

**Britain and The Communal Problem 1935-1940:  
A Study of Perception and Policy**

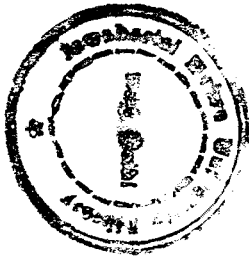
Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the award of the Degree of  
**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

1

**SWARNA AIYAR**

CENTRE FOR HISTORICAL STUDIES  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY  
NEW DELHI-110067  
1987

July 1987

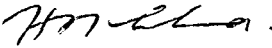


DECLARATION

Certified that the dissertation entitled  
"BRITAIN AND THE COMMUNAL PROBLEM — 1935-1940 :  
A Study of Perception and Policy" submitted by  
Swarna Aiyar is in fulfilment of eight credits  
out of the twenty six credits for the degree  
of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY of this University.  
This dissertation has not been previously  
submitted for any other degree of this University  
and is her own work.

We recommend that this dissertation be  
placed before the examiners for evaluation.

  
SUPERVISOR  
(PROF. BIPAN CHANDRA)

  
CHAIRMAN  
(PROF. HARBANS MUKHIA)

CONTENTS

Pages:

PREFACE	...	i-ix
<u>Chapter-I</u> : <u>INTRODUCTION</u>	...	1- 62
<u>Chapter-II</u> : <u>THE AFTERMATH OF THE</u> <u>ACT OF 1935 : 1935-1939</u>		63-143
<u>Chapter-III</u> : <u>FEDERATION AND THE WAR :</u> <u>1937-1940</u>	...	144-191
<u>CONCLUSION</u>	...	192-197
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>	...	198-205

\* \* \*

P R E F A C E

## PREFACE

The government of one country by another is an onerous and complex task and establishes a multiple level relationship between the two countries leaving its mark on both the ruler and the ruled. The popular attitudes and perceptions of both the ruler and the subjects are inter-linked, the one influencing the other, and at the same time reflecting the advantage that the ruling country has over the other, by virtue of controlling State power and apparatuses. This is particularly true of the relationship between Britain and India. British policies and perceptions were coloured and conditioned by the evolving and changing course of events in India, and communalism, a significant phenomenon, particularly in the 20th century, provided an important means of retaining British control over India and formed the backdrop to British policies and perceptions of India.

While considerable research has been done in the last couple of decades on the subject of communalism, with studies focussing variously on the meaning of communalism, the growth and extension of communal attitudes and whether or not these attitudes were inherent in Indian society, the growth of Hindu communalism and Muslim separatism, the rise of Hindu and Muslim communal organisa-

tions, the role of religion in its formation and ultimate partition of the country and the numerous theories forwarded to explain this event; few authoritative works have focussed exclusively on the role of the British and its policy towards communalism. As a result an attempt has been made to study the British handling of the communal problem — to analyse the role of the British and their perception and policy towards communalism in India, in the period 1935-1940.

British policy towards communalism was not uniform. It was formulated to suit imperial interests and objectives, as well as to fit the changing situation in India and this was what dictated the need for a change of policy or provided a new set of alternatives from which to choose. This has to be kept in mind while examining British perception and policies. Similarly, the formulation of policy was not undertaken by only one individual, many minds and hands were at work. The two major parties responsible for the broad formulation of policy were the Imperial policy-makers in England and the Government of India in New Delhi. More specifically, at the all-India level, it was the Secretary of State for India in England and the Viceroy in India who were responsible for giving shape to the imperial policy. They were aided and assisted in the implementation of it by the administrative

machinery, the Governors of the various provinces, the bureaucracy as well as the district level officers.

Apart from studying 'policies' implemented, (i.e., actual administrative measures), an attempt has been made to incorporate British attitudes and perceptions, i.e., how they looked upon the problem and following from that how they dealt with it. Their understanding of the social, political and cultural conditions which helped frame their policy, therefore become important. Their evaluation of specific situations and conditions peculiar to India, their attitude towards the dominant political forces and leading personalities become equally important in an understanding of the functioning of the official mind and the factors that conditioned the defining of their policy. The communal problem in India, therefore, has to be seen in the context not merely of the equation between the Indian political forces, but also in the equation between the Indian political parties and the Government. The latter aggravated and distorted the former.

The focus of this study has been on the period 1935-1940. The choice of this period has been partly to enable the defining of a manageable time-span keeping in mind the constraints of time and space and the limited

scope of this work, but more importantly, because this period, though short, constitutes a significant period in the history of modern India, from the point of view of the developments that took place during this period, which determined the formulation and refining of British policy towards communalism, the intensification of communal attitudes, as well as the consolidation of political interests around communal issues and organisations. However an attempt has been made to view the period not in isolation but in continuity and as part of a larger framework. The period witnessed:

- (a) the reformulation of British strategy and tactics both towards political organisations and institutions as well as communal ideology, in the wake of the collapse of the second Civil Disobedience Movement and the search by the Congress for an alternative method to fight imperial control.
- (b) the passing of the Government of India Act of 1935, the response of various organisations to it and the hardening of communal attitudes;
- (c) the formation of Congress ministries and the defeat of the Muslim League in the election leading to an increasingly sharper focus on communal issues by it;
- (d) the growth and extension of communal organisations like the Muslim League, which now acquired a



wider base and a more representative character and emerged as the most important party representing Muslim communalism;

- (e) the attempt by the British to implement the federal part of the Act of 1935 and its rejection by all the important Indian organisations;
- (f) the demand of the Muslim League to be recognized as the sole representative body of the Muslims and its challenge to the Congress claims to represent all sections of Indian society;
- (g) the consequent encouragement by the British to the League and the strengthening of separatist politics which ultimately led to the partition of the country;
- (h) the exigencies of the war opened up new considerations, with the British now thinking in terms of maximum support for war and consequently, extending political support and recognition to the Muslim League and its demands.

Imperial policy-making is currently not a very fashionable field. Therefore it may be asked whether it is 'elitist' to study policy, especially at a time when the tendency among most historians has been to study mass

movements or an analysis of the relationship between socio-economic changes and political development. It may be said, that while it is true that mass mentalities and the 'politics of the people' have been neglected and must be studied, it is nevertheless important to bear in mind that it was the policy formulated by the policy-makers which influenced the thinking of the masses. It was within the framework imposed on them by the British that the Indians were forced to operate and this limited the choice open to them. However, this is not to say that Indian politics flowed exclusively out of the institutions, laws and policies introduced by the British. It was a two-way process. Conditions in India, the changing political situation, the many issues and events, the political organisations and their attitudes, all determined and changed the perception and policies adopted by the British just as much. Therefore, both the study of policy and perception, as well as mass mentality are equally necessary approaches to the study of history.

Similarly an all-India approach has been adopted in this study. This has been done partly to get an understanding of the broad picture of the developments during this period, and partly, because the British formulated policy at an all-India level.

This dissertation is divided into three chapters followed by a conclusion. In Chapter-I, as an Introduction, an effort has been made to understand communalism — its meaning and definition by surveying the prevalent notions on communalism. An attempt has also been made to examine the role of the British in the growth of communalism, both by tracing the early history of British rule, the nature of divide and rule policy as well as by examining the extent of responsibility assigned to the British by the existing works on the subject of communalism.

Chapter-II, deals with the developments in the period 1935-39 and analyses how these issues affected and determined British perception and policy towards communalism.

Chapter-III, deals with the period 1937-39 and examines how the implementation of federation and the crisis of the war affected the British perception and policy. This is followed by the conclusion.

One major limitation has been the use of sources. The dissertation is based upon sources available in Delhi alone. As a result this work has relied heavily on

the private papers and correspondence of British officials in this period available in Delhi, as well on institutional papers and government records. On examination of the government records — mainly the Home Political Files — available at the National Archives, it was found that though the records contain a great deal of information as regards communal riots, they unfortunately yielded very little material as regards policy or undertaken by the British.

I would like to thank very specially, my supervisor, Professor Bipan Chandra, for providing great help and encouragement and giving me complete freedom to pursue my own ideas. Without his assistance and co-operation this work would not have got written. His invaluable suggestions and incisive comments have been responsible for making the quality of this work better than it would otherwise have been.

My friends who saw me through the moments of tension and anxiety that went into the writing of this dissertation, provided every possible help and the badly-needed encouragement which sustained me through the writing of this work. I am indebted in particular to Gyanesh Kudaisya, Medha Malik, Neerja Singh, Shashibhushan Upadhyay and Indumathi Sreenivasan.

I would like to thank Anthony Thomas, for acting as a sounding board and providing useful criticism and allowing me the use of some rare books from his rich personal collection.

