

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH ASIA: THE PARALLEL JOURNEY OF TWO DIVERGENT POLITICAL FORCES IN THE SUBCONTINENT (1900-1937)

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Abstract

Political development in the Indian subcontinent during the period of British rule has been one of the most important features of modern South Asian history. The two divergent political forces in the form of the All-India Muslim League and Indian National Congress was the hallmark of the political history of the subcontinent. Often found divergent in their respective reforms agenda both political forces had one thing common: that both of them agreed upon the transfer of power to the native people. The roots of political turmoil experienced in the 19th century by Muslim India, especially in Bengal, can be understood through the activities of Muslim religious reform movements through which the feelings and the sentiments of the community were initially expressed. During the latter half of the century there emerged a series of religious reform movements. An academic investigation of the Indian political history between 1900 and 1937, as represented mainly through the Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League can elucidate the manner in which the non-Muslim and Muslim Indian political leadership attempted to look after the rights and demands of the Indian society at large.

Keywords: South Asia, India, politics, Muslim League, Congress

Introduction

Muslim separatism in India was laid much before the emergence of the All-India Muslim League which was an

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exclusively Muslim political party. Though elitist in approach, the main purpose of the emerging Muslim politics was to project, protect and further the interests of the Muslim community. A careful perusal of the march of events suggests that Muslim-Hindu political separatism was not so much introduced by the 'divide and rule' policy of the British but was a logical result of the introduction of British administrative and political system. Economically backward and politically disorganized Muslims found it almost impossible to compete with educated Hindus. Their experiences had proved to them that in government offices Hindus wanted took every post for themselves (Hayat, 2021: 165).

Material frustration in the form of these economic deprivation eventually made Muslims focus their political demands in asking for a fair share of government jobs. Therefore, it was Muslim economic problems alone that impelled a large portion of Muslim politics for a while. But the introduction of the local bodies, municipalities and legislative councils, which were elected on a very limited franchise, also made Muslims aware of their inferior political status (Ahmad, 1981: 71). This time the shock came from the preponderance of the Hindus on elected bodies. The low level of Muslim representation in central and provincial elected councils in the early 20th century can be gauged from Muslims' adverse electoral fortunes in various parts of India. The results obtained in the municipal and provincial elections between 1880 and 1900 in the three provinces of the Punjab, the United Provinces and Bengal - where Muslims formed significantly larger portions of the local population - suggests how alarming the situation was. In the Punjab, for instance, of a total of 96 elections, between 1883 and 1884, Muslims won a majority on only 12 committees, whereas Hindus controlled 72. In the United Provinces Muslim representation on municipal boards between 1884/5 and 1907/8 declined from

34.1% to 30.1%. The total percentage of Muslim representatives in Bengal declined drastically from 50% to less than 13% (Blunt, 1909: 116).

The protection of Muslim culture in India was a responsibility assumed with equal solemnity by both Muslim modernists and traditionalists. It was necessary in the years following the debacle of 1857 to save Muslims from a destructive bitterness and the repressive force of British arms. It was only the differences over the method in protecting the identity of Indian Muslims that came to divide the modernists and the traditionalists. Though both modernists and traditionalists viewed the events of 1857 as a watershed in the life of Indian Muslims, the conclusion modernists drew from the experience was that the Muslims had to escape from the desire to regain their position of eminence. This meant acquiring some degree of critical awareness of the past and of the present inadequacies and to be willing to learn from the Europeans in order to improve the condition of Muslim life in India (Barrier, 1998: 37-53).

The central figure of the modernist perspective was Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-98). Sir Sayyid's contribution to the recovery of self-esteem by Indian Muslims during the latter half of the 19th century, and in the grim shadow of 1857, was immense. Having recognized the futility of opposition to the British as an imperial power in India, Sayyid Ahmad induced Muslims to western knowledge and cast aside their conservative outlook. Sayyid Ahmad was convinced that “the more worldly progress we make, the more glory Islam gains” (Tinker, 1954: 48). It was with this political conviction that he took an extraordinarily courageous initiative by establishing the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh in 1878 to educate future generations of the Muslim elite to be defenders of the interests of the Muslim community. It “played an

important role in the development of the Muslim community as it gave Muslims "a new sense of mission" (Qureshi, 1972: 242).

