

Trends in Punjab Politics: 1925-1947

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Abstract

This article gives a background of the province of Punjab and a detailed analysis of its politics from the end of the nineteenth century, when, in 1877, the landlord community brought forward, its first political association – Lahore Indian Association – representing all communities, till the time when the British finally decided to establish an organised political party to promote and protect their interest there. Their rapport with the rural elite of the Punjab helped them in achieving this goal, i.e. the creation of the Unionist Party. The success of this party depended on careful balance of interests of Hindu Jats and Muslim landlords. How this party dominated the political scene of the Punjab from the time of its creation in 1923 to 1946 is carefully narrated in this article. In 1946, the Muslim League won 79 out of 86 Muslim seats and emerged as the single largest party in Punjab, a province that held the key to the future of India. This article shows how failure of the Unionist Party was the major cause which paved the way for the partition of Punjab and the creation of Pakistan.

The most remarkable feature in the topography of Punjab is found in its rivers. These rivers flow from the Himalayas, descend into the plains of Punjab, fertilize the soil and continue their course to the south, until after their confluence the amalgamated waters fall into the sea. These rivers run between the Indus and the Jamna.¹ These eastern rivers are the Jhelum, the Chenab, the Ravi, the Beas and the Sutlej. ‘The word ‘Punjab’² literally means five waters or five rivers’.³ With reference to the

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¹ *World Atlas*, Millennium Edition (London: Dorling Kindersley Limited, 1999), pp.268-69. Also *The Times Atlas of The World* (London: Times Book Limited, 1985), pp.30-31.

² ‘Punj’ and ‘ab’ are two separate words in Persian. ‘Punj’ means five, whereas ‘ab’ means water. See the Persian-English Dictionary (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Limited, 1892), pp.1, 256; Also Mir Ali Asghar

name of province it is, however, to be observed that there are in fact six rivers instead of five,⁴ but as the Indus was considered the boundary to the far west, the ancients seem to have disregarded it while giving the region its present name.⁵ These rivers running through the land for centuries, and changing their course continuously, made the land fertile. A fertile land with supporting weathers and plenty of water became a resource rich area. Moreover, the land was the gateway to India. Thus, Punjabis, therefore, were the people who had to bear the brunt of the invader's attacks. In pre-historic times, it was presumably, the Punjab that was first invaded by the Aryans from their camping ground beyond the snowy ranges of Himalayas.⁶ The Brahmins, the Rajputs and the Bannias of Hindu race are commonly regarded as the descendents of Aryans. Alexander from Greek also invaded Punjab. In India it was the Punjab and Sindh where, the armies of Islam obtained their footings, under Mohammad Bin Qasim. The Punjab is also the birthplace of Sikh religion⁷ whose followers were able to establish a state of their own under the able leadership of Maharaja Ranjit Singh who was able to extend the boundaries of Punjab to NWFP and Kashmir. After his death intrigues and internecine fighting weakened the state to the extent that it finally surrendered to the British rule after the first Anglo-Sikh war of 1845-46.

Montazem the New English Persian Dictionary (Tehran: Khoosheh Book, 1991), pp.1357, 455.

³ Six rivers flowing through Punjab are the Indus, the Jehlum, the Chenab, the Ravi, the Sutlej and the Beas. Although Indus runs through Punjab, yet it was making the boundary of province, therefore, it might have been neglected while naming the land. But interesting to see here is that now the Beas, almost, does not flow through Pakistani Punjab. Thus leaving the today's Punjab a land of five rivers, very much according to the name. The Indus is now included in the five rivers, making the land 'Punj-ab'.

⁴ Syed Muhammad Latif, *History of Punjab: From the Remotest Antiquity to the Present Time* (New Delhi: Eurasia Publishing, 1964), p.1.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Muhammad Bin Qasim entered the Indian land through Balochistan, conquered Sindh and reached up to Multan. He managed to keep the occupied territories under full control. Even Muslims under his command were planning to invade Kashmir, but he had to go back because of the orders of the new caliph. But it is clear in history that armies in Islam managed to have their footings in Punjab, under Bin Qasim.

⁷ Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, born in 1469, in Talwandi, now called Nanak Sahib in Pakistan. This place is near to Lahore. The Sikhism then developed and flourished in the Punjab.

The British started their occupation drive of India from the eastern lands of the subcontinent. If we look at the map, the Punjab lies close to the western and northern borders of India.⁸ Principally for that reason, the Punjab was one of the last regions of India to be annexed by the British.⁹ They were also aware that Punjab was an old and distinct society that had been greatly influenced by its geographical location and had a turbulent history. Realizing this situation well, they planned to develop the province as a model of prosperity and agricultural stability.¹⁰ To achieve the goal of stability and prosperity, the British depended on the rural nature of the province and aimed at communal harmony among the big three communities of the province, i.e., the Muslims, the Hindus and the Sikhs.¹¹ They improved irrigation system and set up canal colonies.¹² They created new rural elite by supporting the people who had supported the British during the annexation of the province. They richly awarded those who had helped them in their darkest hour.¹³ Their help, during the East India Company's crisis in general, and during the Second Sikh War (1849) and in the events of 1857 in particular, did not go unrewarded.¹⁴ As the new elite came from different religious communities, British needed communal harmony to promote their

⁸ *World Atlas*, Millennium Edition, *op.cit.*, pp.268-69.

⁹ Punjab was the last region to be annexed by the British. It was so not for some strong political or defensive system of the province, rather it was a blessing of its location. British with its formidable naval power started their occupation of India from the northeastern side of the land. They captured the resource rich Bengal first then moved towards the south and the west. Punjab was therefore, one of the farther regions from the springboard of Bengal. For this reason, Punjab's annexation to the British India came in, as late as, March 1849.

¹⁰ C. Dewey, 'Anglo-Indian Attitudes: The Mind of the Indian Civil Service', London, 1993, quoted in I.A. Talbot, *Khizr Tiwana; The Punjab Unionist Party and the Partition of India* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996), p.4.

¹¹ In the Punjab there were two types of divide. One was the urban-rural divide, whereas the second division was among various religious communities.

¹² These colonies were developed to absorb the surplus population of crowded districts of Central Punjab, with the objective of revenue generation.

¹³ S.S. Thorburn, *The Punjab in Peace and War* (Lahore: Qausain, n.d.), p.209.

¹⁴ British rewards for their 'helpers' were not only rewards, as the British needed their crucial support to maintain their control over the occupied lands. Thus one might say that these rewards were not merely rewards but were also an investment to keep the sympathizers to the British Raj stick to their side in future.

interests of stable Punjab. They formulated a policy of inter-communal political cooperation for protection of their vested interests. The British helped new elites in rising to the new position of authority in the new setup and consequently won the support of the Punjab chiefs that was crucial for the British to safeguard their Raj in the province.

The British realized Punjab's potential for military manpower. Having the services of the landlords, British managed the martial races of Punjab to join the British Indian Army.¹⁵ Towards the end of nineteenth century, the province emerged as the major recruiting area for the British Army.¹⁶ At the end of the First World War, almost three fifth of the British Indian Army recruits were drawn from the province. The following table depicts that the Punjab's contribution to British Indian Armed forces was highest in proportion to population as well as in number.¹⁷

Table: I

Area	Population, In millions	Number of recruits in thousands
N.W.F.P.	3	32
Punjab	24	350
United Provinces	46	142
Bombay	27	35
Bengal	48	6
Behar & Orissa	38	8
Madras	48	46
Central Provinces	16	5
Assam	8	1
Burma	13	13
Ajmer	0.5	8
Native States under Government of India	45	80

The recruitment in the army was open to all communities. Muslim Rajputs, Sikh Jats and Hindu Dogras, jointly willing to fight for

¹⁵ Mustafa Kamal Pasha, *Colonial Political Economy* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁶ S.C. Mittal, *Freedom Movement in Punjab* (Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1977), p.71.

¹⁷ Dr. S.D. Pradhan, 'Punjab's manpower contribution to the Indian Army during the First World War', in *Punjab Revisited*, compiled by Ahmad Saleem (Lahore: Gautam Publishers, n.d.), p.450.

the British, dominated the British Indian Army.¹⁸ The soldiers from Punjab fought as far as the mud of Flanders, the deserts of Arabia and in the bushes of East Africa. They won over two thousand medals and awards, including three Victoria Crosses.¹⁹

To secure rural stability, the British associated the leaders of the agriculturist tribes with the political life and processes. They pursued a policy to use the resources of the Punjab to reward the agriculturist population. A framework of political representation was established to institutionalize the division between the agriculturist and non-agriculturist populations. In addition to these actions, they encouraged the rural elites to get into administrative system and offered them the post of *zaildar*. Posts were also reserved for the agriculturists in the official ranks of the local administration.²⁰

The British introduced comprehensive irrigation projects in the southwestern Punjab, where they developed nine canal colonies. The creation of these colonies coincided with the Punjab's emergence as the sword-arm²¹ of India.²² The British rewarded ex-servicemen with lucrative grants of land in these canal colonies. Approximately, a million of Punjabis migrated to these canal colonies, which were inhabited rapidly and in return converted the province into a major exporting zone of wheat and cotton. Moreover, these colonies also became a source of revenue generation for the British government.²³

Towards the end of nineteenth century, the British started to introduce political reforms in British India. They also decided to bring forward their allied landlord community in the political front. As a result S.N Banerjee²⁴ founded the first political association in Punjab in the

¹⁸ C. Dewey, *The Rural Roots of Pakistani Militarism*, in D.A. Low (ed.), *The Political Inheritance of Pakistan* (London: Heinemann, 1991), p.264.