I owe a very special debt to Salil Misra for the many hours of discussion with me, which helped clarify and put into perspective my ideas on the subject, as well as for meticulously going through parts of the first highly unstructured version of the manuscript and making valuable suggestions.

Special thanks are also due to Mr. Thulasidharan for his quick, & efficient typing of this manuscript at very short notice, and Ranjit Dwivedi for his skilful help in proof-reading. I take this opportunity to thank Mr & Mrs Eswaran for their affection and encouragement in the pursuit of my studies, and for providing me with a home away from home.

Most of all, to my parents I owe my deepest debt. Their constant encouragement, love, concern and understanding has been the inspiration and motive force behind this dissertation.

However, I am alone responsible for the undoubtedly manifold errors and shortcomings.

Swarna Aiyar  
(SWARNA AIYAR)

I N T R O D U C T I O N

## Chapter-I

### INTRODUCTION

"We have maintained our power by playing off one part against the other, and we must continue to do so ... Do what you can to prevent all having a common feeling."

— A.P. Macdonnell to  
Lord Curzon  
18 May 1900.

#### I

Few questions have aroused such great interest or given rise to such an intense and passionate debate as the subject of communalism. In sheer numbers, the profusion of literature available on the subject is staggering. Studies have varied widely in their definition of communalism, its nature, roots and origin, its place in society and its manifestation in politics — both as violence and as an ideology.

Thus one of the major problems that confronts a student of communalism is that of finding an appropriate and comprehensive definition from the rich variety of explanations and diversity of perspectives that characterize the studies on the subject. This can only be done by keeping in mind the multi-dimensional nature of communalism. Most studies tend to concentrate on one or the other facet, and either neglect or under-emphasize the other facets. This carries with it the risk of missing the wood for the trees.

Among the earlier writers on the subject, W.C. Smith is one who has tried to keep this multiplicity in mind. He defines communalism as:

"...that ideology which has emphasized the social, political and economic unit, the group of adherents of each religion, and has emphasized the distinction, even the antagonism, between such groups; the words 'adherent' and 'religion' being taken in the most nominal sense."<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> W.C. Smith, Modern Islam in India, p.187.



Acknowledging the psychological, economic, political and sociological aspects of communalism, Smith shows how religion has nevertheless been used to serve many other purposes besides the elemental one of expressing the life of a closed fraternity:

"... in today's embattled world men readily press their religion again into the service not of its highest ideals but of the immediate interests of their own groups."<sup>2</sup>

Thus though communalism may have as its cause many factors; economic, religious, psychological and so on, it is religion which is the decisive factor, determining and governing all other spheres and interests of a man's life.

"In imposing its categories of thought communalism has aimed at exterminating all other sociological and political categories. In raising and making the communal issue supreme, it confuses every other issue — political, social, linguistic, economic and even religious."<sup>3</sup>

---

2 Ibid., p.185.

3 Ibid., p.188.

Close to this view is Bipan Chandra, who feels that:

"the communal view asserts that the religious distinction is, among Indians, the important or fundamental distinction or cleavage or distinguishing mark. This distinction overrides all other distinctions. On the other hand, all other social identities and distinctions are either denied or when accepted in theory, either negated in practise or subordinated to the religious identity. Not nation, nationalities, linguistic groups, or classes, but religious communities are seen as the fundamental social unit of the Indian milieu .... it is only the aspect of the religious community that is emphasized, all other issues — political, economic, social, linguistic, cultural and even purely religious — are ignored, confused and even suppressed."<sup>4</sup>

Regarding communalism as basically a by-product of colonialism, he suggests that instead of religion, economic, social and political factors must be taken into account. Thus to regard religion as the basis for communal politics, or to regard

---

4 Bipan Chandra, Communalism in Modern India, (Henceforth referred to as 'Communalism etc. '), p.2.

communalism as a revival of a traditional ideology and to trace its origin back to the medieval ages was barking up the wrong tree.<sup>5</sup> "Communalism was a modern phenomenon that arose as a result of British colonial impact and the response of Indian social classes, strata and groups."<sup>6</sup> It was a new consciousness — an ideology which appealed to the past to establish linkages, but did not exist in the past. It was based not on a real conflict between Hindus and Muslims, but on a distorted reflection of real conflict — a false view of reality.<sup>7</sup>

Religion or religious differences he feels do not explain a socio-political phenomenon like communalism. Religion was only the vehicle of

---

5 Ibid., pp.8-9. Also pp.158-180.

6 Ibid., p.8.

7 Ibid., see pp.21-23. W.C. Smith, op.cit., holds a similar view. He asserts that continuous and widespread antagonism was a modern phenomenon. Unequal economic development within the British imperialist system and the political policy of the government (reinforced by the economic factors) aided communalism in becoming a powerful divisive force. See pp.191-196.

communalism and was used as an organising principle by the communalist to mask non-religious aspirations. While not under-estimating the potential of religion in the growth of communalism at the popular plane, it cannot be understood as the cause or the end of the phenomenon of communalism.<sup>8</sup>

K.B. Krishna regards communalism as a distorted version of class-conflict, with communalism deriving its theoretical base from the principle of community, class and interest, all of which were determined by religion. Thus divisions along community, class and interest have a political interpretation not a religious one. Thus according to him, communalism was "a struggle between the various communities who were unequal educationally, politically and economically."<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to these views<sup>is</sup> Louis Dumont, who emphasises the role of religion in communalism.

---

8 Ibid., pp.160,170-172.

9 K.B. Krishna, The Problem of Minorities, pp.316-17.

To him,

"communalism is the affirmation of the religious community as a political group, where religion is taken not as the essence and guide to life but only as sign of the distinction of one political group against another."

Drawing a parallel with nationalism, he says,

"communalism supposes the existence of a community, a group of adherents of the same religion, but it gets the edge of its meaning through the parallelism with nationalism. It is something like nationalism, in which the nation so to speak is replaced by the community."<sup>10</sup>

Along Dumont's lines, but much more extreme is Manshardt's interpretation of communalism. To him, communalism was a form of religious fanaticism. He feels that it was natural for man to take pride in his religion, culture and tradition, but when this reached extreme proportions it took the form of a violent hatred of other communities. It was

---

<sup>10</sup> Louis Dumont, "Nationalism and Communalism", in Contributions to Indian Sociology, vol.IV, no.7, 1964, p.47. For the role of religion also see pp.35, 40-46.

then, no longer desirable. Communalism, therefore, was a manifestation of this fanaticism.<sup>11</sup>

Gopal Krishna is another recent writer, who emphasises the role of religion and says that it has governed the political cleavages of the country in the modern period. "In the political evolution of modern India no single element has been as pervasive as religion."<sup>12</sup> With this opening statement, in his essay, he goes onto describe communalism as inevitable in a "plural society where religious identities are primary".<sup>13</sup> A plural society cannot escape from communalism. It can only put limits on its expression in public life."<sup>14</sup> Describing the communal issue as

---

11 C. Manshardt, The Hindu-Muslim Problem in India, pp.51-52.

12 Gopal Krishna, "Religion in Politics", in, Indian Economic and Social History Review, vol.VIII, no.7, 1971, p.362.

13 Ibid., p.376.

14 Ibid., p.394.

the "communal religious issue", he puts forward the proposition that "the root of political polarisation in India was the religious antipathy between Hindus and Muslims..."<sup>15</sup> For him, communalism was:

"that peculiarly destructive Indian expression of religion in politics, which emphasizes the religious identity of social groups and requires the political society to be organised as a confederation of religious communities, ...."

Though this view may have lost all legitimacy today, he feels that, "this is of course not the same thing as saying that the doctrine has lost its hold on people's minds."<sup>16</sup>

N.C. Saxena in a historiographic survey article,<sup>17</sup> writes that communalism should not be interpreted in a perjorative sense and communalism per se does not threaten the stability of culturally plural societies.

---

15 Ibid., pp.380, 375.

16 Ibid., pp.393-94.

17 N.C. Saxena, "Historiography of Communalism in India", in Mushirul Hasan (ed.), Communal and Pan-Islamic Trends in Colonial India, p.321.