While his concern to protect and cultivate the separate identity of Indian Muslims led to his espousal of an accommodation with the British, it also denied Congress the opportunity to enroll a large number of Muslims. Yet by refusing to join the Congress after it was founded in 1885, and by giving similar advice to Muslims in general, Sayyid Ahmad was instrumental in raising Muslim consciousness through encouraging the establishment of Muslim cultural and educational organizations. It was through such measures that he laid the foundation of Muslim politics. The destiny of Indian Muslims, in his view, was that Muslims should not allow the majority Hindu community, in its march to self-rule under British tutelage, to absorb them politically under its leadership and thereby emasculate their separate identity. From this it followed that while British ruled India Muslims as the principal minority community, had to seek and cultivate British protection of their interests against the demands of the Hindu majority. This conviction was deeply planted in the minds of the graduates of Aligarh (Aziz, 1972: 34).

The 20th century arrived in the wake of a significant increase in agitation for legislative reforms. When the Congress leadership's pressure began to be heeded by the new Liberal government in England, the demand for separate Muslim electorates, 'weightage' and Muslim-Hindu parity also emerged on the political issues. This is, though a natural outflow of Sir Sayyid's life-long activity, in fact "the responses of a minority uncertain of its political future" (Shaikh, 1991: 8).

All India Muslim League Versus Indian National Congress

Congress activity increased and took different forms in 1905, as a result of the partition of Bengal and other socio-economic factors. Indian nationalist opinion expressed through the platform of the Congress ranged from the extremism of Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) in Bombay, to the moderate reformism of G.K. Gokhale (1866-1915) and Pherozshah Mehta (1845-1915), also of Bombay and Surandranath Banerjea (1848-1925) of Calcutta. The Muslim community counseled by its leaders mostly remained outside and aloof from the agitation led by Congress leadership. Muslims were, however, moved to action with the Hindu opposition to the partition of Bengal, and the possibility of a long-awaited reform bill with the arrival in England of a new Liberal government. Muslims responded to the pressures of the changing political climate by taking a constitutional step. They organized a delegation, popularly known as Simla delegation. Led by Agha Khan III (1877-1957), the delegation presented the new Viceroy, Lord Minto (1871-1814, Viceroy 1905-10), a memorial regarding the concerns of the Muslim community. By the time Minto received the delegation of Muslim notables in Simla on October 1, 1906, the partition of Bengal into two separate provinces by the previous Viceroy, Lord Curzon (1859-1925, Viceroy 1899-1905), had sparked furious opposition and episodes of terrorism by Bengali Hindus (Majumdar, 1963: 28).

To see the demands of the deputation in clearer light it is necessary to look at its background. In the election of 1892, out of the candidates recommended by the various electoral bodies for the Central Council the Muslims obtained only about half the number to which their numerical strength entitled them. For the Council of the United Provinces not a single Muslim had been recommended. When, therefore, it was known that the British

Government was contemplating reforms which would introduce a large element of representation, Muslims sent a deputation to the Viceroy, Lord Minto and argued their case for separate representation on all local and provincial elected bodies (Seal, 1971: 299).

The focus of the memorial being on the expected introduction of legislative reforms, the delegation reminded the Viceroy that "the proportion of Mosulmans to the whole population of British India would be found to be approximately one-fourth"; and therefore, "under any system of representation, extended or limited, a minority accounting to a quarter of their population may justly lay claim to adequate recognition as an important factor in the state." Based on this premise, the delegation laid forth the case that under the existing framework of administration, Muslims were not adequately represented at all levels of government open to native Indians. The memorial, therefore, requested the Viceroy to consider appointing to all nominated positions, "both in the Gazetted and the subordinated and Ministerial services of all Indian provinces, a due proportion of Mohammadans." Those positions in Municipal and District Boards, Senates and Syndicates of Indian Universities, and, finally, Legislative Chambers in the provinces and at the centre, which were to be filled through election by limited franchise, should be distributed according to proportionate representation of the Hindu and Muslim communities in the respective jurisdictions and the election of members to these offices be conducted through separate electorate (Bombay Gazette, October 2, 1906).