¹⁹ Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj, 1849-1947* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.45.

²⁰ J. Royal Rose Berry 111, *Imperial Rule in Punjab, 1818-1881* (Lahore: Vanguard, 1988), p.196.

²¹ Lord Roberts, who served as the Commander in Chief of the Indian Army, from 1885 to 1893, enunciated the theory of martial races. The theory considered the Punjabis as martial race. Therefore even before the First World War Punjabi soldiers formed the bulk of Indian Army.

²² Ikram Ali Malik, *A Hand Book of Reading on the History of the Punjab 1799-1947* (Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, 1970), p.325.

²³ S.S. Thorburn, *The Punjab in Peace and War* (Lahore: Qausain, n.d), p.275.

²⁴ Surendranath Banerjee (1848-1925) was involved actively in students associations. He formed Indian Association in 1876, with the objective of

year 1877.²⁵ The association, named as Lahore Indian Association,²⁶ provided a common platform to all communities of the province. It included some of the prominent leaders from different communities, such as Dyal Singh²⁷ and Barkat Ali Khan.²⁸ The Lahore Indian Association cooperated in the establishment of the Punjab branch of Indian National Congress in 1885.²⁹ However, by that time, differences among different communities were quite discernable.

Hindu revivalist movements,³⁰ like Brahmo Samaj³¹ and Arya Samaj,³² were the major contributors in generating ill feelings amongst

organizing public agitations to seek redress of grievances. He stressed the need for Hindu-Muslim unity as a pre-requisite to the attainment of *swaraj*.

²⁵ Surendernath Banerjee, *A Nation in the Making* (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), pp.46-7.

²⁶ Lahore Indian Association, established in 1877, was provincial branch of Indian Association founded a year before by Surendernath Banerjee.

²⁷ Sardar Dyal Singh was the founder of Dyal Singh College, Dyal Singh Library and *The Tribune*. He was the President of Lahore Indian Association.

²⁸ Khan Barkat Ali Khan belonged to a Pathan family of Shahjahanpur. He served British as *thanedar*, *tehsildar* and extra assistant commissioner. During his services he was given the responsibility to settle disputes among religious communities. After retirement his main field of activity involved Anjuman-i-Islamiyah. He was also vice-president of the Lahore Indian Association.

²⁹ Mushirul Hassan (ed.), *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India* (Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1979), p.238.

³⁰ The reason for launching these movements was the thinking that Muslim, Sikh and Christian onslaught had posed serious threat to the position of Hindus. Therefore they launched such movements to consolidate their position.

³¹ Raja Ram Mohan Roy founded Brahmo Samaj in 1828. Over the period of time, it split in three branches. Of these branches, the 'Adhi Samaj' soon became indistinguishable from Hinduism and faded away. 'Nav Vidhan' also faced the same fate; however the 'Sadharan Samaj' showed vitality and made some headway.

³² Arya Samaj (the society of Aryans) was a Hindu revivalist movement. It was founded by Sawami Dayanand Saraswati, a Brahman of Kathiawar. The movement was founded in Bombay but it could not flourish there. However in the latter years of Dayanand's life, Punjab became the center of his activities. He was a religious reformer. He opined that it was the advent of meat eating (Muslims) and wine drinking (British) foreigners—the slaughterers of Kine and other animals that brought trouble and sufferings upon the Aryans. His cry was 'Arya for the Aryans'. See 'The Punjab and

religious communities unlike Congress that claimed to be the harbinger of all the communities; Arya Samaj's activities were mainly focused on safeguarding the communal interests of the Hindus only. As a result a large segment of Hindu community developed antipathy towards Congress for endeavouring to win Muslims support as well. Similarly, the Muslims of Punjab, on the pattern of following the footsteps of the Muslims of rest of India, became quite conscious of their identity³³ and started exerting themselves as a separate and distinct community and founded several associations to promote their interests. The first among these associations founded in 1869, which focused its attention to safeguard socio-economic and political interests of Muslims and also maintained mosques and voiced its opinion on various issues, confronting the community. Another important Muslim organization, Anjuman Himayat-i-Islam³⁴ was founded in 1884, with the avowed objectives to:

- 1 To impart education to the Muslims.
- 2 To improve the social and intellectual conditions of the Muslim community.
- 3 To respond to the attacks against Islam.³⁵
- 4 To advocate loyalty to the British Raj.³⁶

In the last quarter of nineteenth century, the British provided Punjab with an opportunity to elect some members of its municipal committees. Holding of elections to these committees resulted in communal conflict in many areas.³⁷ In the meanwhile Hindu majority in the local self – government bodies at all India level not only gave rise to communal tension but also intensification of demand by Muslims for separate communal electorates.

the Arya Samaj' an article appearing in *The Times*, London, 1910. The article was reproduced in *Punjab Revisited*, *op.cit.*, pp.420-29.

³³ Throughout their history in India, Muslims had faced various Hindu attempts to abolish their separate identity, but they successfully coped with such efforts.

³⁴ *Ibid.* Also see S.R. Wasti, 'Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam, Lahore: A Brief Survey', *Journal of Research Society of Pakistan*, Lahore, 3:1 & 2 (April 1966), pp.64-5.

³⁵ Non-Muslims, particularly Hindus, on occasions had attacked Islam to disgrace it and to bring Muslims back to Hinduism. But such efforts had created resentment among Muslims and they faced them with more zeal and vigour.

³⁶ Qalb-i-Abid, *op.cit.*, p.11.

³⁷ N.G. Barrier, 'Muslim Politics in the Punjab, 1870-90', *Punjab: Past and Present*, VI:2 (April 1971), p.91.

In the British India, Muslim representation in the official services was already drastically negligible and, by the 1880's, their representation had almost been eliminated.³⁸ In 1895, an official inquiry revealed that for a long period, the Hindu officers had been deliberately preventing the qualified Muslims from getting high-ranking jobs.³⁹ It was growing consciousness among Muslims that they might not be able to compete privileged Hindu community; therefore, they demanded a share in jobs for the Muslim community on account of population percentage in Punjab.⁴⁰ Annoyed by the demand of Muslims, Hindus dubbed Muslims as greedy job seekers and also questioned their abilities and even chided that they should stop behaving like children and should fight like men.⁴¹

The feelings of deprivation led some prominent Punjabi Muslims, such as Justice Shah Din,⁴² to think about the establishment of a central political organization for the Muslims,⁴³ much early than the creation of All India Muslim League in December 1906. Interesting, Mian Fazl-i-Husain a noted Muslim leader, had founded a Muslim association, named as The Muslim League⁴⁴ in February 1906 but Fazl-i-Husain's Muslim League could not gain foothold among the Muslims as its leader, Mian Fazl-i-Husain, had joined Congress in 1905.⁴⁵ He was still a member of Congress at the time he launched his Muslim League.

In order to check the influence of Indian political parties, British sponsored the Association of the Landed Aristocracy of Punjab and helped in the formation of Punjab's first multi-communal rural political association in 1907 by Sardar Partap Singh Alhuwalia, which was latter

³⁸ Muslims had ruled over India for a long period. British had taken power from them, therefore psychologically they were perceived as a potential threat to the British rule. This fact coincided with the hate, among Muslims, for adapting to the new circumstances. They did not come forward to learn English language, which was the official language of the British India. For these reasons Muslims lagged behind other communities in getting jobs.

³⁹ Qalb-i-Abid, *op.cit.*, p.10; also see N.G. Barrier, *op.cit.*, pp.91-2.

⁴⁰ Mushirul Hassan (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp.35-6.

⁴¹ *The Tribune*, 15 December 1886.

⁴² S.M. Ikram, *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1995), p.216.

⁴³ Bashir Ahmed, *Justice Shah Din* (Lahore: Sh. Mohammad Ashraf, 1962), p.344.

⁴⁴ Qalb-i-Abid, *op.cit.*, p.14. Also see Azeem Husain, *Mian Fazl-i-Husain: A Political Biography* (Bombay: Congress, 1946), p.94.

⁴⁵ Waheed Ahmad. (ed.), *Letters of Mian Fazl-i-Husain* (Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, 1976), p.xxxv.

renamed as the Punjab Chief Association.⁴⁶ It was a conservative and loyalist organization, serving equally well the interests of the British and landlords of the province. Punjab Chief's Association limited Congress' influence on the provincial political horizon and reduced communal tensions in the provincial countryside,⁴⁷ which had dominated political life in the towns of Punjab from the 1880s onwards.⁴⁸ During the First World War, landlords under this association not only assisted in raising large number of recruits for the British forces, but also helped to limit the impact of two very important movements, i.e., Sikh Ghadr Movement founded⁴⁹ by Har Dyal Singh,⁵⁰ and the Khilafat Movement launched by Ali brothers i.e. Maulana Mohammad Ali Johar and Maulana Shaukat Ali. The disturbances in 1919 that resulted in the brutal Jallianwalla Bagh massacre⁵¹ in Amritsar were in fact limited to only a handful of the province's towns and had least impact on the rural areas.⁵² However, in the urban areas, tensions among various communities continued to increase and at times tensions rose so high that nationalist leaders had to intervene for reconciliation.