Instead of examining communalism as a sign of political under-development, it must be examined as part of the problem with multi-ethnic and plural societies such as the Indian society. According to him, all studies on communalism have regarded it as a divisive and unhealthy force, which was opposed to nationalism, secularism and a non-religious outlook. Whereas to him nation-building did not necessarily imply obliteration of communal moulds or the creation of a common identity outside of an identity of groups based on religion, caste or language. While not suggesting that communalism should be encouraged, he feels that it is possible to study the phenomenon in isolation from its detrimental effect on national politics.<sup>18</sup> Since the period 1885-1947 saw "both the strengthening of consciousness along religious lines and the simultaneous interplay of such forces in politics", historians seem to write more out of a "sentimental attachment" to the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity, rather than objectively.<sup>19</sup> He regards

---

18 Ibid., see p.329, p.321.

19 Ibid., p.322.



the Hindu-Muslim rivalry "more as power conflict between two groups a 'majority' and a 'minority',<sup>20</sup> and therefore, "Hindu-Muslim relations should be studied from an international and cross-cultural perspective."<sup>21</sup> Hindu-Muslim relations so far, Saxena feels, have been examined in a "value framework" which regards continuance of ethnic or communal groups as a drag on economic progress and a hinderance to the achievement of a rational and progressive society.<sup>22</sup> He emphasizes that "since the process of identity formation and the fight for more political power took place simultaneously in India, there is less legitimacy attached to such a conflict than would have existed for a long time."<sup>23</sup> Thus collective action by communities based on language and region should be seen not only as inevitable but as a necessary part of the democratic political process.

---

20 Ibid., p.332.

21 Ibid., p.337.

22 Ibid., pp.320-21.

23 Ibid., p. 323.

Prabha Dixit views the problem from a different angle. Departing from the general theses that communalism was the result of religious and cultural differences which existed between the Hindus and the Muslims, she instead regards communalism, not as a political aspect of religious antagonism or a distorted version of class conflict, but as:

"a consciously conceived political doctrine propagated by one section of the traditional elites to counteract the forces of nationalism and democracy."<sup>24</sup>

As the title of her book expressively suggests she sees communalism as essentially a struggle for power between the Muslim ruling class on the one hand and the Hindu ruling class on the other, in the medieval period.

"The issue at stake... was neither Hinduism nor Islam, but the empire of India. This power struggle was deliberately given a religious twist by those whose displacement had become imminent as well as those who were aspiring to dislodge them."<sup>25</sup>

---

24 Prabha Dixit, Communalism — A Struggle for Power, see Preface, p.vii.

25 Ibid., p.7.

But the politics in the medieval period did not bear any resemblance to the 20th century politics, where <sup>communal political parties were</sup> formed by certain sections of their elites on a religio-cultural basis. Communalism in the 20th century, thus, emerged as a political phenomenon and was not the result of religious antagonism, but the result of the rise of nationalism;

"It was not the result of religious hostility between the Muslims and the Hindus, but was evolved as a political doctrine and was closely tied up with the struggle for power."<sup>26</sup>

Thus communalism to her was a "political doctrine which makes use of religio-cultural differences to achieve political ends."<sup>27</sup> This task is facilitated in ethnically plural societies which create "ideal conditions for sectarian politics", particularly as a consciousness of cultural identity serves as a sheet-anchor for communal movements.<sup>28</sup>

---

26 Ibid., p.10.  
Implicit here seems to be the assumption that even in the 20th century, it was a struggle for power between the religious communities of the 'Hindus' and the 'Muslims' and not between sections of the elites.

27 Ibid., p.1.

28 Ibid., see Preface, p.vii, and Introduction.

While acknowledging the religious factor as playing a significant role in Indian politics, she does not place religion as a causative factor in the rise and growth of communalism.

"Religion was primarily a weapon used by the communal leaders ... it never formed the ultimate end of their politics."<sup>29</sup>

Communalism was therefore a political doctrine rather than a problem of religious sensitivity.

From this bird's eye survey of the prevalent notions of the meaning of communalism, it is clear that there exists among the scholars a wide diversity of opinions ranging from purely political explanations to an ideology of religious identity as a social interpretation or tracing its existence to class-conflict within the society. These differences of opinion set forth the complex nature of communalism and underscore the importance of the need for an integrated approach, which would take into account its

---

29 Ibid., p.ix of Preface.

broader social, economic, psychological, and religious dimensions, in defining the character and causation of communalism.

## II

Besides examining the nature of communalism and how it finds expression in society, attempts have been made scholars to examine what forces sustained and encouraged the growth of communalism, and in particular what was the role played by the British in this matter.

In the attempts to explain these forces, opinions are divided. If taken as an ideological spectrum, at one end of it may be placed the view that the British created and were wholly responsible for the growth and extension of the communal ideology, and that before their entry the different communities in India lived in peace and harmony with no conflict among them. Attempts have been made to paint a glorious

picture of harmony and a synthesis of Hindu-Muslim culture in the medieval period, which was broken only with the advent of the British, who through skillful manipulation fostered the growth of communalism and converted the two communities into two rival political entities in India. At the other end of the spectrum is the view that is favoured by apologists for British rule, and this stresses the fundamental incompatibility between the two communities, seeing communalism and its ultimate political expression in the form of the partition of the country as the inevitable outcome of the age old rivalry between the Hindus and the Muslims.<sup>30</sup>

A third viewpoint, as a variation of the second suggests that Muslim communalism grew in response to

---

30 This second explanation is adopted by Dumout and Manshardt discussed above and by R. Coupland, The Constitutional Problem in India, Part-I., as well as by colonial administrators who attempted to absolve themselves of blame.

Indian nationalism.

"Muslim communalism was a consequence of the failure of Indian nationalism to develop a truly non-communal ethos. The national movement though begun on a secular patriotic note, soon went into the hands of leaders whose outlook was narrowly Hindu; the symbols they chose, the idiom they adopted and the sources of their inspiration were all Hindu."<sup>31</sup>

The Hindu revivalism of the 19th century affected leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai, Aurobindo Ghosh and Tilak profoundly. Though it was only Savarkar who campaigned for an exclusive Hindu nationalism, but "there can be no doubt, however, that Lajpat Rai, Pandit Malaviya, Aurobindo Ghosh, Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi imparted a pronouncedly religious character to the national movement."<sup>32</sup>

These two ends of the spectrum represent the two extreme viewpoints regarding the role of the British in fostering communalism. While examples can be given

---

31 See Gopal Krishna, op.cit., p.376, and again pp.378-79.

32 Ibid., see pp.378-80.

for writers subscribing to the second view, it may be argued that the former viewpoint was put forward by the apologists for British rule and colonial administrators in their attempt to exonerate the British of all responsibility for the growth of communalism, rather than by the 'nationalist' writers themselves. A more reasonable approach, saying midway between the two extremes, would be to hold the British largely but not entirely responsible for the monstrous proportions that communalism and communal ideology ultimately reached. Indeed, this was the position adopted by the so-called "nationalist" writers or more appropriately the anti-imperialist writers.<sup>33</sup> Recently, scholars like Gopal Krishna, have criticised the position adopted by "nationalist" writers — that communalism was the deliberate creation of the British.<sup>34</sup>

This argument has been refuted recently by Bipan Chandra, who has quoted anti-imperialists at length to prove that they did not adopt such an absurd

---

33 See Bipan Chandra, op.cit., chapter-8, in particular pp.238,241.

34 Ibid., see in particular pp.373-74.



or extreme posture as has been ascribed to them.

"It is obvious that the British policy of 'divide and rule' could succeed only because something in the internal social, economic, cultural and political conditions of society favoured its success.... Conditions were remarkably favourable for the rise and growth of communalism and for the policy of divide and rule, and communalism could grow not only because it served the political needs of colonialism but also because it met the social needs of some sections of Indian society.

Whatever might have been said at the level of popular agitation by lower level political workers, no responsible leaders or writer ever maintained that the British rule was solely responsible for communalism or that communalism was basically created or produced by British policy or that the removal of colonialism would automatically solve the problem."<sup>35</sup>

The role played by the British in fostering communal ideology and their responsibility for the perpetuation of the communal problem, is unavoidable in any discussion on communalism. Thus in most works on the subject, imperial policy towards communalism has been taken up for discussion, with

---

35 Bipan Chandra, op.cit., p.238.  
For a lucid and forceful demonstration of this point see also, pp.237-42.

scholars assigning a lesser or a greater degree of responsibility to the British in the perpetuation of the problem. But interestingly enough, no scholar has dealt exclusively with the role of British policy as its central theme. With the sole exception of David Page, whose book has dealt with the British angle of the problem as its central theme, for the period 1920-1932,<sup>36</sup> most others have dealt with it as a sub-theme:— either as a part of a discussion on Muslim communalism or separatism, or an analysis of the factors leading to partition or along with the general communal problem in India.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, an

---

36 David Page, Prelude to Partition : The Indian Muslims and the Imperial System of Control 1920-1932.

Page offers a structural explanation for the growth of communalism, through the imperial system of control and the framework imposed by the British through their policies. His work has been discussed below.

37 It may be mentioned here, that interestingly enough, Prabha Dixit, in such a detailed and extensive study of communalism, has not touched upon the role of the British at all. It is surprising how the role of the British (whatever the extent of their responsibility) can be altogether avoided in an otherwise sound study of the subject.

examination of the various prevalent opinions on the significant question of the imperial role in the communal problem would prove to be a valuable exercise.