The somewhat reassuring address by the Viceroy at the conclusion of the meeting was reported by the Bombay Gazette as "a most sympathetic reply". Also, he was reported to be in complete agreement with the views of the deputation. He agreed

that “any electoral representation in India would be doomed to mischievous failure which aimed at granting a personal enfranchisement regardless of the beliefs and traditions of the communities composing the population of this continent” (Rahman, 1970: 320).

Assessing the importance of the Simla deputation, Peter Hardy wrote that Minto, in receiving the Simla memorial, “acknowledged and decisively encouraged the nisus towards a separate Muslim political personality in India, which had been growing since Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan refused to have anything to do with the Indian National Congress” (Hardy, 1971: 156).

The controversy surrounding the Simla delegation and its memorial to the Viceroy was heated at the time, and has remained controversial among historians who have disputed whether it was a "command performance" at the behest of the British, or initiated by Muslims and welcomed by the British against the background of increasing nationalist opposition. Irrespective of which side opinion falls. The importance of the Simla deputation lies in its being the first explicit statement of Muslim political opinions. It reflected the extent to which the conviction of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan regarding the destiny of Indian Muslims under the British Raj had been internalized by modernist Muslims who saw themselves as the defenders of Muslim interests.

The Simla Deputation drew a sharp line by which the British were able to divide Muslims from Hindus in the subsequent politics-constitutional developments in the country. The Muslim League ultimately became the instrument to divide India into two sovereign states. Once Muslim politics had taken a definite shape and assumed a new stance, suggestions appeared immediately for creating an exclusively Muslim organization to represent Muslim interests. Nawab Salimullah of Dacca (1871-

1915), one of the founders of the All India Muslim League and the host of the December 1906 meeting when it was established, stated in a public memorandum that the aim of the party was:

- a. to controvert the growing influence of the so-called Indian National Congress, which has a tendency to misinterpret and subvert the British rule in India, or which may lead to that deplorable situation,
- b. to enable our young men of education, who for want of such an association, have joined the Congress camps, to find scope, to exercise their fitness and ability for public life (Zaidi, 1975: 750).

Muslim politics, in the post-Simla deputation period, moved so fast that before the end of 1906, the All-India Muslim League was formed in Dacca. On December 30th, after the conclusion of the Mohammadan Educational Conference, a special meeting was called to discuss the formation of a political association of Muslims. Nawab Viqar-ul-Mulk (1841-1917), President of the meeting, in his speech said that, "Time and circumstances made it necessary for Muhammadan to unite in association so as to make their voice heard above the din of other vociferous parties in India and across the wide as in England. The duty of Muhammadans was to loyally serve Government, and so much was their cause bound up with that of the British Raj that they must be prepared to fight and die for Government if necessary" (Mujahid, 1981: 112).

The formation of the Muslim League and its representation of the interests of the Indian Muslims have been well recorded and examined. The literature on the Muslim League's growth into a Muslim national movement bringing about the establishment of a separate Muslim state in the subcontinent under the British Raj is also extensive (Sayeed, 1968: 145). The Muslim League argued that Muslims as a

minority in a non-Muslim majority India faced a bleak future, both financially and politically. Thus, the question was how Muslims could secure their interests and co-exist with a non-Muslim majority when political power was no longer theirs to wield. The fact that Muslims have always tried to maintain their separate identity was forcefully expounded by Sharif al Mujahid, when he wrote, “in terms of their tone and content, many and diverse were the movements launched by the Muslims in the wake of their political decline and ultimate downfall. Despite their divergence, however, each one of the movements had made important contributions to the evolution of Muslim politics: to the development, formation as well as emergence of Muslim separatism...” (Zaidi, 1975: 55).