Punjab was less advanced and was given a Legislative Council as late as 1897⁵³ as British treated it basically as a military province, thus the political awareness in Punjab started with the introduction of political parties and with the award of a Legislative Council in the province. The passage of Montague-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 increased the franchise and transferred control of certain subjects to provincial administration and maintained that at least seventy per cent of the seats in the provincial legislature would be elected and not more than twenty

⁴⁶ Ian Talbot, *Provincial Political Parties and the Pakistan Movement* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.84.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Ghadr Movement or Ghadr Party was launched by Lala Har Dyal in 1913, to liberate India from the British. It was the first secular, democratic and revolutionary upsurge aimed at liberating India from the foreigners. Although it included Muslims and Hindus as well, it was the Sikhs who were the majority of the party. For the Sikh community it was the end of their long saga of unquestioned support to the British Raj. For the genesis, activities and propaganda, see R. C. Majumdar, *History of The Freedom Movement in India*, Vol.2 (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1963), pp.387-97.

⁵⁰ Ian Talbot, *op.cit.*, p.104.

⁵¹ Satya M. Ram, *Punjabi Heroic Tradition 1900-1947* (n.d), p.116.

⁵² Ian Talbot, *op.cit.*, p.85.

⁵³ Qalb-i-Abid, *op.cit.*, p.4.

per cent could be nominated.⁵⁴ Due to enlargement of legislatures in eight provinces, Punjab legislature reached to a total of ninety-three members.⁵⁵ This figure included seventy-one elected and twenty-two nominated members of the Legislative Council.⁵⁶ The Montague-Chelmsford Reforms proved to be a watershed in sharpening political consciousness, and for advancing political process in the province,⁵⁷ as it not only enlarged the legislature but also increased the elected element of the legislature. The number of elected members was increased to a nine times greater than that of what was given in the Minto-Morley Reforms.⁵⁸ The Muslims of the province being a majority community got fifty per cent representation in legislature in accordance with the Lucknow Pact.⁵⁹ The nature of communal relations in the Punjab cannot be gauged exclusively from the religious trends. It consisted of a wider, complex network of social, political and economic relations. For instance, the issue of boycott of shops of a rival community had economic, religious and social causes at the same time. Thus, it is clear that the communal relations were the result of the interplay of different forces and motives for a specific act by a religious community.

The year 1906 was of extreme importance in the chronology of Muslim separatism in South Asia. That was the year when a separate Muslim political organization, the All India Muslim League (AIML), was formed at Dacca. Since the Punjab was an area inhabited by communities having different religions, cultures, traditions and different sources, the interests of these groups also varied. So the natural out come of this situation was that each one of these groups needed a separate political organization to convey their demands to the government. Muslim backwardness in Punjab was, in the view of the leaders like Sir Muhammad Shafi, definitely caused by the absence of such an organization.⁶⁰ Thus, a branch of the Punjab Provincial Muslim League was established in 1907. One of the key aims of the new organization was to safeguard the political interests of the Muslim community of the Punjab.⁶¹ In its first annual session it had on its agenda issues like job

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.32.

⁵⁵ Zarina Salamat, *The Punjab in 1920s* (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 1997).

⁵⁶ Qalb-i-Abid, *op.cit.*, p.32.

⁵⁷ Zarina Salamat, *op.cit.*, p.141.

⁵⁸ Qalb-i-Abid, *op.cit.*

⁵⁹ Zarina Salamat, *op.cit.*, p.44.

⁶⁰ Ikram Ali Malik, *A Book of Readings on the Punjab 1799-1947* (Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, 1970), p.266.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.268.

quotas for the Muslims, and development of the Islamic literature to promote national spirit among Muslim community.⁶²

The first annual session of the Muslim League vehemently supported the issue of separate electorates and argued that in case joint electorates were imposed, Muslims would be under represented in major cities of Punjab. The session was unanimous in supporting the Land Alienation Act (1901), an issue of direct concern to the urban Hindus. Punjabi language, however it was argued, was being given 'undue importance' – a direct attack on Sikh sensibilities on the issues.⁶³

The Punjab Muslim League's demand for separate electorates for Muslims was not ill founded as the electoral contest essentially was on communal lines. The complaints of Muslim under-representation or the split of Muslim vote were galore.⁶⁴ The problem of under representation of the Muslims in the Muslim-majority area had created the same kind of protectionism, seen at play in Muslim-minority provinces like the U.P. Thus, the attempts to bring the Congress and the Muslim League closer at the central level by politicians like Muhammad Ali Jinnah were viewed with suspicion and unease by the Punjab's loyalist politicians like Sir Mohammadd Shafi.

In that context the Lucknow Pact of 1916 proved to be a turning point and caused a split in Provincial Muslim League and the AIML. The provincial chapter openly accused the central body of leaving the path of moderation and indeed dubbed it as the 'Lucknow League', thus, contesting its claim of representing all Muslims in India.⁶⁵

By 1918 the disenchanted Muslims in the province formed the Punjab Provincial Muslim Association. The new organization was different form of All India Muslim League because it wanted Muslims, in their capacity as a separate community, to get government jobs and political appointments, something the later was not doing.⁶⁶ But the Muslim demand for special or separate political representation was not uncontested. A strong segment of Hindus not only opposed the Muslim's demands but found Punjab Hindu Sabha on 16 December 1906 at Lahore. The organization from the very beginning adopted communal line and opposed Muslims demand for separate representation by rejecting the Muslim claims of historic and political importance. Secondly, it also rejected the Land Alienation Act and questioned the

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.274.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.281.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.294-95.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.312.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.371.

policy of giving job quotas to the Muslims.⁶⁷ These along with other demands like imposition of Hindi, practice of Ayurvedic system of medicine, protection of cow and need to write history of 'Hindu Period' were more forcefully stated in the October 1909 Hindu Conference organized by the Sabha.⁶⁸

In Punjab, even the Indian National Congress was a Hindu body for all practical purposes. The members of Hindu Sabha often used the district branch offices of Congress for their propaganda.⁶⁹ In fact, in a statement of the Punjab Provincial Congress Committee in June 1909, there were the echoes of the demands by the Hindu Sabha. It demanded that in case religion is the basis of representation in the province, their representation must be equal to that of the Muslims.⁷⁰ The same year, the Hindu Sabha presented a memorial to the Viceroy, which, in addition to all the above-mentioned demands, rejected the Muslim claims of separate identity. It argued that the local Muslims were descendents of the Hindus. Furthermore, it stated in no uncertain terms that the original inhabitants of India were Hindus.⁷¹

In the meanwhile, new trends were emerging in the Punjab to socially boycott other communities. Muslims were getting agitated over the establishment of shops of *jhatka* (non-kosher) meat in mixed localities. The Hindus, traditionally, had no objection to eating *halal* meat prepared by the Muslims, and now their insistence on having separate meat shops for Hindus had a definite communal ring to it.⁷²

Muslims responded to these moves by opening their own shops of the commodities that were traditionally considered to be reserved for the Hindus.⁷³ Similarly names of shops like 'Hindu Tailor Master' were pointer towards the future. To add hatred, were the reports that the Muslims and the Hindus disagreed on the usage of shared resources like well water in common localities.⁷⁴

Thus, what we had in the Punjab in the early years of the twentieth century were communities struggling to define their separate place in the colonial scheme of things. The quest for securing

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.344-45.

⁶⁸ 'Partition Punjab' in, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress: 58th Session* (Aligarh: Centre of Advanced Study in History, 1998), p.444.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.445.

⁷⁰ Ikram Ali Malik, *A Book of Reading on the History of the Punjab: 1799-1947* (Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, 1970), p.346.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp.358-59.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.366.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.373.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.377-79.

concessions for one's community and increased mobilization of individuals were changing the concepts of time and space of isolated communities. New and wider communal identities, which went beyond the immediate kinship and locale, were taking shape. No wonder, communal relations on the eve of the greatest episode of Hindu-Muslim cooperation, Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movement, were in a state of flux.

It would be expedient to explore briefly the nature of inter-communal relations just before the Khilafat and the Non-Cooperation Movements. The 1916 Lucknow Pact though an important step towards communal understanding had deeply divided the Muslims. Contemporary commentators on Muslim affairs saw three clear divisions in the community between:

1. Those who opposed any reforms.
2. Those who strived for the Muslim rights only.
3. Those that supported the 1916 Pact with certain reservations.⁷⁵

Between the later two, there was a war of words regarding the 'Muslim first' or 'Indian first' issue. For instance *Vakil*, a Muslim paper, had to say:

Mohammedans are nationalists in true sense of the word, but they cannot forget that their interests are all embracing. They have to live in India, but have also kept their eye on affairs in the whole world, for they as compared to other Indian communities are more deeply connected with it.⁷⁶

Thus, it was not surprising that All India Muslim League statements criticizing the Muslims first and Indians afterwards did not go unchallenged.⁷⁷ There was a definite sense of persecution among the Muslims, many of whom openly said that if they were unjustly treated under the British rule what will be their status under 'Home Rule'. They were convinced that the Muslim culture would be threatened in such a case.⁷⁸ This fear was reinforced by the decline of the Muslim political power in the subcontinent, as one paper noted:

...our authority was paramount in India half a century ago... but what is left of us now? We are destitute of authority and education and have no aptitude for trade.

⁷⁵ *The Punjab*, 1918, *Selection from the Native Newspapers* published in 1918-1920, NDC. Henceforth as NNPP.