The British hold a special responsibility in assisting the growth and development of communalism. Through a series of administrative measures the British strengthened existing divisions emphasising in particular the religious division to accentuate communal strife.

One of the earliest works on this aspect is that of Mehta and Patwardhan who discussing the British role in the problem write:

"To treat it (the communal problem) merely as a question of Hindu-Muslim adjustment is to view it out of focus, as the third party, the British Government has played a great and often-times decisive role in Hindu-Muslim relations." 38

---

38 Mehta and Patwardhan, The Communal Triangle in India, p.8.

Y 348 (Q) .56 N4  
Diss  
M7

TH-2514

Analysing this further, they say:

"The peculiar character of their rule in India compelled them to pursue certain policies which have helped to widen the gulf between the two communities and there is no hope of bridging the gulf as long as the character of that rule is not altered."<sup>39</sup>

Since the British maintained their separate identity and resisted all attempts at assimilation within the Indian society; it became the central feature of their policy to see that Indians did not unite against the ruling party themselves and to create a class of Indians loyal to themselves. For this reason:

"separatist tendencies were assiduously cultivated and adroitly exploited to assure the safety of the British Raj. The soil itself was very suitable for such exploitation."<sup>40</sup>

Thus to Mehta and Patwardhan, the British played a major role in the growth of communalism. They saw

---

39 Ibid., p.222.

40 Ibid., p.91.

the British policy as one of assisting forces opposed to nationalism and building up strong allies. These allies may be the Muslims, the landlords or the princes, but they were all forces which were united in their opposition to the nationalist forces. Their solution to the communal problem was to bring a change in the character of their rule — in other words, to put an end to British rule.

Closely akin to this viewpoint was Rajendra Prasad, who traces the origin of communalism to the British policy of divide and rule.

"It started in the days of the East India Company when the British were first establishing themselves as rulers of India and can be easily seen working on the statements made by the ex-Secretary of State for India, Mr. L.S. Amery and other high placed Britishers connected with the Government of India....

The communal question in India is thus not a question between the Hindus and Muslims who can solve it as they like, if they will. There is a third party, and in some respects a most important party, that is, the British government. We have thus, what has been expressively

termed a communal triangle, with Hindus and Muslims as its two sides and the British government as the base. As this base has grown in size it has simultaneously widened the angle of differences between the two sides."<sup>41</sup>

Prasad thus traces the hand of the British even earlier i.e., right from the establishment of their rule to his time and holds the British greatly responsible for the acceleration of the communal problem. As a contemporary politician, his solution was also to suggest that self-government by the Indians would be imperative if the situation was to be saved.

Similarly, R.P. Dutt, sought that:

"British rule holds the primary responsibility (which is not to say that there were also other responsibilities....) for promoting communal strife in India..."<sup>42</sup>

Condemning the British attempt at an artificial division of the Indian people into two nations on the

---

41 Rajendra Prasad, India Divided, pp.87-88.

42 R. Palme Dutt, India Today, p.455.

bases of religion as "reactionary impractical and contrary to the interests of democratic liberty"<sup>43</sup>, he describe the general administrative policies of the British as driving a wedge between the two communities, through the introduction of communal electorates and special weightage to the Muslims.

"There is no natural inevitable difficulty from the cohabitation of differing races or religions in one country... They arise in particular, whenever a reactionary regime is endeavouring to maintain itself against the popular movement."<sup>44</sup>

Thus to Dutt;

"Communal strife is... a special product of British rule, and in particular of the latest period of British rule or of the declining imperialist ascendancy."<sup>45</sup>

Like Prasad, his contemporary, Nehru found the policy of the British in relation to the communal

---

43 Ibid., p.463.

44 Ibid., p.454.

45 Ibid., p.455.

question ,

"Fundamentally and inevitably... one of preventing the Hindus and Muslims from acting together, and of playing off one community against another."<sup>46</sup>

Elucidating the point further, he said:

"It is the purpose of these (imperialist) powers to encourage disruptive tendencies and create minority problems which weaken and partly counteract the nationalist urge and give an excuse to the imperialist power to stay on and pose as the impartial arbitrator."<sup>47</sup>

Tracing the problem, basically to the economic conflict — the struggle for jobs among the middle classes, he condemned the communal leaders on both sides for giving a communal colouring to a basically economic problems. So along with the British, he apportioned an equal proportion of the blame to the Indian communal leaders. "The communal leaders

---

46 Jawaharlal Nehru, An Autobiography, p.460.

47 Ibid., p.437.



represent a small upper class reactionary group, (who) exploit and take advantage of the religious passions of the masses for their own ends."<sup>48</sup>

Thus:

"To say that the British government created the Hindu-Muslim problem in India would be patently wrong, but it would be equally wrong to ignore their continuous efforts to keep it alive and to discourage the coming together of the two communities. Politically, the Hindu-Muslim question was essentially a middle class affair and a quarrel over jobs. Its effect however, spread to the masses."<sup>49</sup>

Holding an almost identical position to Nehru's A.R. Desai maintained that political and economic struggle between classes and different communities were given a communal form by the communalists.

"Communalism was only the disguised expression of the struggle between the vested interests belonging to

---

48 Ibid., p.468.

49 Jawaharlal Nehru, Glimpses of World History, vol.II, pp.1130-31.

different faiths who gave a communal form to that struggle."<sup>50</sup>

As regards the British role, Desai holds that:

"the British strategy of political counterpoise between various communities to maintain its paramountcy, carried out through the devices of communal representation, communal electorate and weightage, and schemes of provincial reorganization to suit the Imperialist interests, helped to accentuate communalism in the country and retard the growth of the national movement of the united Indian people for freedom."<sup>51</sup>

Thus to Desai,

"Communalism was mainly the result of the peculiar development of the Indian social economy under the British government and the vested interests within those communities."<sup>52</sup>

In the opinion of all these writers discussed so far, it may be seen, that there is agreement among them

---

50 A.R. Desai, Social Background of Indian Nationalism, p.407.

51 Ibid., pp.392-93.

52 Ibid., p.393.

as to the important role played the British in the communal problem. But as is evident from their statements, it is equally clear that none of them hold the British solely responsible for the communal problem.

This view of the role of British policy was later accepted by scholars like Ram Gopal<sup>53</sup> and most recently with slight differences of emphasis by scholars like Francis Robinson, and David Page.

---

53 Ram Gopal, in Indian Muslims, has traced the political history of the Muslim community and has shown how the British aided the Muslim community in gaining a separate consciousness and then organizing themselves politically. Their role in the early history i.e., from the formation of the Congress to the sympathetic reception given by Minto to the Muslim deputation and their encouragement to Muslim all along until partition has been traced with telling examples. This will be discussed below. In particular see chapters VII & VIII, and also pp.92-93, 114, and the appendix, p.348. Discussing the Reforms of 1909, Ram Gopal quoting Lady Minto says, "The prevalent belief that official record was working, or at any rate wished, to divide Muslims from Hindus is confirmed.... The electoral scheme of 1909 showed Muslims that they would get without agitation more than what Hindus would get with agitation.", p.114.

Robinson assigns a central role to the British in creating a separate consciousness among the Indian communities, by patronising the followers of one religion, i.e., the Muslims, through political concessions in the form of reforms and recognition of their demands as the legitimate demands of the minority and thus providing the chief motive force behind the organization and development of the Muslims as a separate political entity.

Starting out from the basic premise that the Muslim community was hardly a political entity in the beginning, he goes on to show that communalism and a separate consciousness organised around religious lines arose out of the pursuit for power by those leaders for whom British patronage held out the promise of the power they sought. In the early days after the 1857 uprising, the government held a paradoxical attitude to the Muslim community. "On the one hand they were still regarded as dangerous, yet... an important group of Muslims was also regarded as a

major support of British rule in north India."<sup>54</sup>

Thus in the early days, Sir Syed Ahmed was favoured and he acquired an important position in Indian politics.

"His views were accepted by government as Muslim views... By building up the college (Aligarh College) and Syed Ahmed, government assisted the birth of a 'Muslim political party' and a 'Muslim' political doctrine.