The objectives of Muslims, according to Salimullah Khan were, further elaborated in the founding resolution of the All India Muslim League. The founding Resolution listed the aims and objects of the Muslim League as follows:

- a. To promote, among the Mussalmans of India, feeling of loyalty to the British Government, and to remove any misconception that may arise as to the intention of [the] Government with regard to any of its measures.
- b. To protect and advance the political rights and interests of the Mussalmans of India, and to respectfully represent their needs and aspiration to the Government.
- c. To prevent the rise, among the Mussalmans of India, of any feeling of hostility towards other communities, without prejudice to the other aforementioned objects of the League (Mujeeb, 1967: 135).

The politics of accommodation was short-circuited, however, by the annulment of the 1905 partition of Bengal six years later in 1911. At the founding convention of the Muslim League one of the resolutions adopted was support for the British Government's decision to partition Bengal, and the condemnation of agitation, boycotts and violence by Bengali Hindus supported by the Congress in opposition to the partition. The annulment of partition and the reconstitution of a united Bengal sent a powerful message to the Muslim leaders. They felt betrayed by the British, as they watched an impressive power of public agitation influencing the imperial government. But, more importantly, the announcement of the decision to revoke the partition of Bengal effectively exposed the hollowness of the loyalist strategy of the Muslim League (Ahmad, 2008: 54).

It marked the beginning of the gradual transformation of the League to become, during the interwar years, a more active political party. The King's announcement also revealed in some sections of Muslim opinion a small degree of the near fatal weakness of keeping the Muslim community away from the nationalist movement led by the Congress and relying on the goodwill of the British alone. Henceforth the politics of the Muslim League until the formation of Congress ministries (1937) would be firmly based on the motto of defense if not defiance. The Muslim politics remained within the 'Simla framework': the defense of the principle of separate electorate and its extension to all levels of government for the representation of Muslims to the British Raj (Arthur, 2017: 105).

This principle of separate representation was conceded through the India Councils Act of 1909, more generally known as the Minto-Morley Reforms. The crucial aspect of the 1909 reforms was the increase in the number of elected and nominated Indians to the various legislative councils; it also extended the

limited powers of legislators to discuss the annual financial statement of the government to ask questions concerning matters of public interest. The Act of 1909, however, did not conciliate the nationalist opinion for greater reform leading to self-government; instead, the concession of the principle of separate representation to Muslims caused resentment among Hindus who demanded its revocation. In this context, the annulment of the partition of Bengal was viewed at some quarters of nationalist opinion, especially among Hindu extremists, as a vindication of the extra-constitutional means of pressuring the British, and the need to extend this strategy for the demand of self-government. The period following the declaration of the Minto-Morley Reforms was one of increased agitation for self-government or Swaraj (Ali, 2012: 132).

The enormous and important Indian contribution to the war effort between 1914 and 1918 during World War I heightened nationalist expectations of positive steps by the Raj towards Swaraj. In expectation of positive political gestures by the British, the moderate wings of both the Congress and the Muslim League made serious efforts to bridge their differences and present a united front. The Muslim League had recognized the necessity to find common grounds with the Congress and demonstrate to the British its sense of commitment to the idea of self-government. The practical shape of the Muslim League rapprochement was the Lucknow Pact of 1916. This constitutional arrangement jointly agreed by both parties was facilitated by the liberal opinion of nationalist leaders who felt committed to keep the 'spirit' of Gokhale alive. This was reflected in Article 49 the 'scheme of Reforms' passed by the Congress in its 31st session on December 29, 1916 and adopted by the Muslim League in its session two days later (Gokhale, 1961: 116).

The Lucknow Pact is of special significance for two reasons. First, it was a public acceptance on the part of the Congress of the 'Simla Framework', the principle of separate electorate for Muslims. Secondly, in signing the Lucknow Pact Congress conceded that it did not represent Indian Muslims, and that the Muslim League, irrespective of its numerical strength, spoke for Muslims. Analyzing the terms of the Pact it is said that it deprived the Muslims of their majority position in the provincial legislatures of the Punjab and Bengal. Whereas the fact is that the Muslim League gained a great deal. The Congress not only acknowledged Muslims as a separate nation but also recognized the Muslim League as their sole representative (Ahmad, 2017: 213).

