

1945-46 Elections and Pakistan: Punjab's Pivotal Role

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Abstract

The 1945-46 elections were by far the most critical ones at all levels in all the annals of subcontinental history. The first Simla Conference had broken down on 14 July 1945 on the controversial issue of the All India Muslim League (AIML)'s representative character, and Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948) was quick to demand a reference to the electorate to buttress his 'demonstration of imperious strength at ... Simla'. Jinnah, a strategist with an acute sense of timing, seized the moment to call for general elections, so that the League's claim to being Muslim India's authoritative body and his claim to being its sole spokesman get validated, once and for all, at the hustings. General elections, thus, came to be announced on 21 August 1945, and were scheduled for winter 1945-46. Not inexplicably though, the two critical issues at stake were: (i) whether the AIML was Muslim India's sole authoritative spokesman, and (ii) whether Muslims favoured Pakistan or not.

Although every Muslim seat throughout the subcontinent was important, more critical, however, were those in the Punjab and Bengal, the most demographically dominant Muslim provinces. After all, if Pakistan were to be established, it had to be in the Muslim provinces. No wonder, Maulana Azad, the Congress Rastrapathi, wrote to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel (1875-1950), the 'Iron Man' of the Congress, on 21 October that 'the Punjab and Bengal hold the key position in the present election'. Patel went a step farther, asserting that 'the Punjab holds the key to the future of India'. That, above all, underscores Punjab's pre-eminent role in the electoral battle for Pakistan, even from the Congress's viewpoint.

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As against the Provincial Muslim Leagues (PMLs) in Sind and the North-West Frontier Province, the Punjab PML had become much more organized, much more disciplined and much more buoyant, if only because of its break-up with the Unionists in April 1944. It was also the least troublesome in terms of feud and faction. All said and done, however, it was Jinnah alone who, like Lenin had provided the critical linkage between the top, disparate Punjab leadership.

Allama Shabbir Ahmad Usmani and student leaders like Abdul Sattar Khan Niyazi and Hameed Nizami, played a leading role in organizing and mobilizing the ulema, students and young workers.

Meantime, for a year or more, numerous Primary Leagues had sprung up, the Muslim League National Guards (MLNG) was duly reorganized, and several women activist groups organized in several cities. Additionally a radical manifesto (1945) came to be crafted. By all accounts, it was a big jump forward.

The chink in the armour was, however, the League's meagre resources. Yet the greatest problem confronting the rejuvenated League was that not only were the Unionists in power, but that the Glancy-Khizr axis had as well 'conspired' to utilize brazenly the bureaucracy, the most powerful and the most ubiquitous in the entire subcontinent, to get a verdict in their favour, whatever be the means, whatever the cost.

In the central assembly elections, held in late November-December 1945, the League made a complete sweep of the six Muslim seats. In the provincial elections it contested all the eighty-six Muslim seats and two of its candidates returned unopposed. The Unionists contested seventy-six seats, the Ahrars sixteen, the Congress eight and the Khaksars three. The League's score was 87.2 per cent of the Muslim seats and 65.3 per cent of the total Muslim vote; the Unionists secured 27.26 per cent votes while the rest 7.44 per cent. An enthralled Jinnah lauded the Punjab results, saying, 'The Muslims played a magnificent part in conclusively proving that Punjab is the cornerstone of Pakistan. Ninety per cent fighting against all odds is a splendid achievement of which you, Muslim India and myself should be proud', he wired Mamdot, the Punjab PML President. The Punjab vote was the most critical one since, to the Congress as well to British officials and non officials the Punjab held 'the key to the future of India'. And once Punjab was firmly secured, the Pakistan issue could not be shelved any more. Nor Pakistan's emergence could long be thwarted. And it came eighteen months later.

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of the All India Muslim League (AIML)'s representative character, and Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948) was quick to demand a reference to the electorate to buttress his 'demonstration of imperious strength at ... Simla'. This demonstration, to quote H. V. Hodson, former Reforms Commissioner (1941-42) and author of the most authoritative British account of the Great Divide, 'was a shot in the arm for the League and a serious blow to its Muslim opponents, especially in the Punjab'.¹ Clearly, Jinnah's Simla strategy went extremely well with Muslims. Indeed, Simla endowed the League with a tremendous psychological boost overnight, perhaps as much as Lucknow (1937) and Lahore (1940) had done earlier. Jinnah, a strategist with an acute sense of timing, seized the moment to call for general elections, so that the League's claim to being Muslim India's authoritative body and his claim to being its sole spokesman get validated, once and for all, at the hustings. Fortuitously though, Sir Stafford Cripps (1889-1952), the India expert in the new, postwar Labour government, also urged the holding of fresh elections, if only 'to expedite the means of arriving at a permanent settlement'.² General elections, thus, came to be announced on 21 August 1945, and were scheduled for winter 1945-46. Not inexplicably though, the two critical issues at stake were: (i) whether the AIML was Muslim India's sole authoritative spokesman, and (ii) whether Muslims favoured Pakistan or not.