Such a result smacks of divide and rule. Indeed, it is undeniable that British policy in the second half of the 19th century made a great contribution to the development of Muslim separation."<sup>55</sup>

But he clarifies by saying, that this did not mean that the British followed this policy out of a malicious desire of "setting Muslims against Hindus, but at reconciling them to British rule. Their unintended result was to encourage some Muslims to

---

54 Francis Robinson, Separatism Among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860-1923, p.130.

55 Ibid., p.131.

operate in politics as Muslims."<sup>56</sup> Attempting to answer the question of how and why political alignments based on religion arose and estimating the hand of the British in it, Robinson writes, "Being Muslim, of course, did not make them a nation. But being Muslim under British imperial rule did give them some common experience."<sup>57</sup> In addition, the U.P. Muslim landlords and professional men in their search for power responded on a communal basis to British rule, whenever British administrative policies like the introduction of elective government threatened their position. Hindu revivalism contributed its bit to the organization of the Muslims on a communal basis.<sup>58</sup> Thus, he concludes:

"A prominent feature of British rule in the 19th century was a tendency to see its Indian subjects primarily not as members of different races, nor as speakers of different languages, nor even as representatives of different faiths. Men were recognised first as Parsis, Sikhs, Hindus or Muslims."<sup>59</sup>

It was by this kind of a perception, that the British encouraged communal divisions.

---

56 Ibid., p.132.

57 Ibid., p.345.

58 Ibid., see pp.345-48.

59 Ibid., p.348.

David Page adopts a similar line of argument as regards British role in dividing the <sup>two</sup> communities, but seeks to explain the growth of communalism and a separate consciousness among the Muslims through the constitutional reforms initiated by the British and the changing structure of politics, which Page feels contributed to the growth of communal awareness among the Muslims. Page's book is perhaps the only authoritative work which seeks to explain the growth of communalism through the imperial system of control i.e., through the formal structure of politics as its chief cause. The British role in the problem, forms the central theme in Page's work as compared to all the other works discussed so far, whose major thrust or focus has been Muslim communalism, the general communal problem or even causes for the partition.

Covering the period from 1920 to 1932, Page argues that the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 were crucial to the growth of communal politics. For the first time, the reforms introduced political

responsibility at the provincial level and the efforts made to balance the representation of different communities in the councils. This Page suggests encouraged the development of communal blocs within the councils, and this was done deliberately by the imperial government to offset the weight of the 'nationalist' politicians.<sup>60</sup>

He then proceeds to illustrate how as a result of the introduction of the Reforms, communal tensions show a marked increase during the decade of the twenties, particularly with politicians at the provincial level using a communal appeal to retain and increase their power and their hold over the provinces.

"The Congress has to compromise with communal parties in order to maintain its coherence and in the process loses much of its Muslim support."<sup>61</sup>

This was one part of the British strategy, as encouraging

---

60 David Page, op.cit., Preface, pp.x-xii.

61 Ibid., Preface, p.xii.



"Muslim provincial ambitions" would "offset the challenges to its authority at the centre".<sup>62</sup> He concludes with the declaration of the Communal Award which <sup>made</sup> "Muslim Raj in Punjab and Bengal a real possibility"<sup>63</sup>, by strengthening the communal forces in these provinces against the nationalist forces.

Page therefore concludes that:

"In the consolidation of political interests around communal issues, the Imperial power played an important role. By treating the Muslims as a separate group, it divided them from other Indians. By granting them separate electorates, it institutionalized that division. This was one of the most crucial factors in the development of communal politics. Muslim politicians did not have to appeal to non-Muslims; non-Muslims did not have to appeal to Muslims. This made it very difficult for a genuine Indian nationalism to emerge."<sup>64</sup>

As opposed to the opinions of the scholars discussed so far, who seek to place the lion's share of the responsibility for the acceleration of

---

62 Ibid., Preface, p.xii.

63 Ibid., Preface, p.xii.

64 Ibid., p.260.

communalism onto the British shoulders, are those who minimise or dismiss altogether the responsibility of the British.

One such view is that of Louis Dumont. He rejects the notion that British policy brought about disunion among the Hindus and Muslims, who until the British came to India were living in perfect harmony. Instead, he regards the two communities as:

"deeply divided among themselves by a series of historical causes. These causes were not independent, but reinforced each other and their effect could not but grow as the struggle for independence intensified and the transfer of power by the British was enlarged by steps and promised to become total."<sup>65</sup>

Explaining the separateness of the two communities further, he says "people who have lived together for centuries do not really constitute a society if their values have not fused."<sup>66</sup> Therefore the British cannot

---

65 Louis Dumont, op.cit., pp.64-65.

66 Ibid., p.56.

be blamed for creating a separate consciousness, especially when in Dumont's opinion a common consciousness did not exist to begin with.

Taking the view that the Muslims suffered a long history of discrimination, he justifies the political concessions given by the British to the Muslims on the plea that:

"if any community suffers under a long heritage of social and economic discrimination and asks for safeguards and privileges to compensate for the history of discrimination, then the democratic principle entails that these should be granted permanently or until the heritage of the past has been sufficiently counterbalanced."<sup>67</sup>

Thus Dumont justifies the political concessions in the form of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms given by the British as "not devoid of merit".<sup>68</sup> It is on these grounds, that Dumont felt that the partition of India was

"inevitable, as a lesser evil, in so far as the feelings of the Muslims of being socially distinct were disregarded by the leaders of the

---

67 Ibid., pp.64-65.

68 Ibid., p.65.

nationalist Congress. The attempt was made to coerce India into the abstract framework of modern political theory instead of recognising its duality and trying to build the union of the two communities, ... on their very separateness."<sup>69</sup>

Similarly, for R. Coupland there was <sup>a</sup> long-standing 'schism' between the Hindus and Muslims, and it was the result of the secular government established by the British that both the Hindus and the Muslims got an opportunity to develop irrespective of their religious beliefs. As a result of the new opportunities opened up before them, they were forced into competition with each other, and this led to the growth of communalism, which because of the restraining hand of the British did not get worse.<sup>70</sup> Far from fostering divisio between the Indian communities, the British gave to them political unity, their "greatest gift" to India.<sup>71</sup>

---

69 Ibid., p.69 .

70 R. Coupland, Part-I of The Constitutional Problem in India, p.

71 Ibid., Part-II, p.258.

Dumont and Coupland represented the other extreme viewpoint, that had it not been for the beneficial and restraining hand of the British, communalism would have grown unchecked. Therefore, the British cannot be blamed for the ills inherent in Indian society.

Rejecting both extremes, one may safely conclude, that though the sole responsibility for the growth of communalism does not rest with the British, they played a vital role in its development. In the words of Bipan Chandra,

"Their role became crucial precisely because they held state power, a crucial determinant in the political fortunes of any ideology or movement. And to deny this role directly, or indirectly by misrepresenting those who bring it out is to become an apologist for imperialism....

In fact, apart from the socio-economic situation, British policy was the determining element of the communal question. After all, the social classes and groups involved — from landlords to the petty bourgeoisie, lacked the political power to push their interests through communal politics and could hardly have gone

far, ... in the absence of support from the colonial State."<sup>72</sup>

To sum up, we may say, that though the British divided and ruled, there was no deliberate attempt to promote communal hostility, or communalism per se. Indeed, the aim was to avoid it.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, the British policy-makers found it necessary to divide Indian society in order to govern. They had to identify areas of opposition and cultivate areas of support. This done, they could formulate their policies accordingly and extend patronage. In establishing a separate Muslim identity both political and social, their policies, therefore, played a major role.

---

72 Bipan Chandra, op.cit., pp.242-43.

73 The British found an excessive display of communal hostility as destabilising and posing administrative problems for them. This is discussed below.

## III

Having discussed the prevalent notions as regards the extent of the British role in the growth of communalism, we may briefly trace the early history of British rule and the first beginnings of their policy of cultivating the forces of division and in particular how they encouraged certain sections of the Muslims and extending patronage<sup>to</sup> them, thus cultivating them as an ally from a very early stage.

While many scholars have attempted to establish a fundamental antagonism between the two communities with communalism being the legacy of the medieval past, no major historical work has been able to authoritatively establish the prevalence of communalism as a dominant political phenomenon in the pre-modern period. Only with the advent of the British — particularly in the 20th century, did it emerge as a significant factor to reckon with.

The British policy of patronising the Muslim community began early. Immediately after the 1857 uprising, the British began to distrust the Muslims and discriminate against them. A policy of reducing the number of Muslims in the army and bureaucracy was followed. This was because the British believed that having displaced the Muslims as a ruling class, they would naturally be resentful of the British. William Howard Russell observed in 1858:

"the Mohomedan element in India is that which causes us most trouble and provokes the largest share of our hostility ... Our antagonism to the followers of Mohamed is far stronger ... They are unquestionably more dangerous to our rule."<sup>74</sup>

The Muslims were also, for various reasons, slow in taking advantage of western education, and fell behind in the competition for jobs in the government and

---

74 W.H. Russell, "My Diary in India in Years 1858-9", vol.II, pp.73-74, quoted in Peter Hardy, The Muslims of British India, p.70.



general economic advancement.<sup>75</sup>

Gradually this policy of discrimination against the Muslims changed. Particularly once the Indian National Congress was founded in 1885, and the newly educated sections became more vocal and began propogating ideas of nationalism, the British began to feel threatened by the Congress. In addition, in the Muslim community too, men like Syed Ahmed Khan began to organise the Muslim community on political lines. He also argued that the Muslims should dissociate themselves from the Congress and be loyal to the British, instead. This would help them in getting both education and employment.