The Lucknow Pact was the high point of political unity between the Hindus and Muslims. It was the declaration of a common purpose, and an agreed formula by which the two communities could progress toward the objective of self-government. The man credited with the constitutional deal was Mohammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948), and he was heralded as the 'ambassador' of Hindu-Muslim Unity. He was a great admirer of the "moderate" Gokhale (Gokhale, 1961: 121). Through the Pact Jinnah attempted to convince the recalcitrant members of both the parties that in the light of the wisdom of Gokhale the movement for Swaraj could only be advanced through constitutional means keeping the interests of all Indians in view. He was conscious of the difficulties involved in bringing the Congress and the Muslim League together. The greatest fear for Muslims as a minority was that if the Hindu majority desired it could easily push through legislation adverse to minority interests. To overcome this fear, he devised the constitutional arrangement which could prevent such an event from taking place. And this he achieved with the Congress' recognition of the principle of separate electorate as an integral part of all future constitutional settlements for a self-

governing India. Jinnah also succeeded in winning the conservative members of the Muslim League to the nationalist struggle to which he was himself deeply committed (Niaz, 2020: 311).

In the wake of this development, the British Government declared its stand on the issue of Swaraj. Thus the Lucknow Pact also anticipated the evolution of Indian self-government. On August 20, 1917, Edwin Montagu (1879-1924), Secretary of State for India between 1917 and 1922 announced to the House of Commons that His Majesty's Government believed in "the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire" (Moore, 1974: 40). This resulted in the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme for constitutional reform, which passed into law as the Government of India Act on December 23, 1919. The central feature of the new Act was the innovative feature of half-and-half rule, known as Dyarchy. It was the constitutional arrangement by which Britain declared its intention of preparing India for responsible self-government in successive stages.

The Act of 1919 was a disappointment when measured against the expectation of Swaraj (Aziz, 1972: 46). The Rowlatt anti-sedition bill, which extended martial law that had been put in place in 1915 suspending civil liberties and the due legal process, preceded the reform Act and made its reception hostile. Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948), who returned to India in 1915 after a long sojourn in South Africa, emerged in this climate of opposition to the reforms as the new voice of nationalist India. He organized a campaign of civil disobedience against the Rowlatt Act and declared his opposition to the incremental approach of the government as reflected in the Act of 1919 (Long, 2015: 233).

The rush of events in the interwar period overtook the constitutionalists and destroyed the concordat of Lucknow. A new type of politics came to be shaped in the months after the Great War by the Congress under Gandhi's leadership. The tragedy of Jallianwala Bagh at Amritsar in 1919, the Muslim attitude towards the Khilafat Movement (1919-24), the call for civil disobedience by Gandhi in 1920, individually and collectively mobilized the masses and left the constitutionalists isolated. In this politics of mass mobilization and extra-legal activities, the Muslim League found itself at a disadvantage because its politics was conducted within constitutional limits (Salim, 1993: 37).

This phase of Muslim history became a "period of frustration" for they "witnessed the political eclipse of the Muslim League and the emergence of new forces which seriously questioned its right to represent Indian Muslims". Jinnah, now president of the Muslim League exemplified the generation of 'modernist' Muslims who had emerged as leaders of the Muslim League. Though they were concerned about and spoke for the Muslim community and its interests, they spoke in secular terms. What always added to their political difficulties was the increasing infusion of religion into the politics of both Hindus and Muslims. That is why during the Khilafat movement, Jinnah denounced the ulamas' role as leaders of the community and asked "the intellectual and reasonable section" of the community to lead their co-religionists (NAP, 1939: File 219).