⁷⁶ *Vakil*, 19 December 1917, NNPP.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Rain Magazine*, December 1917, NNPP.

We are alien to industries and arts, agricultural estates have passed out of our hands, and we have lost our character....⁷⁹

However, it was not all. It was feared that the Muslims would endure the same fate as the Muslims of Spain, Portugal and Sicily, if the situation was not rectified.⁸⁰ The Muslim insecurity was finding expression in different forms throughout the province. The urge to define a religious sphere distinct from other communities was only one manifestation of this fear. There were demands ranging from the establishment of a *waqf*⁸¹ department to the demands by students to say *azan* and prayers in congregation.⁸² This attitude was reinforced by the perceived hinduising tendencies of the Congress. As one Lahore based Muslim newspaper highlighted the Hindu point of view:

Swaraj means that we should prefer India and its politics to our religion and nationality. And what constitutes Indian politics? It implies humbly bowing our heads before the majority, reposing unbounded faith in educational ability and the divine authority of the sacred *Brahmins*, promoting the cause of Hindus, the national language (of Hindus), by putting aside our own civilization and progress, and merging our existence in that of Indian people.⁸³

The paper went on to describe the competition between the two religious groups for official patronage as an 'educated' and 'civilized riot'. In these circumstances the warnings that, the Muslims in their enthusiasm for unity, should not blind themselves to community's special interests came as no surprise.⁸⁴

For the Hindus however, this real or imagined sense of persecution was no less. The Hindus were a minority in Punjab. Punjab, therefore, was a fertile ground for Hindu communalism and Hindu organizations. According to some Hindu estimates 7,000, Hindus converted to Islam annually in Punjab. In a system where numbers were becoming increasingly important this was perceived to be a substantial loss.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ *Al-Munir*, 1 September 1918, NNPP.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Paisa Akhbar*, 10 October 1918, NNPP.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 30 January 1918, NNPP.

⁸³ *Aftab*, 10 January 1918, NNPP.

⁸⁴ *Municipal Gazette*, 5 & 12 March 1918 NNPP.

⁸⁵ *Arorbans Gazette*, 24 January 1918, NNPP.

These concerns were guided, as much by a sense of competition with the Muslims as they were by the quest for a broad Hindu identity. While criticizing conversions of the Hindus, there was an indirect admission that the cause was the stratification in Hindu society.⁸⁶ There was a feeling that the Hindus, as a community, had become 'lifeless'. The Muslim 'sense of nationality' was cited as an example, who allegedly 'exaggerated' the accesses against them. The Hindu leaders were admonished for taking up politics while neglecting national feelings of the Hindus.⁸⁷

These attempts of redefining and outlining the Hindu sphere were coeval with attempt to create the myth of a 'golden past'. The teachings of Dayanand were propagated emphasizing that Indian golden past was not the period when the Hindus were forcibly subjected to Islam i.e., during the Muslim rule. The golden era period existed in the *Vedic* past when the 'Aryans held sovereign control over India'.⁸⁸ The natural corollary to this historicist premise was that the Aryans would never have declined if they had followed their 'true religion'.⁸⁹

These contradictions and tensions were exhibited in every day life of common Punjabi as well. For instance, a cricket match between MAO Club Aligarh and Hindu Sports Club Amritsar turned into a Hindu-Muslim issue.⁹⁰

In every-day communication, attempts were made to sideline Urdu. At the same time cow protection had assumed a peculiar symbolic significance as one paper noted, it was no longer a 'religious question' but a 'grave political and administrative problem'.⁹¹

Muslims were not the only victims of Hindu animosity, Arya Samajists were making hectic efforts to bracket Sikhs as a branch of Hinduism. Sikh's resentments against this move finally found expression in the publication of a booklet by Kahan Singh, the Chief Minister of Nabha, with self-explaining title '*Hum Hindu Nahin Hain*' (we are not Hindus).⁹² The Sikhs were further alienated from the Hindus due to the attempts by Arya Samaj to cultivate Sikh Jats and launching a vicious propaganda that Granth was a collection of sayings of saints and fakirs with very few original quotes from the real Sikh *gurus*. Sikh leaders

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Bulletin*, 1 February 1918, NNPP.

⁸⁸ *Arya Gazette*, Rishibodh No.7, March 1918, NNPP.

⁸⁹ *Milap*, January 1918, NNPP.

⁹⁰ *Vakil*, 10 April 1918, NNPP.

⁹¹ *Punjab Chronicle*, 19 January 1918, NNPP.

⁹² Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol. 2, 1839-1964 (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1966), pp.146-47.

realized soon that for Dayanand, Granth was a book of 'secondary importance' and *gurus* were 'men of little learning'.⁹³ Thus, the Sikhs along with the Christians and the Muslims demanded the suppression of Arya propaganda hurting the feelings of all the three communities. These attempts for defining a distinct religious identity accompanied the demand for a separate political representation,⁹⁴ a demand opposed by the Muslim press as it would bolster Hindus in an indirect way, was vaguely pointing towards the events to come.⁹⁵

The Sikh-Muslim confrontation was not restricted to the political arena only rather it found expression in every day life as well. One such instance was the protest against Jadunath Sircar's historical account of Emperor Aurangzeb's reign (1658-1707) in the university syllabus. It was alleged that it contained disparaging remarks concerning the Sikh *gurus*. Ultimately, the book was removed from the syllabus.⁹⁶ An equally important, though unrelated development was the attack on Bhai Arjan Singh, religious guide of the *maharajas* of Patiala, Farid Kot and Jind for his alleged blasphemy against Lord Krishen in his poem 'Krishna Bhano'.⁹⁷ These developments reflect the fragile nature of relationship between three major communities—Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. Although the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movements (March 1920) attempted to bring disparate communities together, the unity in their ranks even at the height of these movements remained superficial.

Two important developments, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre by the imperial machinery in 1919 and the pro-*khilafat* sentiments brought about significant changes not only in Punjab but had its bearing on national political scene as well. The sheer magnitude of Jallianwala Bagh tragedy, resulting in the killings of innocent people, helped different communities to move closer to face the British juggernaut. Consequently union between the Hindus and the Muslims was very much in evidence during the Lahore strike that followed the tragedy.⁹⁸ At the same time the defeat of Turkey in the First World War and plans of the Allied forces to divide the Turkish territories had aroused the Muslims sentiments in India. In order to express their solidarity with Turkish people and launched a concerted campaign from the restoration of *khilafat*, the Muslim leaders in India gave institutional shape to the pro-*khilafat*

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.139.

⁹⁴ *Loyal Gazette*, 9 June 1918, NNPP.

⁹⁵ *Vakil*, 20 July 1918, NNPP.

⁹⁶ *Desh*, 9 February 1918, NNPP.

⁹⁷ *Ittihad*, 25 January 1918, NNPP.

⁹⁸ *Paisa Akhbar*, 15 April 1919, NNPP.

sentiments by forming the Khilafat Committee in March 1919. Six months later, the Muslim League Council also organized an All India Muslim Conference at Lucknow. The most important feature of this meeting was the formation of All India Khilafat Committee and decision to observe 17 October 1919 as the Khilafat Day. Hindu-Muslim amity was quite discernable even the Hindu extremist leaders like Swami Shranddanand attended the Delhi meeting of All India Khilafat Committee.

In Punjab, the communal unity touched to new heights when Hindu leaders were allowed to visit the Badshahi Mosque.⁹⁹ Local press reported, with a degree of pride the same year, that there were no disturbances on *Bakr* Eid, an occasion on which riots were common on the issue of cow killing. This new found spirit of unity also raised expectations. As *Siyasat*, while countering the Hindu objections to the building of mosque in an Amritsar locality, wrote:

Our Hindu brothers' objection is that there is a temple close to the site and the construction of the proposed mosque therefore calculated to wound their religious susceptibilities. We fail, however, to understand the reason for the conduct, when they are willing enough to raise shouts of *Allah-ho-Akbar*, to grieve with Mohammedan brothers on the Khilafat Day, to wear *Fez* and work as volunteers with the tazia processions, and to offer water, *sherbet* and... like the Mohammedans on such occasions – may drink out of the same glass with them. Have not the Mohammedans, who can utter the cries of 'Sri Ram Chandar' and 'Maharani Sita' and render every service (including the carrying of jhankis) to their Hindu brothers during the Dosshra, the right to build a mosque near a temple, having common walls.¹⁰⁰

However, voices were raised to warn the Muslims against these trends and a segment of Muslim society feared that the imitational politics, would take away the 'communal' as well as 'religious' rights of the Muslims. The 'struggle for education' was replaced by 'political cries' and Muslims were giving up their 'communal sentiments',¹⁰¹ but the emerging political climate was strongly in favour of evolving a joint strategy. Consequently, the Congress, the All India Muslim League, the All India Khilafat Conference, the Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind held their

⁹⁹ *Paigham-i-Sulah*, 10 September 1919, NNPP.

¹⁰⁰ *Siyasat*, 27 October 1919, NNPP.