Syed Ahmed Khan was actively encouraged by the British officials. They saw in the rising tide of nationalism a threat to their own authority. The Congress was gradually becoming very critical of the government policies and beginning with mild criticism

---

75 For an account of Muslim backwardness in Bengal, see W.W. Hunter, The Indian Musalmans.

of the government, it increasingly began to put forward more radical demands. To counteract the Congress and to prevent a fusion of the two communities and thus facilitating the growth of a sense of national solidarity, the government began to favour the Muslim as a community in order to build up a counter-weight to the Congress.

Thus the government initiated this new policy with increasing vigour from the 1880s. It now began to provide special assistance to Muslims for the spread of education among them. Syed Ahmed Khan's attempt at setting up the college at Aligarh for higher education for the Muslims was encouraged. Francis Robinson writes that:

"Syed Ahmed was the genius behind Aligarh, but it was government's patronage that made the college... a major political force, without government's aid it is unlikely that the college would have been founded, it is even less likely that it would have been so successful. Without the favour of the government of India, Syed Ahmed, would never have acquired the position and reputation that enabled him to found and lead all-India political organisations."<sup>76</sup>

---

76 F. Robinson, op.cit., p.131.

Hunter's account of the backwardness of the Muslim community in education in Bengal<sup>77</sup>, served to provide the excuse and also served a useful purpose in establishing the myth that Muslims all over India (emphasis mine), were an educationally deprived community, needing protection and patronage.<sup>78</sup>

Similarly, as regards official employment in public services, special assistance was provided to the Muslims. The Muslims were nominated to serve on the Viceroy's Legislative Council and on the Education and Public Service Commission in the 1870s and early 1880s.

"The selection of witnesses before the Public Service Commission was designed to ensure that Muslim views and interests were heeded. Although the Commission's report did not propose communal representation in the services, Panjab officials were asked to ensure in their official establish-

---

77 W.W. Hunter, op.cit., see chapter-IV, pp.138-206, in particular pp.189-206.

78 See Peter Hardy, op.cit., pp.120- 22 for details of the proportion (percentage-wise) of education among the Muslims.

ments that no important community went unrepresented."<sup>79</sup>

Disregarding the evidence submitted by several provincial British officials that whole classes of Muslims did not aspire to government appointments, the Commission's report spoke of the "Mohammedan" as a "class" who have fallen behind in the race of life under British rule."<sup>80</sup> The Government of India resolution of 23rd October, 1884, also spoke of the need to give Muslims "in some respects exceptional assistance"; and another resolution in July 1885 assumed that the Muslims as such competed with their rivals — the Hindus — in State employment. This "helped to endow the Muslims with a separate social as well as religious personality which needed to be recognized in British policy."<sup>81</sup>

---

79 Confidential. Demi-official letter from Secretary, Punjab Government to the Principal officials in Punjab, dated 2 August 1887, File No.16, cited in Peter Hardy, Ibid., p.125.

80 Education Commission Report, p.6. Quoted in P. Hardy, Ibid., p.122.

81 Cited in P. Hardy, Ibid., p.122.

Thus by the 1890s, the British statesmen and officials, were prepared to see in the Muslims a great and distinct political community and some upper class Muslims and some important leaders were themselves only too willing, to see themselves as such.<sup>82</sup>

By the early 20th century, the principle of reserving posts in public services through fixed quotas for Hindus and Muslims was actively adopted in Bengal and Punjab and later extended on an all-India basis by 1934. In addition communal leaders and communal politics was strengthened by forms of patronage such as grants of contracts, conferment of titles, nominations to legislative bodies and the like.<sup>83</sup> In this manner,

---

2 Thus Syed Ahmed began to campaign among the Muslims to maintain their separate identity and not join the national movement or throw in their lot with the nationalist efforts of the Congress whom they regarded as 'Hindu'. Sir John Strachey declared, "The better classes of Mohammedans are source to us of strength and not of weakness. They constitute a comparatively small but energetic minority of the population whose political interests are identical with ours". Quoted in Ram Gopal, op.cit., p.89.

83 See Bipan Chandra, op.cit., pp.279-80.

the British began to treat the Muslims as a distinct political group in India.

The decision to partition Bengal in 1905, was also motivated by the British desire to weaken what they saw as a nationalist agitation in Bengal.<sup>84</sup> In addition, they saw in the partition lesser chances of the Muslims being won over by the Congress. Andrew Fraser, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal argued that the Muslims of Calcutta should not be dominated by the Congress party.<sup>85</sup>

Curzon courting the support of the Muslim community said in February 1904, that partition would invest "the Mohammedans of Eastern Bengal with a

---

84 Risley, Home Secretary to the Government of India, wrote in an official note on 6th December 1904, "Bengal united is a power. Bengal divided will pull several different ways. That is what the Congress leaders feel : their apprehensions are perfectly correct... one of our main objects to split up and thereby to weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule." Quoted in Bipan Chandra, Modern India, p.240.

85 Z.H. Zaidi, "The Political Motive in the Partition of Bengal", Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society, XII, 2 April 1964, p.113, cited in Peter Hardy, op.cit., pp.149-50.

unity which they had not enjoyed since the days of the old Musalman Viceroys and Kings."<sup>86</sup>

The possibility of younger Muslims going over to the Congress party disturbed the British and it was to prevent this, that the British gave a sympathetic hearing to the Muslim Deputation in 1906 and soon after accepted the demand for separate electorates in 1909. Minto wrote to Morley on 8th August 1906, that it was necessary to give full value to the importance of other interests besides those of the Congress. Denzil Ibbetson, Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, wrote of taking into consideration the aspirations of the younger generation of Muslims.

" Their aspirations are perfectly natural. But it would be calamity if they were to drive those who feel them into the arms of the Congress Party; for at present the educated Mohammedan is the most conservative element in Indian society."<sup>87</sup>

The politics behind the creation of separate electorates for the Muslims further illustrate the

---

86 Z.H. Zaidi, Ibid., p.137, quoted in P. Hardy, Ibid., p.150.

87 Quoted in Peter Hardy, op.cit., p.157.

government policy of building up the League as an ally and stirring up Muslim opinion, behind the cloak of religion. "We have much to gain politically by our good will to Musalman enlightenment"<sup>88</sup>, wrote Minto to Morley in July 1908.

The prospect of Hindu-Muslim amity did not attract Minto. Arguing against a joint electorate he pointed out to Morley that under the joint scheme, the Hindus would not only be able to elect their own men, but a Mohammeden as well, who might not represent bona fide Muslim interests.<sup>89</sup>

The Muslim deputationists in 1906, further succeeded<sup>in</sup> persuading the British to give Muslims representation in Councils according to their political importance and not merely according to numerical strength.<sup>90</sup>

---

88 Minto to Morley 29th July 1908, Morley Papers, quoted in F. Robinson, op.cit., p.167.

89 See Peter Hardy, op.cit., p.159.

90 See F. Robinson, op.cit., p.173.



In reply to the Muslim Deputationists' request, on the question of representation Lord Minto said:

"The pith of your address, as I understand it, is a claim that in any system of representation ... the Mohammedan community should be represented as a community.... You justly claim that your numerical strength both in respect to the political importance of your community and the service it has rendered to the Empire entitle you to consideration. I am entirely in accord with you;..."

Assuring the Deputationists of British support, Minto continued;

"... I can only say to you that the Mohammedan community may rest assured that their political rights and interests as a community will be safeguarded in any administrative reorganisation which I am concerned..."<sup>91</sup>

Thus the British regarded Indian society "as a collection of interests and groups". Indian Muslims were regarded "as separate, distinct and monolithic".