In response to a political climate becoming rapidly hostile to constitutional negotiations, the British dispatched the Indian Statutory Commission, the "Simon Commission", on 26 November 1927 to discuss and plan for the next stage of self-government. It toured India twice: the first time from 3 February to 31 March 1928, and then again from 11 October 1928 to 13

April 1929. Nationalist opinion in India unanimously rejected the Simon Commission and decided to boycott its proceedings. The Muslim League was divided in its response; one faction headed by Sir Muhammad Shafi (1869-1932), known as the Shafi League, decided to welcome the Commission, while another faction led by Jinnah joined the ranks of the opposition. The nineteenth annual session of the Muslim League was consequently bifurcated. The Jinnah League held its session in Calcutta on 30 December 1927-1 January 1928, with the Maharajah of Mahmudabad (1878-1931) in the chair. The Shafi League held its session in Lahore on 1 January 1928, with Shafi himself as President. Despite the boycott of a number of important political groups a very large number of Muslim political, social and religious groups and parties met the Commission and submitted memoranda (QAP, 1939: File 239).

The Congress leadership resented the Secretary of State for India, Lord Birkenhead (1872-1930) when he asserted that Indians were not put on the panel because no unanimous report could be expected from a body with Indian representation. In response to the Commission, it called an All-Parties Conference in February 1928, which in turn appointed its own Committee to draft a nationalist constitution by July 1, 1928. In December 1927, in its annual session held in Madras Congress asked all other parties to join hands with it in preparing a constitution. This call resulted in an All-Parties conference that met in Delhi in February-March 1928. The Jinnah League attended the meeting but the Shafi League did not. A committee was appointed with the Congress leader Pandit Motilal Nehru (1861-1931) as the chairman. Two Muslims, the relatively unknown Ali Imam and Shoib Qureshi, were appointed to it but both were unrepresentative of their community. Shortly afterwards the Sikh member of the Committee was also disowned by the Sikh League (Ziring, 1998: 255). The Indian Christian Conference also

dissociated itself from the principles adopted by the Report on the protection of minorities. The All-Parties Conference Committee Report on the constitutional status of India, more generally known as the Nehru Report, was published in August 1928. It recommended a fully responsible system of government in which the majority (the Hindus) would be sovereign and separate electorates were to be immediately abolished. The rejection of the principle of separate electorate was in effect the repudiation of the Lucknow Pact of 1916 (Ziring, 2019: 45).

Muslims were shocked and almost all Muslim parties raised their voice in protest. The All-Parties Conference met on 29-31 August to consider the Report, and decided to convene an All-Parties Convention in December in Calcutta to elicit public opinion. On 28 December at the Convention Jinnah suggested amendments to the Nehru Report. They were: 1) one-third of the members of the central legislature should be Muslims; 2) in the event of adult suffrage not being introduced, Punjabi and Bengali Muslims should have reserved seats for ten years; 3) the residual powers should be vested in the provinces; and 4) the separation of Sind should not depend on the achievement of dominion status. The Convention rejected every single demand put forth by Jinnah. Chastened by this experience he hastened to make peace with the Shafi League which had not co-operated with the deliberations of these conferences and committees (Sheikh, 1990: 178).

The significance of the Nehru Report lies in the fact that it united the Muslims and all political differences and rivalries between them were forgotten. The Muslim League, guided by Jinnah, rejected the Nehru Report. Another important significance of the Nehru Report was that it bid farewell to 'Indian nationalism'. In December 1928, Fazl-i Husain (1877-1936) organized the All-India Muslim Conference in order to

'speak authoritatively on behalf of the Muslims of India'. Except Jinnah, every prominent and influential Muslim figure, except Jinnah, attended the opening session of the Conference. The resolution passed by the session on the rights and demands of the Muslims remained as basis for all negotiations with the British and the Congress at the Round Table Conferences in London and in the events and negotiations that followed (Zirinig, 1982: 117).