Although every Muslim seat throughout the subcontinent was important, more critical, however, were those in the Punjab and Bengal, the most demographically dominant Muslim provinces. After all, if Pakistan were to be established, it had to be in the Muslim provinces. No wonder, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1889-1958), the Congress Rastrapathi, wrote to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel (1875-1950), the 'Iron Man' of the Congress, on 21 October that 'the Punjab and Bengal hold the key position in the present election'. And the indefatigable Patel, who, though ailing, yet ran the Congress's election campaign so determinedly and so efficiently from his sick bed at Poona, on his part, gave the utmost attention to Bengal and the Punjab. No wonder, he immediately sent a cheque for Rs. 50,000/- to the Ahrars in the Punjab, followed by other huge tranches to the Punjab Congress leadership,

¹ H. V. Hodson, *The Great Divide* (Karachi: OUP, 1969), pp.127-26.

² Maurice Gwyer and A. Appodorai, *Speeches and Documents on the Indian Constitution* (London: OUP, 1957), II: 566, TP, VI: 21, note 7.

while making it absolutely clear to one and all that he would help out the provincial leadership ‘only in the matter of Muslim constituencies’.³

Subsequently, Patel reminded Sachar that ‘The Punjab is [not only] a prosperous and key province of Pakistan’ but that ‘the Punjab [also] holds the key to the future of India’, and, he called on him to collect contributions from local industrial magnates, big businessmen and landlords.⁴ That, above all, underscores Punjab’s pre-eminent role in the electoral battle for Pakistan, even from the Congress’s viewpoint.

Another major component of the Congress’s strategy was spelled out by Azad after meeting Malik Sir Khizr Hayat Khan Tiwana (1900-75), the Punjab Unionist Premier, when he told reporters on 8 October in Lahore, ‘We are ready to enter into a pact with anyone [whatever their standing and whatever their objectives,] excepting the League’.⁵ Hence the Congress clobbered together a formidable string of anti-League forces – the entrenched Unionists, the vociferous and agitation oriented Ahrars, the militant Khaksars, the religion invoking Jamiat al Ulema-i-Hind and the much organized Congress – into an almost impregnable opposition in the Punjab. Between these disparate groups, Azad served as the Chief Coordinator, fuelling them with the requisite funds through Sardar Patel. A third component was that the Congress decided to approach the Muslim masses through its client Muslim parties and the much esteemed *ulema*, who were expected to explode the ‘myth’ concerning the League and Pakistan.

Like G. M. Syed (1904-1995) in Sind, Premier Malik Khizr Hayat Khan Tiwana as well tried to confuse the ordinary, almost gullible voters, asserting that he and other Muslim Unionist members were ‘firm

³ Azad to Patel, 21 Oct. 1945, Durga Das (ed.), *Sardar Patel’s Correspondence* [hereafter *SPC*] (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1972), II: 24-25. The funds allocated by Patel were only for the Muslim candidates and Muslim constituencies; ‘For the non-Muslim candidates’, ‘the province must make its own arrangements’, he told the local leaders. Patel to Prakasam (Madras), 5 March 1946, *ibid.*, II: 248. See also Prasad to Patel, 19 October. 1945, *ibid.*, II: 95; Patel to Azad, 06 March 1946, *ibid.*, II: 64. Azad to Patel, 16 October. 1945 and Patel to Azad, 21 December 1945, *ibid.*, II: 27 & 47.

⁴ 30 December 1945, *ibid.*, II: 281; 08 January 1946, *ibid.*, II: 283-84.