---

91 Lord Minto's Reply to the Muslim Deputation, Text quoted in Ram Gopal, op.cit., Appendix-C, p.338.

"In establishing the Muslims as a separate and special interest in the Indian constitution, the Muslim League was important, but government's assumptions about Indian Muslims in general, and its policies towards them, were crucially important."<sup>92</sup>

In terms of political manipulation, therefore, the Minto-Morley reforms "endeavoured to put power not into the hand of those who demanded reform but into the hands of those on whose co-operation the Raj had long relied." Against this background,

"The granting of separate electorates appears to have been an attempt by the Raj to shore up a crucial part of its system of control .... it was an attempt to extend and broaden the base of its rule by extending and broadening the support of its traditional allies."<sup>93</sup>

The Lucknow Pact between the Congress and the Muslim League was an agreement which was soon nullified by the British in the Act of 1919, by granting to the

---

92 F. Robinson, Ibid., pp.173-74.

93 David Page, op.cit., pp.13-14.  
The Government of India's despatch (No.21, dated October 1, 1908) to the Secretary of State for India, regarding Muslim representation

League, more than what it got under the Pact.<sup>94</sup> The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919, enlarged the provincial councils and introduced Dyarchy in the provinces. The distribution of seats under the Act was carefully worked out between the different interests in the Council. Under the Lucknow Pact each Council was to consist of 80 per cent of elected members and

---

reached the "conclusion that representation by classes and interests is the only practicable method of embodying the elective principle in the Constitution of Indian Legislative Councils". The criterion of importance and not numerical strength suited to the smooth continuance of British rule.

Quoted in Ram Gopal, op.cit., p.108.

The reforms gave the Muslims unequal representation and left the Hindus murmuring. Thus giving room to the growth of communal feeling through dissatisfaction of one community. With separate electorates Muslims gained direct franchise also, which was denied to the other communities. The argument that Muslims were in a minority in all Provinces except Punjab, Bengal, Assam and so needed protection, led Malaviya to ask why Hindus were not given protection in Hindu minority provinces.

Cited in Ram Gopal, Ibid., p.112.

94 The first part of the Lucknow Pact dealt with the Muslim question — provision should be made for the representation of important minorities and Muslim should be represented through special electorate on Provincial Legislative Councils with one half of elected members in Punjab and 40% in Bengal and 15 to 30% in other provinces. The second part demanded that India be given dominion status. Cited in Ram Gopal, Ibid., pp.129-30.

20 per cent of nominated members. But under the Act of 1919 the government granted 30 per cent of the seats in the Council to nominated and special interests.<sup>95</sup> In addition care was taken to see that ultimate control was retained in government hands.

Another major change was <sup>that</sup> the introduction of ministerial responsibility at the provincial level was itself divided. A minister was responsible for one aspect of a department without the other. Residual powers were vested with the governors. Thus a policy of checks and balance was effectively employed. "Nationalism exhausted its strength against this intricate pattern of concession, checks and counterpoise."<sup>96</sup>

The Khilafat and Non-Co-operation Movement in the twenties led to a lull in the active official policy towards promoting communalism, only to be taken up in the early 1930s with the Round Table Conferences

---

95 See David Page, op.cit., pp.32-33.

96 Mehta and Patwardhan, op.cit., p.70.

and the declaration of the Communal Award. By 1935, the stage was set fully to perpetuate division in Indian politics on communal lines.

#### IV

This was the early history and foundation upon which the British skillfully practised their policy of divide and rule. This communal view of Indian society and politics was maintained from the beginning of modern politics in India till the end of British rule.

But while assessing this policy of divide and rule it must be borne in mind, that this policy was neither uniform nor was it practised out of a malicious desire to divide Indian society for its own sake or promote communalism per se. It evolved gradually, changing to suit the changing circumstances, and varied from time to time and often from region to region. It varied in degree as well. Starting out

from a position of careful and controlled support to communalism, it ended with the British giving all out support to communalism, particularly when all other means of division were exhausted or had outlived their utility. It was the communal division which proved to be the longest lasting and which was therefore, maintained until the end.

The policy of divide and rule was therefore for more complex and to provide a facile or simplistic explanation of all developments or to dub all policy divisions under the blanket term of 'divide and rule' would be to misunderstand it. Capturing the essence of the form this policy took, Bipan Chandra says:

"... communalists were seldom given open and all-out support by the colonial state. They were encouraged through the ready acceptance of their demands, welcoming of their initiatives, 'non-frowning' upon their agitations, non-action against their ideological misdemeanours, extension of official patronage and so on."<sup>97</sup>

---

97 Bipan Chandra, Communalism etc., p.247.

The policy of favouring the Muslim community began initially out of a need to conciliate the Muslim community whom the British saw as having been displaced as the ruling class. Thus it was to mollify their sentiments and win them over to British side. So it was pro-British rather than anti-Hindu. But with the rising tide of nationalism and the increasingly stiff anti-imperialist stand adopted by the Congress, the policy shifted from being merely pro-British to anti-nationalist as well.<sup>98</sup>

That the British were not interested in promoting communalism in itself is evident from their policy of giving support to communalism in a carefully controlled fashion. This was done, because if allowed to grow unchecked it manifested itself in the form of violence which posed a law and order problem for the administration. So although the British welcomed

---

98 Thus the Congress began to be seen as a 'Hindu' body. For a detailed discussion of this point see chapter-

activities which undercut the legitimacy of the Congress and its claim to represent all Indians and themselves promoted communal ideology, they could not condone communal violence, as this threatened the very fabric of British administration and was a destabilising factor. To preserve the interests of the colonial state and to prolong their stay in India, it was essential that law and order be maintained. The confidential Home Political Files of the British clearly reveal the British concern over communal riots.<sup>99</sup>

Further, unlimited support to Muslim communalism in particular was undesirable as it might provoke Hindu communalism which may turn to Congress and the combined opposition of the majority of the population as dangerous. Thus all-out support to Muslim communalism was given only towards the end of their

---

99 For the period under consideration, see Home Department (Political) File Nos., 37/20/39; 113/1939; 3/10/40; 5/2/40; KW to 53/140. In addition the Fortnightly Reports of the Governors in the Home Political Files clearly reveal this anxiety. For the distinction between communal violence and ideology, see Bipan Chandra, op.cit., pp.4-6.



rule, after 1939, when the lines of confrontation with Indian national movement were irrevocably set and the British lost the support of even the moderate elements among the Hindus.

In following the policy of promoting division the British exploited every kind of division that existed in Indian society. Thus in addition to the religious division; regional, linguistic and caste divisions were also fully exploited. But the religious division proved to be the most useful and was retained until the end.

In political terms, the British treated the Muslim community as monolithic bloc with all its members having common political and economic interests and placed it on par with the Congress 'Party'. The Muslims as a whole were viewed as though they represented a separate political party. There are constant references by the British officials to 'Muslim' opposition, 'Muslim' desire, 'Muslim' sympathies, 'Muslim' mind and so on. In this manner the Muslims were pitted against the Congress and encouraged to

treat themselves as a separate political entity. Differences within the Hindu community were acknowledged and opposition to the Congress from certain sections of the Hindus was referred to in non-denominational terms as the opposition of landlords, or princes or conservative interests. Communal opposition was recognized as such. In contrast, as far as the Muslims were concerned whatever category of opposition they fell into was regarded as 'Muslim' opposition.

Implicit here was the assumption that Muslims were a homogenous bloc with common social, political and economic interests. Whereas the Muslims were, in fact, far from being so. They were divided by different interests in land, in employment, in government service, religious and ethnic differences. The Muslims therefore represented a multiplicity of interests rather than a homogenous community. Similarly, the Hindus were divided by different interests in land, government services, caste, sub-caste and language.<sup>100</sup> Frequently, these different interests

---

100 For a profitable discussion of these differences within the two communities, see F. Robinson, op.cit., pp.24-32.

vied for favour and special treatment and played into the hands of the British.

In assessing the policy of divide and rule, it must be borne in mind that social, economic, religious and cultural differences existed and were exploited by the British to maintain their hold over the country. These differences provided fertile soil, in which the British could operate successfully. In the 20th century, communalism became a useful ideological weapon against nationalism. The Secretary of State for India, Lord Olivier, in a letter to The Times (London), dated July 10th, 1926 said:

"No one with any close acquaintance of Indian affairs will be prepared to deny that on the whole there is a predominant bias in British officials in India in favour of the Muslim community, partly on the ground of closer sympathy, but more largely as a make-weight against Hindu nationalism." (emphasis added). 101

Similarly writes Ravinder Kumar,

"The decisive factor... was the over-arching presence of the imperial power

which promoted dissensions between Hinduism and Islam (as it promoted dissension within the communities of Hinduism and Islam) for the purpose of political control over the sub-continent. The objective of the strategy of 'divide and rule', was not to break up the sub-continent into antagonistic politics. Its objective was to render a society of 400 million and more amenable to imperial control ." 102

This strategy, however, reinforced the strength of political formations like the Muslim League, which sought to aggravate the Muslim community of India into a separatist posture.<sup>103</sup>

But once in motion, this had a snowballing effect and in the late 1930s and especially in the 1940s, as Mushirul Hasan has pointed out, communalism gained its own momentum, independent of British control as well as communal organizations. This paved the way for the partition of the country in 1947.<sup>104</sup>