Muslim demands were reformulated by Jinnah himself in his famous "Fourteen Points" of March 1929.". These were a more elaborate enunciation of Muslim concerns for the protection of their culture and interests in Muslim minority areas and their representative position in the provinces where they constituted the majority. The constitutional stalemate created by the boycott of the Simon Commission, Congress' adoption of the Nehru Report and Jinnah's "Fourteen Points" left it to the British Government to break the deadlock (Long, 2004: 214). The British response was to call a Round Table Conference. In the first session the Congress was absent because it insisted that the Conference could not discuss whether India should or should not receive self-government but should first shape a constitution on the basis of a free India. All other parties attended the Conference. In the second session which was attended by the Congress, the communal issue was seriously taken up. The Agha Khan, Jinnah, Sir Muhammad Shafi and Zafarullah Khan (1893-1985) negotiated with Gandhi. But Gandhi, the sole Congress delegate to the Conference, refused to consider any compromise until the Muslims accepted the Nehru Report in its totality. Upon this all the minorities except the Sikh, drafted a joint demand of claims and presented it to the British Government as their irreducible minimum. Muslim demands were based on the resolutions passed by the All-India Muslim Conference at Delhi on 4 and 5 April 1931. In summary they were: residual powers with the provinces; separation of Sind from the Bombay

presidency; full autonomy for the NWFP; reforms in Baluchistan; transfer of power direct to the provinces; separate electorates; special Muslim weightage in all political bodies; constitutional sanction for the enforcement of basic rights; safeguards against communal legislation; adequate Muslim representation in public services; and amendment of the constitution with the concurrence of the provinces. But the Hindu-Muslim problem remained unsolved (Long, 1998: 78).

The failure of the Conference to agree on the quantum of seats for the Muslim and the Hindu community in the central and provincial legislatures made the British to produce its own proposals in the form of the Communal Award of August 1932. The British proposals, mainly based on the report of the Simon Commission granted communal electorates to minorities. Congress rejected the Award as it shattered Congress' claim to speak on behalf of minorities. The Award was followed by the Government of India Act, 1935, the last major legislative action taken by the British Government before independence. The Act provided a federal structure for India which recognized the need for considerable local and provincial autonomy. To make the Act operational, the elections to the provincial assemblies were to be held in 1937 (Tharoor, 2017: 45).

Jinnah who had just returned to India in 1935, after spending some four years in England, found the Muslim League neither popular nor an organized political party. In order to succeed in the forthcoming elections, he decided to turn the Muslim League into a mass organization. Despite serious efforts, the Muslim League did not do well even in the Muslim majority areas (Hayat, 2016: 25). Congress did very well in the Hindu majority areas in the 1937 general elections and obtained majorities in six provinces. The results of the 1937 elections made the political situation in India increasingly complicated.

The Congress declared that only those Muslims would be allowed to share power with them if they subscribed to its ideology. It meant total exclusion of the Muslim League members from the provincial government. The Muslim League could never agree to it. It would have meant the repudiation of the League's claim to be the sole representative of the Muslim nation (Altaf & Hayat, 2018: 57-66).

Congress success at the 1937 polls contributed more to Muslim separatism than to Indian unity. The Muslim League leadership became convinced of the futility of expecting any future fair dealing of the Muslim affairs from the Congress. Summing up this situation, R.C. Majumdar wrote, “the Muslims now fully realized that as a separate community they had no political future. The Congress ultimatum was the signal for the parting of ways which by inevitable stages led to the formation of Pakistan” (Majumdar, 1963: 113).

To sum up, the political hierarchy in India comprised three major stake holders. Firstly, the British Indian government was at the top of that hierarchy. It gradually extended its surveillance to every nook and corner of the subcontinent. At the lower level of that hierarchical structure, two divergent political forces, the All-India Muslim League and the Indian National Congress were there which played their respective roles in the process of freedom struggle. Each of these political forces had its own distinct approach towards the empowerment of the native people and ultimately towards the independence of the Indian subcontinent. The ideological divergence between the two forces was responsible for the political and constitutional dilemma of India but the most important factor often kept on the back burner was the question of material gain – the economic factor. This earthbound factor was deeply operative in the whole political and constitutional processes of India. Some other factors widened the

political gulf between the All-India Muslim League and the Indian National Congress. They were the socio-cultural, the religious, the political and the constitutional ones. The relationship between these two political forces were constantly monitored by the British as they had to make the final decisions regarding the constitutional make-up of the country. The British government, however, was constrained by both political groups and had to take into consideration their political agendas. Above all, the imperial masters thought a great deal about their prestige and the position which they thought they would enjoy. For this reason, they wanted nothing more than a 'graceful exit' from India in August 1947.

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