¹⁰¹ *Paisa Akhbar*, 9 October 1919, NNPP.

sessions at Amritsar. To pave the way for Hindu Muslim alliance even hard-line Hindu leaders like Lajpat Rai started supporting the Khilafat cause. Hakim Ajmal Khan, in his presidential speech at the Muslim League session, went to the extent of proposing abandonment of cow sacrifice to appease the Hindus. This was followed by a formal resolution – a move seen to have more ‘social significance’ than political by Hindu commentators as increased social interaction was more long lasting than the political alliance.¹⁰²

But this new found Hindu-Muslim rapprochement was viewed with a degree of cynicism in some quarters and it was feared that the unity was but a ‘passing phase’. Unity, one magazine argued, must be ‘on terms of equality and not based on the supposed or real political superiority or importance of the one and the inferiority of the other’.¹⁰³ An article published on 26 March 1920 in *Watan* titled ‘The Cow’ criticized the All India Muslim League resolution and attributed the Hindu-Muslim unity to the brutal actions of ‘Dyer and Dwyer’. The author saw in the moves a sinister plot to make Muslims ‘destroy their own religion’.¹⁰⁴

The events in India, however, moved at a fast pace during Bengal Khilafat Conference held in Calcutta in February 1920. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad eloquently drew a distinction between those non-Muslims (like the British) who had invaded Muslim territory and those who were at peace with them (like the Hindus). While he favoured friendship with the later, the former were not to be trusted. This was the basis of the *Tark-i-Muwalat* (literally means end of friendship) or the Non-Cooperation Movement.¹⁰⁵

On 19 March 1920 another Khilafat Day was observed. It was followed by the announcement of launching a four-stage programme of non-cooperation with the government. The first stage was to be the giving up of the titles awarded by the British; the second, withdrawal from the government services; the third, resignations from the military and the police, and, fourth stage, non-payment of taxes. However, bringing the Hindus into the mainstream still required something more than the *khilafat* issue. So Lajpat Rai, a renowned Hindu leader

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Vedia Magazine*, May 1920, NNPP.

¹⁰⁴ *Watan*, 26 March 1920, NNPP.

¹⁰⁵ For details see B.R. Nanda, *Gandhi: Pan-Islamism, Imperialism and Nationalism in India* (Bombay, OUP, 1989), pp.214-15; see also M. Naeem Qurashi, *Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics: A Study of the Khilafat Movement, 1918-1924* (Boston: Brill, 1999), pp.236-37.

advocated the Punjab atrocities in the campaign agenda.¹⁰⁶ It was this blending of *khilafat* with the Punjab issue along with promises of strict non-violence, which won the Hindus' support for the *khilafat* cause.

For the political elite, the movement was a tool to mobilize the masses against the government. In that respect Maulana Shaukat Ali's departure from the traditional theocratic positions was interesting. For instance, in a speech in Surat he voiced, that *Imam* Gandhi had appeared in the place of *Imam* Mehdi. These assertions did not go well in the Punjab where a Muslim newspaper was quick to point out that Gandhi cannot be an *Imam* because of his religion. So even at the height of the Hindu-Muslim rapprochement, the attempts to blur religious differences were fiercely resisted.¹⁰⁷

Even within Congress, there were strong dissenting voices against the Non-Cooperation Movement. It was only with the support of Gandhi and a last minute switch over by Motilal Nehru which won the day for the proponents of the Khilafat Movement at the special conference in September 1920 against the alliance of Lajpat Rai, Madan Malviya and other Hindu leaders. This victory paved the way for the inclusion of religious groups from Punjab like the Sikh League. Punjabi countryside at that time was brewing with discontent as the disbanded soldiery was returning home to face crop failure, plague and diseases.¹⁰⁸

Hindu leadership realized that these alliances were transitory and ephemeral in nature and the cause of unity amongst different communal groups was not a new found confidence in Indian nationalism rather it was purely religious as far as the Muslims were concerned. So the sense of distinctiveness among religious communities was still something to be countered. For instance, Lajpat Rai wrote on 12 March 1921 that: 'It is necessary that in order to obtain Sawaraj, they (people) should rise above the idea of separate nationality.... We should form one nation in India abandoning all ideas of our being separate nationalities'.¹⁰⁹

In fact such calls were need of the hour, as even in the era of supposed communal harmony, tension was still prevalent all around particularly in Punjab, reportedly, Muslims were not allowed to say *azan* in some areas of Gurdaspur.¹¹⁰ While the resolution by Lahore municipality against cow- sacrifice was seen to have done more harm to

¹⁰⁶ M. Naeem Qurashi, *ibid.*, p.269.

¹⁰⁷ *Paisa Akhbar*, 12 November 1920, NNPP.

¹⁰⁸ M. Naeem Qurashi, *op.cit.*, p.269.

¹⁰⁹ *Bande Matram*, 12 March 1921, NNPP.

¹¹⁰ *Siyasat*, 18 February 1921, NNPP.

communal unity than good.¹¹¹ The fragility of the communal amity can be gauged from the following excerpt:

...While Hindus are supporting the Khilafat on its merits as a cause, just and fair, they expect that the Mohammedans will also deal with question of cow protection on its merits... Khilafat may win or Khilafat may fail, the cow question may remain open till it is settled to the satisfaction of the Hindus.¹¹²

In these circumstances Mopilla rebellion of 1921-22 in the Malabar region, radically changed the drift of events. The attacks on Hindus convinced their co-religionists on the all India level that the threat of pan-Islamism was real and looming large on their heads. Although it can be said that Mopilla revolt had 'no widespread communal repercussions',¹¹³ yet politically it had adversely affected the tone and tenor of the Non-Cooperation Movement.

By the end of 1921, there was mounting tension between the government and the activists of Non-Co-operation Movement and it was fast moving towards confrontation. Gandhi threatened the government to launch mass Civil Disobedience Movement from 1 February 1922. However, the murder of the entire police station staff in Chaura Chori on 6 February 1922 changed the whole scenario as the working committee of the Congress in its meeting held on 11 February suspended the Non-Cooperation Movement until stricter control could be imposed on volunteers. The withdrawal of Congress from the movement had devastating impact on the movement and Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind in its March session criticized Gandhi and demanded that the Khilafat Movement's leadership should be handed over to the Muslim League. Prominent All India Khilafat Conference leaders like M. A. Ansari and Ajmal Khan tried to maintain the Congress-Khilafat alliance in the face of communal tensions which resurfaced again.

Keeping in view the peculiar conditions of the province,¹¹⁴ the

¹¹¹ *Ar-Rai*, 25 February 1921, NNPP.

¹¹² *Liberal*, 25 May 1921, NNPP.

¹¹³ M. Naeem Qurashi, *op.cit.*, p.421.

¹¹⁴ Punjab's population was pre-dominantly rural but was cut across into different communities. Although Muslims were in majority, the combined Sikh and Hindu community was falling very close to the Muslim percentage. Therefore, as excluding Muslims from the consideration of any future set-up was not possible, considering only a Muslim dominated Punjab was also not looking much workable. Here came in the rural nature of province to rescue the British out of this troubled province.

Table: II

Year of Census	Urban Population of Punjab in % age	Rural Population of Punjab in % age
1881	11.9	88.1
1891	10.7	89.3
1901	10.6	89.4
1911	9.8	90.2
1921	10.3	89.7

British decided to establish an organized political party in Punjab to promote and protect their interests in provincial politics. Their rapport and friendship with the rural elite of the province helped them in achieving their desired goal and paved the way for creation of the Unionist Party.¹¹⁵ The party's success in the province depended on a careful balancing of the interests of Hindu Jats and Muslim landlords. The British in this regard were more than willing to help.

The brain behind the formation of Unionist Party was a lawyer, Mian Fazl-i-Husain, who had been earlier involved in the activities of the Punjab Congress and later Punjab Muslim League. He was of the view that the special political arithmetic of Punjab demanded inter-communal cooperation, as no single community commanded an absolute majority in the province.¹¹⁶ Although Muslims were a majority community in the province, yet under the Congress-League Scheme of Reforms, known as Lucknow Pact of 1916, they had sacrificed their majority position in the Punjab Legislature to secure weightage for the Muslim-minority areas. As the sub clause 4 of the clause 1, regarding the Provincial Legislative Councils, speaks, 'Adequate provisions should be made for the representation of the important minorities by elections, and the Muslims should be represented through special electorates on the Provincial Legislative Councils in the following proportions:

Punjab---- one half of the elected Indian members

U.P----- 30 per cent

Bengal---- 40 per cent

Bihar----- 25 per cent

¹¹⁵ Raghuvendra Tanwar, comments about the creation of Unionist Party that 'The Unionist Party was in fact born at the top and had little to do in its origin with the 'Pains of labour' and the ground realities'. *Politics of Sharing Power* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1999), p.53.

¹¹⁶ See G. Allana, *Pakistan Movement Historical Documents* (Lahore: Islamic Book Service, 1967), p.26.

C.P----- 15 per cent

Madras----15 per cent

Bombay---one-third

Consequently, he founded the Unionist Party¹¹⁷ in 1923, which since its inception dominated the provincial scene till 1946. The Unionist Party was different from the other political parties functioning in British India, as it was composed of different and in principle, belligerent communities. Throughout its tenure, it functioned more as a loose coalition of the Muslims, the Hindus and the Sikh landowners and cultivators, than as a political party in the modern sense. It mainly mustered support from big landlords and peasants and appealed to the Hindus of eastern Punjab and Muslims and Sikhs of southern and western Punjab alike. Muslim landlords dominated the party but some rural Hindus and Sikhs also played significant and important role in its development, particularly Chaudhary Chhotu Ram's¹¹⁸ oratory provided a populist appeal to the party's platform.¹¹⁹ However in 1920's, parties and movements seeking greater religious identification in politics strongly attacked the dominance of agriculturist tribes in politics¹²⁰ keeping Unionists under assault from Sikhs, involved in Gurdwara Reform Movement,¹²¹ Hindu Sabha leaders and Muslims of the Ahrars.¹²²

In early 1920's, emerging socio-political changes awakened the Sikh community. The Sikhs organized themselves to protect and promote their political rights and formed a political party, Akali Dal,¹²³ which was

¹¹⁷ Before founding Punjab Nationalist Unionist Party in 1923, Mian Fazl-i-Husain had also founded Muslim League in February 1906, nine months before the All India Muslim League's inception and also Mohammedan Rural Party in 1921. See Raghuvendra Tanwar, *op.cit.*, p.28.