⁵ *The Deccan Times*, (Madras), 4 November 1945. See N. K. Krishnan, ‘A Patriot’s Note book’, *The Peoples War* (Bombay), Communist Party’s organ, Shamsul Hasan Collection [hereafter *SHC*], Punjab, V: 75. Patel also asked the Congress leaders in the provinces to collaborate fully with the anti-League forces to defeat the League at the hustings.

and uncompromising supporters of ... Pakistan',⁶ but the gimmick failed to work. And this chiefly because, as against the Provincial Muslim Leagues (PMLs) in Sind and the North-West Frontier Province, the Punjab PML had become much more organized, much more disciplined and much more buoyant, if only because of its break-up with the Unionists in April 1944. It was also the least troublesome in terms of feud and faction. Thus, the Punjab team was able to remain intact under Nawab Iftikhar Husain Khan of Mamdot (1906-69), the Punjab PML President. And he was able to infuse the team spirit among his colleagues, chiefly because he was a self effacing, but confident leader, who, backed by Jinnah all the way, worked silently, *sans* ambition, *sans* rhetoric and *sans* fanfare.⁷ All said and done, however, it was Jinnah alone who, like Vladimir Ilich Ulyanove Lenin (1870-1920), the architect of the Russian Revolution (1917),⁸ had provided the critical linkage between the top, disparate Punjab leadership.⁹

Soon after the HMG's announcement of the general elections, the adhesion of some topmost Congressites and Unionists – most notably Mian Iftikharuddin (1907-62), President, Punjab Provincial Congress Committee (PCC), and Sir Feroze Khan Noon (1893-1970), Member, Viceroy's Executive Council, Premier Tiwana's cousin and Unionist Party's founding member, followed by Begum Jahan Ara Shah Nawaz (1896-1979), former Unionist Parliamentary Secretary, and several other Unionist stalwarts – served notice on both the Congress and the Unionist Party that their respective citadels were fast in the process of crumbling down.

⁶ E. W. R. Lumby, *The Transfer of Power in India 1945-47* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1954), p. 64; *Morning News*, 29 October 1945, p. 6; *Civil & Military Gazette* (Lahore), 30 October, 1945, p. 5, and 4 November 1945. An exasperated Patel asked Bhargava, 'Why has Khizr come out with that statement? What does that statement mean?' 'It is difficult to rely upon such people', he confided Nehru. Patel to Bhargava, 9 November 1945; Patel to Nehru, 7 November 1945, *SPC*, II: 145, 71; see also p. 136. However, Khizr had reportedly given 'secret assurances to the Sikhs and [Governor] Glancy that they will forget all about it as soon as the elections were over'. Vicky Noon to Jinnah, 10 October 1945, *SHC*, Punjab, IV: 19.

⁷ On Mamdot, see Sharif al Mujahid, 'Jinnah's Team: The Top Ten', *The Historian* (Lahore), 4: 1 & 2 (January–December 2004), p.102.

⁸ About Lenin, see Sidney Hook, *The Hero in History: A Study in Limitation and Possibility* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1956), pp. 221, 224-25.

⁹ See Sharif al Mujahid, *Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah: Studies in Interpretation* (Karachi: Quaid-i-Azam Academy, 1981), pp. 407-08.

The *ulema* and the *mashaiks* (including the *Sajjada Nashins*), inspired and motivated by the much esteemed Deoband *alim* and Principal, Allama Shabbir Ahmad Usmani (1885-1949), got activated and mobilized, almost overnight. In perspective, Allama Usmani had fortuitously provided since mid-October 1945 the direly needed theological weight in Pakistan's favour against the pervasive and persuasive anti-League influence of the ubiquitous and much esteemed Congress *ulema* at the grass-root level.¹⁰

At another level, student leaders like Abdul Sattar Khan Niyazi (1915-2000s), founder of the Punjab Muslim Students Federation (MSF) (f. 1938), and Hameed Nizami (1915-1962), third elected President of the Punjab MSF and later, Editor, *Nawa-i-Waqt* (Lahore), played a leading role in organizing and mobilizing *the ulema* students and young workers, and leading them in small groups to visit small towns and their hinterland, organize mini gatherings of village folk at various places, listen to their pressing problems, in order to solve them or find solutions to them. *Inter alia*, they sought to educate and explain to them the League's policies and programme in general terms and in the context of the pressures and problems that had held rural Punjab hostage, and its politics and ultimate goals.¹¹ And even as the elections approached, thousands of student volunteers from Aligarh University, Islamia College and other institutions fanned out throughout the sprawling province to educate, mobilize and motivate the ordinary voters to brace for total defiance, both against official pressure and the mighty Unionist oriented zamindars' dire threats and influence.

Meantime, for a year or more, numerous Primary Leagues had sprung up or come to be established where there was none, and the Muslim League National Guards (MLNG) was duly reorganized as never before. In tandem were several women activist groups organized in several cities, besides the Muslim Women Students' Federation, founded earlier in 1941, having been spruced up and streamlined – both targeted to ensuring increasing women awareness, motivation and participation in

¹⁰ See Mujahid, 'Jinnah's Team: the Top Ten', *op.cit.*, pp.97-98.

