kind of disunity the Kurds have shown in the whole region as well as in the individual states within it, in the bygone years, automatically dispossess them of their much proclaimed rights to statehood.

Suggested Readings

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3. Chaliand, Gerald (1980); *People without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan* (London: Zed Press)
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6. Entessar, Nader (1992); *Kurdish Ethno-Nationalism* (Boulder: Lynne Reinner Publishers)
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