¹¹⁸ Sir Chhotu Ram originally contributed to the Arya Samaj creed; he joined Indian National Congress in 1916 but resigned in 1921 because of conflict over the issue of Non-Cooperation Movement. Then he founded Unionist Party with Mian Fazl-i-Husain in 1923.

¹¹⁹ Waheed Ahmad (ed.), *Diary and Notes of Mian Fazl-i-Husain* (Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, 1977), p.188.

¹²⁰ David Gillmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1988), p.37.

¹²¹ B.N Chopra, *Encyclopedia of India* (Delhi: Agam Prakashan, 1988), p.156.

¹²² Iftikhar Haider Malik, *Sikander Hayat Khan, A Political Biography* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1985), p.55.

¹²³ Dr. Kirpal Singh (ed.), *Select Documents on Partition of Punjab 1947* (Delhi: National Book Shop, 1991), p.4. Also see P.N Chopra, *op.cit.*, p.9.

in fact the outcome of the Gurdwara Reform Movement of 1920's. The Akalis were radical Sikhs who had started a movement to wrest control of the Sikh temples or Gurdwaras from Hindu priests.¹²⁴ The Akali Dal, since its inception, emphasized the need to maintain distinct socio-cultural identity of the Sikhs and to protect the interests of the community.

Akali politics witnessed distinct changes since its formation in 1925 till 1947. In the beginning, the major demand of the Akalis was related to communal representation and weightage for the Sikhs in the Punjab and central legislatures. The Akalis expressed their dissatisfaction with the Nehru Report,¹²⁵ but after having assurances of fulfilling Sikh demands from prominent Hindu leaders in December 1929,¹²⁶ a close collaboration began between the Akali Dal and the Congress. The first expression of this collaboration started in early 1930's, when the Akali Dal joined the Congress sponsored 'Civil Disobedience Movement'.¹²⁷ Despite their close collaboration, the Akalis continued to maintain their separate identity and in the first session of the Round Table Conference in 1930,¹²⁸ demanded thirty per cent representation for the Sikhs in the Punjab Legislature and administration.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Patrick French, *Liberty or Death: India's Journey to Independence and Division* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997), p.331.

¹²⁵ K.L. Tuteja, 'Sikhs and the Congress (1930-1940)', in Paul Wallace and Surendra Chopra (ed.), *Political Dynamics of Punjab* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1981), p.97.

¹²⁶ To appease Sikhs, Indian National Congress held its 44th annual session in Lahore, from 29 to 31 December 1929. See K.K. Aziz, *A Chronology of Muslim India 1700-1947* (Lahore: Ferozsons Pvt. Ltd., 1977), p.258.

¹²⁷ K.L. Tuteja, *Sikh Politics in the Punjab*, p.149-150.

¹²⁸ Round Table Conference opened in London in Nov 1930. The conference acknowledged the possibility that India might break up into a Muslim and a Hindu India, and latter in to a number of states.

¹²⁹ The demand did not seem legitimate. Sikh demand for representation in Punjab legislature and provincial services was for thirty per cent share, while in the same years, Muslims were concerned over about representation of Sikhs in regard to their population percentage in the province. In a letter to Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan, dated 27 April 1933, Sir Fazl-i-Husain noted that Sikhs form just thirteen per cent of population of the province while they represent eighteen per cent in legislature and nineteen per cent in services, whereas Muslims, forming 66 per cent of population, occupied only 51 per cent representation, both in legislature and services. See Dr. Waheed Ahmad (ed.), *Letters of Mian Fazl-i-Husain* (Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, 1976), p.263.

An All Parties Sikh Conference held in July 1932,¹³⁰ rejected the Communal Award of 1932, following the decision of Congress.¹³¹ The emergence of Muslim separatism and Muslim League's demand for a separate homeland for Muslims further increased the cooperation between Akali Dal and Congress.

Since its inception the provincial Muslim League faced difficulties due to strong differences with its central leadership and parent organization besides domination of Muslim leaders in Unionist Party, making it difficult for Muslim League to make headway in Punjab.¹³² The Unionist Party at the same time was also not free of problems arising out of the special arithmetic of the province and existence of stratification on communal lines. Some reforms introduced by Mian Fazl-i-Husain, benefiting the Muslims, portended a threat to the Hindu interests, who were dominating the services, education, professions and local government institutions. Hindus took these reforms as an assault on their traditional hold. As a result the first reformed council was divided on purely communal lines.¹³³ The Hindu members of the council started a movement to oust the Muslim Minister of Province. The pro-Hindu press voiced Hindu grievances strongly as is evident from the following: 'The situation created by the strained relations between Hindus and Muslims had given a fresh impetus to the pro-Hindu press in its campaign against Husain [Minister of the Punjab]'.¹³⁴ The *Daily Dush* wrote on 8 June 1923: 'the policy of Mian Fazl-i-Husain is based on injustice and inequality'. The same paper in its issue of 15 July accused Fazl-i-Husain of 'relegating the Punjab Hindus to an insignificant position'. Another Hindu *Daily Milap*, pledged for a Hindu-Sikh-Christian unity against Fazl-i-Husain so that 'the government should realize that showing favour to Muslims is not the best policy'. The *Milap* alleged that the local government in the Punjab was in fact a Muslim rule in the province. It warned the Muslims of the Punjab of the consequences of supporting Fazl-i-Husain and threatened the minister with dire consequences. The paper also criticized the Khilafat and the Congress

¹³⁰ D. Singh, *Akali Politics in the Punjab*, p.18.

¹³¹ S. Qalb-i-Abid, *op.cit.*, p.157.

¹³² Unionist Party not only had a strong control over Punjab, but its leader Mian Fazl-i-Husain, with the support of Mian Muhammad Shafi, formed All India Muslim Conference to represent the Muslim majority areas' interest. They used this organization as a springboard to challenge All India Muslim League at all India level. This shows how much the situation in Punjab was unfavorable for Muslim League.

¹³³ Qalb-i-Abid, *op.cit.*, p.71.

¹³⁴ Emphasis added.

Party for not passing resolutions against Fazl-i-Husain. The *Akash Bani* blamed both Fazl-i-Husain and Sir Syed for 'alienating' Muslims from Hindus. It warned the Muslims that they would not be able to get away with this policy; and that a foreign government was not in a position to take the side of the Muslims for long. The paper charged that 'the Muslims had a mission to crush Hindus...'.¹³⁵

Although the Reforms Act of 1919 can be regarded as a watershed for increasing political process in Punjab, it was in fact a symbol of administrative brilliance as it pretended to give a lot, but it gave only to those who already had been chosen to act as administrative intermediaries for the colonial regime and that was the urban and rural elites. Thus, the Act was essentially only a part of a pre-planned political-cum administrative step. It was, therefore, obvious, and not a coincidence that the first Legislative Council, elected under the provisions of this Act, was almost an assembly of rural and urban elites.¹³⁶ The legislature was pre-dominantly rural because while distributing the seats between urban and rural, government had shown its bias in favour of rural interests. Out of 64 general constituencies, 51 were given to the Punjab's rural areas.¹³⁷ Only 15 out of elected members could have been regarded as town men, and even 10 of them were landowners.¹³⁸ Muslims had 35 members, and as it is noted above, the members had come from the elites; they joined together to form the 'Rural bloc',¹³⁹ later renamed as the Punjab National Unionist Party.¹⁴⁰ Rural bloc, the steel frame of the Unionist Party, was the brainchild of the barrister Fazl-i-Husain. The bloc was initially together only in a sense that most of them were from rural Punjab and had common vested interests, chiefly the preservation of the existing economic and political power structure in rural Punjab. In a 'Loyal Council',¹⁴¹ British wanted a group or a party to further their interests. Therefore, the Rural bloc and later the Unionist Party enjoyed the support and the goodwill of the

¹³⁵ Qalb-i-Abid, *op.cit.*, p.78.

¹³⁶ Raghuvendra Tanwar, *op.cit.*, p.26.

¹³⁷ Qalb-i-Abid, *op.cit.*, p.33.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.33.

¹³⁹ Azim Husain, *Mian Fazl-i-Husain, A Political Biography* (Bombay: Longmans, 1946), p.125.

¹⁴⁰ Raghuvendra Tanwar, *op.cit.*, p.26.

¹⁴¹ Raghuvendra Tanwar in *Politics of Sharing Power*, p.43 cites that 'the Council that was constituted was in keeping with what the British rulers had expected, loyal and obedient'.