¹¹ For details, see Archives of Freedom Movement (AFM), University of Karachi, File Box, Elections 1945-46: Punjab, now deposited in the National Archives of Pakistan [NAP], Islamabad; and Riaz Ahmad (ed.), *The Punjab Muslim League, 1906-1947: Secret Police Abstracts* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 2008), for the years, 1943-45, pp. 124-254.

the League's campaign.¹² Thus, women comprised almost one-third of the audiences in the election meetings, reminisced Mian Mumtaz Khan Daulatana (1916-95) later.¹³

Additionally, authored by Daulatana, Punjab PML's General Secretary, with the assistance of noted leftist, Danial Latifi, the Acting Office Secretary of the Punjab PML since July 1944, a radical manifesto (1945) came to be crafted. By all accounts, it was a big leap forward. It helped to endow the Punjab League election campaign with the direly needed progressive streak. And all the while, the leading Urdu papers, especially the *Nawa-i-Waqt*, *Zamindar*, *Ihsan* and *The Eastern Times*, carried on a blitz undeterred, despite the Unionists' sword over their uneasy heads.

The chink in the armour was, however, the League's meagre resources. As against the Unionists' four million (forty lakhs) election chest, not to speak of the Birla and Dalmia funded millions at the Congress's disposal, the League could possibly collect only a meagre sum of Rs. 800,000. Jinnah, of course, came to the PML's rescue, helping it out to the tune of Rs. 300,000 out of the Central League funds;¹⁴ but still the Provincial League's resources were far too limited, obviously constraining the spread and intensity of its election campaign.

Yet the greatest problem confronting the rejuvenated League was that not only were the Unionists in power, but that the Glancy-Khizr axis had as well 'conspired' to utilize brazenly the bureaucracy, the most powerful and the most ubiquitous in the entire subcontinent, to get a verdict in their favour, whatever be the means, whatever the cost. 'The entire bureaucracy – Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and the British – was against

¹² For details, see, *ibid.* For a succinct account of the Punjab PML's mobilization campaign and Jinnah's role in it, see Amarjit Sindh, 'M. A. Jinnah and Punjab Politics: A Study of the Shamsul Hasan Collection', *International Conference [on] History, Politics and Society. The Punjab, December 29th-31st 2008*, (Lahore, 2008), Abstracts, pp. 68-70.

¹³ Interview, Lahore, 25 July 1984.

¹⁴ Punjab Fortnightly Reports, 1945, para 106 (1-15 December 1945), S. 426, National Documentation Centre (NDC). *The Deccan Times*, 20 January 1946. Interestingly, Patel had likewise told Sachar, 'It should not be difficult for the Congress to raise any money for this all-important issue, which affects the Punjab most', and reminded him later that 'the Punjab is a prosperous province and a key province of Pakistan'. Patel to Sachar, 30 December 1945 and 8 January 1946, *SPC*, II: 281, 284. Also see Patel to Dila Ram, 2 January 1946, *ibid.*, II: 290. Daulatana to Jinnah, 17 January 1946 and Jinnah to Daulatana, 17 January 1946, Quaid-i-Azam Papers (QAP), F. 67: 7, 8; F. 588: 151-52; F. 257: 9.

us', recalled Daulatana years later.¹⁵ Indeed ever since the general elections were announced, the greatest headache for the Punjab leaders was how to ensure the 'complete neutrality of the state apparatus' and several leaders wrote to Jinnah, stressing its imperative need. 'There have been', admitted Lord Wavell (1883-1950), the Viceroy, 'a lot of allegations against the Unionist Ministry... to the effect that they are abusing their position to gain advantage in the elections.'¹⁶ Jinnah himself had to take cognizance of the gravity of these complaints: 'voters and ... workers... are being coerced, threatened, intimidated and persecuted', he charged. And since both the Viceroy and the Governor (Bertrand Glancy) had turned a 'deaf ear' to all those 'shameful and criminal tactics', he told his beleaguered followers that there was 'no door' to knock at and no alternative left but 'to fight' to the bitter end.¹⁷

Earlier, in the central assembly elections, held in late November-December 1945, at stake were six Muslim seats, and the League made a complete sweep of them. Three seats were bagged without a contest, a record for any province; and the Independents (mostly Unionists) and a Khaksar, who contested on the other three seats, secured a total of mere 2,788 (19.04%) out of 16,358 votes cast. This meant that the League could surge forward, making a shambles of the Unionists. And it did in the provincial elections held in February 1946.