British administration. This support was generously provided,¹⁴² partly to establish a loyal, effective and influential buffer between the administration and the masses, and also to keep the peasantry of rural Punjab within satisfied control,¹⁴³ because a large section of the British Indian Army was recruited from Punjab.¹⁴⁴ Besides these objectives,¹⁴⁵ British needed to keep the Punjab, the sword arm of India, away from the deep penetration of political parties functioning at all India level. It was for the policies of the Unionist Party under patronage of the British government that Congress and AIML could not become popular in the province, even as late as 1937. Muslim League's influence in the Punjab was so limited that it encountered great difficulty even in finding candidates who were willing to oppose the Unionists.

However, Muslim League and Congress' prominent leaders addressed mass rallies during the elections 1937 campaigns, while the Unionist Party adopted a low-key approach. They did not formally contest election from party's platform. They were not much active in the campaign because they were confident that the officials of the government were working for them.¹⁴⁶ As stated above, Unionists did not contest elections formally; it was only after the elections that they joined the Unionist Assembly Party. After the 1937 election, non-party members announced their allegiance to Unionist Assembly Party. At the final count, the Unionist Party managed to have 99 members out of the

¹⁴² British needed communal harmony in the province and The Unionist Party was the flag bearer of the same. Therefore British facilitated Unionists' victory in elections. In formation of constituencies, in awarding fiefs and even in appointing presiding officers for elections, British facilitated the Unionists to win over the support of masses. Sir Feroz Khan Noon in his book, *From Memory* (Islamabad: National Book Foundation, 1993), on page 39 has noted that 'Patwari, the Station House Officer and the Tehsildar exercised great influence over the farmer's vote in their areas'.

¹⁴³ As it has been noted above, Punjab was predominantly rural; therefore, it was considered that if peasantry could be controlled safely, the province would remain under complete control.

¹⁴⁴ Raghuvendra Tanwar, *op.cit.*, p.52.

¹⁴⁵ Shahabuddin in a letter, dated 23 January 1936, to Mian Fazl-i-Husain stated the following, as the objectives of Unionist Party: 'To provide equal facilities and opportunities to the backward classes and areas, to infuse the spirit of mutual goodwill, cooperation and tolerance and thus to prevent the creation, and settle amicably, when created, all religious, communal or social differences and disputes'. See Dr. Waheed Ahmad (ed.), *Letters of Mian Fazl-i-Husain* (Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, 1976), pp.484-85.

¹⁴⁶ *Civil and Military Gazette*, 14 October 1936.

house of 175, while Muslim League had succeeded on two seats. Realizing the vital position of the Punjab for the cause of Indian Muslims, Jinnah tried to establish foothold of the Muslim League in the province. He tried to gain the backing of the leading Muslim politicians of all the Muslim majority provinces, especially the Punjab. On the other hand, Unionists under the leadership of Sikandar Hayat were keen to stop the increasing influence of Congress in the province. This convergence of interests led to the Sikandar-Jinnah Pact of October 1937. According to the pact, Sikandar Hayat agreed to advise all the Muslim members of the Unionist Party to join the League. They were to form Punjab Muslim League Assembly Party, which had to obey the rules and regulations of the central and provincial parliamentary boards of the League.¹⁴⁷ Some Unionist leaders criticized Sikandar Hayat for agreeing to the pact, as from their point of view, it was aimed at enhancing the League's prestige in the province.¹⁴⁸ But Sikandar joined League merely to strengthen his ministry in the face of the threat from the Congress' 'Mass Contact Movement', which was launched in Punjab in April 1937.¹⁴⁹ As a quid pro quo Jinnah accepted Sikandar as the leader of the Punjab Muslim League.

Sikandar-Jinnah Pact did not abolish the rivalry between the Muslim League and the Unionist Muslims. Sikandar Hayat wanted complete powers in his hands, while senior leaders of Punjab Muslim League opposed him. Sikandar wanted to have a grip on the finances of League through his men, while Allama Iqbal and other senior leaders termed it as a plan to capture the League and then kill it. Dr. Iqbal was not ready to take the responsibility of handing over the League to Sikandar Hayat and his colleagues; rather his considered opinion was that the pact had damaged the prestige of the League in Punjab.¹⁵⁰

Unionist Party under leadership of Mian Fazl-i-Husain and Sikandar Hayat had succeeded in winning the support of Sikh land-owners who strengthened the party and to achieve the goal of communal harmony but after the passage of Lahore Resolution by Muslim League in 1940, the Khalsas had the second thoughts. The announcement of the

¹⁴⁷ Ian Talbot, *op.cit.*, p.89.

¹⁴⁸ S. Zaheer, *Light on the League-Unionist Conflict* (Bombay: n.p., 1944), p.19.

¹⁴⁹ M.A.H. Isphani, *Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah: As I Knew Him* (Karachi, Forward Publications Trust, 1966), p.54.

¹⁵⁰ Letter from Allama Iqbal to Jinnah on 10 November 1937, quoted in Shameem Hussain Kadri, *Creation of Pakistan* (Rawalpindi: Army Book Club, 1982), pp.122-23.

Cripps Mission¹⁵¹ further increased their uneasiness and with the intention to counter the Muslims, they began to raise the cry of Khalistan. But by that time the Sikhs had come out of the Congress' fold. Therefore, this situation demanded a Sikh-Unionist rapprochement.¹⁵² In July 1942 an All India Akali Conference was held at Vahila Kalan in Lyallpur district, in which a resolution demanding readjustment of the boundaries of Punjab was passed in the conference. Besides this, in June 1943, the working committee of Shiromani Akali Dal demanded the establishment of 'Azad Punjab'.¹⁵³ This new position of Sikhs further developed differences among various communities of the province.

The leader of Unionists, Sikandar Hayat, despite entering into a pact with the Muslim League, wanted communal harmony in the province to support the British in securing recruits for their war efforts, as the Second World War was being waged at that time. Akali leaders, such as Sampurang Singh had linked their support, for the British war effort with the Congress demand for independence.¹⁵⁴ Considering the importance of Sikhs for recruitment, Sikandar Hayat attempted to remedy the situation by publicly stressing that enlistment for war was in vital political interests of the Sikhs. Master Tara Singh, the leader of the Akalis, agreed with Sikandar's view, and quit Congress in September 1940.¹⁵⁵ This decision of Akalis antagonized Congress. Strained relations between Hindus and Sikh communities further deteriorated after Raj Gopal Acharya proposal,¹⁵⁶ which proved to be a wedge for separating Sikhs from Hindus. The proposal provided a chance for the establishment of a Muslim state in northwest and east of India.¹⁵⁷ However, this rift between Akalis and Congress was a blessing for Sikandar Hayat. It provided Sikhs and Unionists with an opportunity to enter in an alliance. In June 1942, Sikandar Hayat entered in an

¹⁵¹ Parshotam Mehra, *A Dictionary of Modern Indian History 1707-1947* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp.74-6.

¹⁵² Qalb-i-Abid, *op.cit.*, p.252.

¹⁵³ Gurbachen Singh and Lal Singh Gaini, *The Ideal of the Sikh State* (Lahore: Lahore Book Shop, 1946), p.10.

¹⁵⁴ S. Oren, *The Sikhs, Congress and the Unionists*, p.405.

¹⁵⁵ Qalb-i-Abid, *op.cit.*, p.252.

¹⁵⁶ Raj Gopal Acharya Formula, also known as 'C.R. Formula' was mooted in July 1944, to break the Congress-League impasse. The formula had provision about giving Muslims a separate state in their majority areas. As the formula neglected the Sikh community's future, they were concerned over it.

¹⁵⁷ A.S. Narang, *Democracy, Development and Distortion* (New Delhi: Gintanjali Publishing House, 1986), p.65.

agreement with Baldev Singh who owed his seat in the Unionist coalition to the backing he received from the Akali Dal.¹⁵⁸ The Sikandar-Baldev Pact¹⁵⁹ was mainly concerned with social and religious issues. Still it included an important political clause as well. The clause was about the increase in Sikh representation in those departments in which it fell below the fixed communal proportion of twenty per cent.¹⁶⁰ The Muslim League considered this clause as discriminatory against the Muslims of the province. For them it was an anti-Muslim clause. Muslim League's anxiety was also heightened with the Akalis' cry for 'Azad Punjab'.¹⁶¹ However, it became evident from the proceedings of the Simla Conference of 1945 that the Akalis had no problem with the Congress' demand for independence as such.¹⁶²

The major sources of conflict and causes of antagonism between Hindus and the Muslims were:

- i) Music playing before mosques
- ii) Cow slaughtering
- iii) Proselytization
- iv) Exclusiveness of Hindu religion and defilement of sacred religious symbols and
- v) Anti-Islam literature.¹⁶³

Playing music while passing by the mosques by Hindus and cow slaughtering by the Muslims, can be regarded as the primary issues.

¹⁵⁸ Baldev Singh officially entered the government as the leader of the United Punjab Party which had some Muslim and Hindu members alongside the Sikh majority.

¹⁵⁹ Dr. Kirpal Singh (ed.), *Select Documents on Partition of Punjab 1947* (Delhi: National Book Shop, 1991), p.350.

¹⁶⁰ *Civil and Military Gazette*, 5 June 1942.