The Muslim League contested all the eighty-six Muslim seats (nine urban, seventy five rural and two women), and two of its candidates returned unopposed. The Unionists contested seventy-six seats, the Ahrars sixteen, the Congress eight and the Khaksars three. Additionally, there were eighty-two Independents in the field. The League's score was 87.2 per cent of the Muslim seats and 65.3 per cent of the total Muslim vote; the Unionists secured 27.26 per cent votes while the rest 7.44 per cent.¹⁸ In view of the

¹⁵ Interview, Lahore, 25 July 1984.

¹⁶ Wavell to Pethick-Lawrence, 25 December 1945, N. Mansergh, E. W. R. Lumby and Penderal Moon (eds.) *Constitutional Relations Between Britain and India* [hereafter TP], (London: HMSO, 1970-82), VI: 683.

¹⁷ *The Deccan Times*, 27 January 1946, Jinnah's statement, Lahore, 18 January 1946, SHC, Punjab I.

¹⁸ For details, see *Return Showing the Results of Election to the Central and Provincial Legislatures in 1945-46* (New Delhi, 1948) and Abdul Wahid Qureshi (ed.), *Tarikhi faisala* (Delhi: Maktaba-i-Siyasiyah, 1946). Also Richard Symonds, *The Making of Pakistan* (London: Faber and Faber, 1950), p. 67; Khalid Bin Sayeed, *Pakistan: The Formative Phase* (Karachi: Pakistan Publishing House, 1960), p.193; and Ram Gopal, *Indian Muslims: A Political History (1858-1947)* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1959), p.305.

Congress's dire prognostications the League's success may well be termed astounding. Patel, the 'lodestar' of the Congress, conceded, albeit grudgingly, 'The League has scored better than expected...'¹⁹

In the battle for Pakistan, Punjab was considered the 'key' province; hence the Punjab results sent a wave of joy throughout Muslim India. An enthralled Jinnah lauded the Punjab results, saying, 'The Muslims played a magnificent part in conclusively proving that Punjab is the cornerstone of Pakistan. Ninety per cent fighting against all odds is a splendid achievement of which you, Muslim India and myself should be proud', he wired Mamdot, the Punjab PML President.²⁰

In perspective, however, despite the temporary setback to assume power after the elections, the Punjab vote was the most critical one since, to Patel, among others, the Punjab held 'the key to the future of India' – an assessment, which was also generally shared by British officials and non-officials. For instance, Governor Sir Hugh Dow of Sind,²¹ Governor Sir Henry Joseph Twynam of C. P. and Berar,²² and Sir Francis Low,²³ Editor, *The Times of India* (Bombay), the foremost Anglo-Indian daily, told Wavell that the Punjab held 'the key to the Pakistan problem'. Likewise, U. S. officials and diplomats in Delhi regarded Punjab as 'the keystone of Pakistan'.²⁴

Hence despite what Ayesha Jalal, herself a fullblooded Punjabi, says about the Punjabi 'opportunists' in her much acclaimed work,²⁵ Punjab did play a critical role in securing Pakistan. And once Punjab was firmly secured, the Pakistan issue could not be shelved any more. Nor Pakistan's emergence could long be thwarted. And it came eighteen months later.

¹⁹ Azad to Patel, 16 October 1945, *SPC*, II: 27. Nehru to Krishna Menon, October 1945, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (Delhi: Orient, 1980s), 14: 96; Sachar to Patel, 2 January 1946, *SPC*, II: 282-83; and Patel to Sachar, 20 February 1946, *ibid.*, II: 305. 'General Appreciation' of the Punjab results, enclosure to Menon to Gibson, 22 March 1946, *TP*, VI: 1232.

²⁰ Jinnah to Mamdot, February 1946, *QAP*, F. 372: 33.

²¹ Governor's Conference, 1 August 1945, *TP*, VI: 14.

²² Sir. H. Twynam (Governor, c. P. & Berar) to Wavell, 9 February 1946, *TP*, VI: 929.

²³ Earlier, in Nov. 1944, Sir Francis Low after meeting Glancy, Khizr, Chottu Ram and others in Lahore, had told Wavell, 'If the Punjab fall for Jinnah ... it would be hard to avoid Pakistan'. Wavell to Amery, 8 November, 1944, *ibid.*, V: 187.

²⁴ Merrel to U. S. Secretary of State, 6 May 1944, F. 845.00/2268, Department of Archives, Washington D.C.

²⁵ Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985).