¹⁶¹ Akali's demand for Azad Punjab was with the readjustment of boundaries of Punjab. They wanted the exclusion of those areas where Sikhs were much behind in number, so that in the proposed Azad Punjab their position should be consolidated. In a memorandum handed over to Sir Stafford Cripps on 31 March 1942, on behalf of Sikh All Parties Committee, Amritsar, Sikhs uttered that 'from the boundary of Delhi to the bank of the Ravi River the population is divided as under: Moslems 4,505,000; Sikhs and other non Muslims 7,646,000'. The memorandum continued as 'from the Delhi boundary to the bank of the Jehlum River, excluding Multan and Jhang districts the population figures are: Moslems 8,288,000. Sikhs and other non Muslims 9,348,000'. See Dr. Kirpal Singh (ed.), *Select Documents on Partition of Punjab 1947* (Delhi: National Book Shop, 1991), p.4.

¹⁶² Qalb-i-Abid, *op.cit.*, p.295.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.295.

These issues kept Hindu-Muslim tension alive, and gave rise to violence on several occasions. During the Khilafat Movement, the zenith of Hindu-Muslim unity, 'Muslims had not only voluntarily reduced cow slaughtering but even accepted in principal to give it up in deference to Hindu sentiments'.¹⁶⁴

However, this settlement did not last long and the issues revived in 1923 due to antagonism created by the renewed vigor of Arya Samaj. Even the most compromising Hindu leader Gandhi refused to compromise over the issue while asking the Hindus to sacrifice their lives for the '*gao mata*'.¹⁶⁵ The second primary cause of antagonism was playing of music near the mosques. Muslims maintained that music playing disturbed the environments of mosques. While for Hindus it was religious act. The music processions were known as *nagar kirtan*.¹⁶⁶

Conversion of non-Hindus to Hindus was vigorously pursued by the Arya Samaj through Shudhi and Sangathan Movements.¹⁶⁷ Shudhi was aimed at the mass conversion of certain backward groups of Muslims to Hinduism by force whereas the Sangathan was meant to organize the Hindus into a militant force to fight with the Muslim. Census of 1911 and 1921 revealed that Hindus had the lowest growth rate as compared to other communities in Punjab.¹⁶⁸ During the said decade, the Sikhs and the Muslims had multiplied, whereas Hindus' population growth rate had declined per thousand from 36.28 in 1911 to 20.66 in 1921.¹⁶⁹ This decrease in population proportion alarmed Hindus and through Arya Samaj and the Mahasabha, they set out to consolidate and increase their numbers through proselytization. To counter these moves, Muslims formed organizations with the name of Tabligh (preach) and Tanzim (organization) with an avowed objective to counter Hindu militants' moves.

Different and mutually contradicting attitude towards life of communities, different cultures, civilizations, social habits, traditions and history also contributed in making the relations strained. One constant source of making the civil relations tense was *chhut* or the untouchables. Hindus considered Muslims as untouchable. Commenting over this,

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.295.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.209.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.295.

¹⁶⁷ Sharif al Mujahid in his chapter on communal riots, in *A History of the Freedom Movement*, Vol.4, notes that Shudhi and Sangathan were anti-Muslim movements. These movements expressed the Hindu extremists' desire and determination to make India 'safe' for Hinduism.

¹⁶⁸ Zarina Salamat, *op.cit.*, p.210.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.210.

prominent Muslim paper *Zamindar* 2, 3 July 1926 wrote: 'The real cause of communal riots is the hostile and selfish mentality of Hindus which appeared in the form of '*Chhut*' urging them to socially boycott other communities',¹⁷⁰

Another issue of conflict between Hindus and Muslims was publication of anti- Islam literature; Ghazi Illmuddin *shaheed* episode¹⁷¹ happened in Lahore. This issue kept alive an atmosphere of fear and suspicion, which was harmful to the cause of peace between these two communities.

Although the Sikhs had reservations towards Muslims, regarding Mian Fazl-i-Husain, but relations between Sikhs and Muslims of the Punjab under British were not as strained as between Hindus and Muslims of the province; however, these were neither cordial. Clashes of interest were mainly of political and economic nature; never the less these fluctuated from one extreme to another. On the issue of ownership and possession of Shaheed Ganj Mosque, the relationship between both communities experienced one of the highest tense points. Referring to the mosque issue, Chaudhary Chhotu Ram wrote in a letter to 'They [the Sikhs] are very cunning, troublesome and in with the Hindus; the whole lot of them'.¹⁷² The strained relations of Sikhs and Muslim communities also had a 'behind the curtain' role of Hindus. Chaudhary Chhotu Ram, a prominent Unionist leader commented on this as:

The position is that Sikhs are mere puppets in the hands of Hindus, and Hindus are most unwilling to see the

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Rajpal, Hindu bookseller in Lahore had given grave offence to the Muslims by publishing a pamphlet entitled 'Rangila Rasool'. He was twice attempted to murder by unidentified men but he escaped. He therefore was provided police protection. There was a serious resentment among Muslims over the affair. On 6 April 1929, Illmuddin, a teenager from Lahore succeeded to kill Rajpal. Muslim community appreciated Illmuddin's action. Muhammad Ali Jinnah pleaded his case in the court, but he was sentenced to death on 31 October 1929. After the execution of sentence almost all prominent Muslim leaders including Mian Fazl-i-Husain met Governor twice on November 4 & 7 to demand the handing over of the body of martyr for public burial. This demand was so strong that Illmuddin's corpse was returned to Muslims for burial in Lahore on 14 November 1924. See Nisar Ahmad Pannoun, *Jinnah the Lawyer* (Lahore: Mansoor Book House, n.d), p.71-4. See also K.K. Aziz, *op.cit.*, p.254 & 257.

¹⁷² Letter by Sir Chhotu Ram to Sir Fazl-i-Husain, dated 20 July 1935, referring to Shaheed Ganj Mosque issue, in Dr. Waheed Ahmad (ed.), *Letters of Mian Fazl-i-Husain* (Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, 1976), p.411.

composition of the difference which may keep Sikhs aloof from Muslims. They want the Sikhs to fight for them against the Muslims.¹⁷³

The Sikhs were the rulers of Punjab before its annexation to the British India. Thus they had a wish to come back in power in the province after the British withdrawal. Therefore, to counter the Muslim demand of Pakistan, they demanded 'Azad Punjab' (independent Punjab), but they could not pursue this demand politically well. Moving towards this crucial period for decision-making about the fate of the sub continent, they threw their weight to the side of Hindus and could not maintain and demonstrate their distinct position in Punjab, resultantly the slogan of 'Azad Punjab', (independent Punjab) find no place among the British decision- making circles.

The introduction of communal electorates by the British government during the 20's provided impetus to the cause of separate identity for the Sikhs. As political concessions had been granted by the British administration on communal basis, the Sikhs started demanding representation in the Provincial Legislature and a fixed quota in the services for their community. The opposition of the Hindu organizations to the grant of these privileges to the Sikhs led to a sharp communal polarization amongst the Hindus and Sikhs and laid the foundation of their future conflicts.

In addition to Hindu and Sikh confrontation on the basis of religion, culture, language and political support, the third predominating group in the communal politics was that of Muslims who in the later part of 19th century, also identified themselves as a strong communal group on the basis of their religion-political and other related identities. While it was difficult for Hindus to accept the political rights of the Muslims, Sikhs were also in doldrums about the nature of their relationship with the Muslims. The introduction of constitutional reforms by the British in 1909 on the basis of separate electorates provided impetus to the simmering confrontation amongst the major communities, i.e. Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. In the early part of the 20th century, communal tension aggravated and each communal group increased its efforts to win the favour of the British policy-makers to achieve respective goals of their community.

The communal as well as economic conflict between various groups in the province developed a complex political situation, which

¹⁷³ Letter by Sir Chottu Ram to Sir Fazl-i-Husain, dated 21 July 1935, on the ownership and possession of the Shaheed Ganj Mosque, in Dr. Waheed Ahmad (ed.), *ibid.*, p.414.

was exploited equally by the Unionists as well as the British authorities. While the Unionist Party concentrated on the welfare of the middle class agriculturists, mainly the Muslims, the Congress was more inclined towards the betterment of non-agriculturists upper and middle classes. Some historians are of the view that the Unionist Party, which apparently stood for unity among various religious groups, in fact, helped in creating dissensions and communal bickering. An assembly member Mr. Abdul Aziz stated on the floor of the House, in March 1943 that 'their (Unionists) discriminating treatment between urbanites and ruralites, unionists and anti-unionists, agriculturists and non-agriculturists and so on, is mainly responsible for sowing the seed for discord and hatred among various communities'.¹⁷⁴

During the 20th century, most of the inhabitants of the sub continent had developed an earnest desire to manage their own affairs independently and started venting out their sentiments that the British should leave their country. But the mutual distrust of the Hindus and the Muslims, two major communities, was articulated in their antagonistic concepts of nationalism. While the Indian National Congress generally represented the Hindus, the later was embodied in the All India Muslim League. Meanwhile, the economic interests of the two communities also played a significant role in determining the political future of the sub-continent. The Unionists followed the policy of collaboration with the British throughout their tenure and took every step to suppress the anti-British sentiments in the province under the garb of maintaining law and order. The opposition parties including the Congress on the other hand could be seen confronting the British.

All the national and regional parties were of the view that Punjab held the key to the future of India but in 1946 the Muslim League won 79 out of 86 Muslim seats and emerged as the single largest party in the assembly. It demoralized the Congress and boosted the morale of the Muslim League. A number of historians consider that the Punjab Assembly was the key to the unity of India. However, the failure of the Unionist Party was a major cause which paved the way for the partition of the Punjab.

¹⁷⁴ Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates, Vol.XXI, p.205.