---

102 Ravinder Kumar (ed), Myth and Reality, Introduction, p.xvi.

103 Ibid., p.xvi.

104 Mushirul Hasan, Nationalism and Communal Politics in India, p.315.

Chapter-II

THE AFTERMATH OF THE ACT OF 1935,

1935-39

Chapter-IITHE AFTERMATH OF THE ACT OF 1935,1935- 39

"... I regard it (a united All-India) as an abstraction which in so far as it becomes real will be fundamentally injurious to British interests. I look upon India as one on the same scale as Europe with all its divisions and counterpoises, and upon the British function being to preserve the balance between these great masses, and thus maintain our own control for our advantage and their salvation .... Following this line of thought I should rather like to see the Muslims of the North joining together as a counter-check upon the anti-British tendencies of the Congress. I hope the 'princes' India will preserve a separate entity and outlook from the rather dismal and bleak outlook manifestation of British India. I should have thought that it was in the preservation of these forms of culture and thought that one of the essentials of strength rested.... I'm not at all attracted by the prospect of one united India which will show us the door. We might not be able to prevent it, but that we should devote our best efforts to producing it, is to my mind distressing and repugnant in the last degree .... of course, my ideal is

narrow and limited. I want to see the British Empire preserved for a few more generations in all its strength and splendour. Only the most prodigious exertions of British genius will achieve this aim."

— Winston Churchill to  
Lord Linlithgow  
3 November 1937.

A proper understanding of British policy towards communalism is impossible without some knowledge of the development of the actual course of events in Indian politics during our period. This necessitates a study of the major issues and events that shaped and influenced State policy during this period. Imperial policy towards communalism was neither uniform nor framed in isolation, but in response to the fast changing conditions in India. Any inquiry into the policy of the British, therefore, has to be seen not only in the light of imperial objectives, interests, and perceptions but also the changing conditions in India. The influence of the policy-makers though seemingly all-pervasive was in reality much narrower; circumscribed and dependent as it was on a precarious balance between

many conflicting factors, in the light of which they were constantly having to redefine, adopt or readjust their policy to best suit the conditions then prevalent; whether it was by adjusting the structure of political institutions which would give them control of the crucial areas of government, or by seizing upon issues and events which were thrown up and which assumed importance in this period, and utilising them to buttress their policy.

The thirties was a crucial period in Indian politics. The decade witnessed important developments on all fronts and in particular on the communal front. It was during these decisive years that the Muslim League consolidated itself, gained strength, rejected the Government of India Act of 1935 and ultimately made the demand for Pakistan in 1940. It was during this period, too, that the British made attempts to implement the carefully drawn Act of 1935, which would fulfil, the British imperialist ambitions of retaining control of India and yet handing over some power to Provinces to placate nationalist aspirations. It was now, again,



that the Congress attempted to maintain its hegemonical position in Indian politics vis-a-vis the Raj and to further the struggle against it; whether it be by full-scale agitation against the British as in the Civil Disobedience Movement, or by constitutional techniques like working the Reforms even if only to hinder the smooth functioning of the reforms by wrecking from within the legislature. Through the medley of all this, ran the thread of communalism and the strengthening and consolidation of communal forces. The developments that took place during this period led to a widening of the gulf between the Congress and the Muslim League. Encouraged by the British, communal politics rose steadily to the forefront. The many issues and events were seized upon by the British to strengthen separatist politics and to implement their old policy of divide and rule.<sup>1</sup> This was done blatantly wherever possible but subtly most of the time. The policy was continually reshaped, adjusted and honed but essentially followed

---

1 For a discussion on the policy of divide and rule, see chapter-I : Introduction.

the tried and tested formula of keeping Indians divided which now acquired new dimensions in order to fit the changed situation.

## I

In a lengthy and complex relationship such as the one that existed between the British and the Indians, with one as the ruler and the other as the ruled, any policy undertaken by the State would necessarily be influenced, not only by the major developments that took place in that period, but also by the state perception and evaluation of the dominant political vehicles and its leaders. Thus before dealing with major issues and policies implemented, it would be useful at the outset, to see how the British perceived the major political organizations in India. This would provide a valuable insight into the minds of the policy-makers and thereby the factors that conditioned and determined the formulation of their policy in India.

The policy undertaken by the British, at any point, was the result of imperial needs and requirements on the

one hand and their preconceived notions about Indian society on the other. In this context the British policy towards communalism becomes important as all their supposedly 'reform' measures can be traced back to the understanding that the Indian society comprised of 'Hindu' society and 'Muslim' society in the main; that religion was the dominant, if not the only unit of division in the society and therefore had to be acknowledged and kept in mind while taking major policy decisions. This outlook is reflected throughout, in the private correspondence of British officials, during this period.

While this understanding is to be found in the official despatches and writings of British officials from the days of Lord Dufferin, The British scholar R. Coupland, reflected this understanding of Indian society in its most cogent form. Although Coupland cannot be taken as an official spokesman of the British, his vision was deeply coerred by the official perception. Since he based himself largely on official sources, one may take him to<sup>be</sup> an unofficial spokesman

of the British. His understanding of Indian society was expressed thus:

"Indian society...was so diversified by race, creed and custom as to preclude the normal operation of 'majority rule'.

The outstanding example of schism in Indian society is the deep-rooted antagonism between the Hindus, who constituted about two-thirds of the population of India, and the Muslims who constitute nearly one-quarter. In the constitutional field this antagonism showed itself in the repudiation by the Muslims of majority rule in principle and of 'joint' electorate in particular."<sup>2</sup>

Interesting, here, is the references to 'deep-rooted antagonism' and a rejection by the 'Muslims' of the principle of joint electorate. Whether it was a position the British earnestly believed in, or whether it was merely to acquire the motivation to pursue the politics of division could be a matter of debate. But such an attitude easily provided the necessary justification for their policies.

---

2 R. Coupland, op.cit., p.v.

It was to keep alive communal forces that the British chose to view the Congress as "dominantly Hindu in fact, though non-communal in principle".<sup>3</sup>

The Congress drew into its fold the majority of the Indian people and represented all shades of political opinion. The British chose to see the differences in terms of religion rather than ideologies. Treating the Congress as a 'Hindu' body would deny it its representative character and thereby weaken nationalism and strengthen communalism. Even a casual perusal of the private correspondence of the British officials during this period, reveals this outlook. Their letters were speckled with constant references to Congress as a 'Hindu' body. This will be brought out in the discussion to follow, alongside the issues that determined their policy. The temptation to cite an example here even at the risk of some repetition,

---

3 R. Coupland, Ibid., p.v.

is, however, great. A statement that typified this understanding ran as follows: "...they (Congressmen) are so reluctant to admit, that the Congress does not in fact represent all parties in this country and is essentially whatever qualification the presence in its ranks of a small number of Muslims may call for, a communal organisation."<sup>4</sup> (Emphasis in the original).

The British tended to regard the Congress and its policy as the single policy determined by the 'high command' or the central caucus<sup>5</sup> — a dictatorial policy which allowed for no dissent.<sup>6</sup> This outlook was responsible for making the communal problem more complex. Zetland frequently spoke of the "totalitarian tendencies of the Congress under Gandhi's influence".<sup>7</sup> It was

---

4 Linlithgow to Zetland, 18 November 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.IV, Roll no.8.

5 See Zetland to Linlithgow, 12 April 1937, Linlithgow Papers, vol.II, Roll no.4.

6 Coupland, op.cit., p.95.

7 Zetland to Linlithgow, 16 November 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.IV, Roll no.8.

in an attempt to break such a policy that the British tried; (a) to effect a split within the Congress ranks, and (b) co-opting the Congress into the framework of the provincial government and thereby encouraging provincial loyalties, dulling national consciousness and so weakening the Congress.

Coupland succinctly summed up the British disapproval of this totalitarianism

"Totalitarianism seems... less excusable in India... For to set a party above the people, to identify its organization with the State, is to override the minority problem. And, as the political development of India has borne witness at each stage of its successive stages, the minority problem is far more difficult in India than in any European country. It cannot be overridden and it has been the nemesis of Congress totalitarianism that the attempt to override it has made it a greater obstacle than it has ever yet been to attaining the Congress goal of a free and united Indian nationhood."<sup>8</sup>

This attitude, they felt, added further to the Muslim fear of a 'Hindu' dictatorship of the nature they thought, they were witnessing in the Provinces.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> R. Coupland, op.cit., p.108.

<sup>9</sup> See Haig Papers for the period 1937-1938.

This gave them further justification for their preferential treatment of the minorities.

The British looked upon Congress not as a 'party' in the Western sense, but as a "revolutionary" body, which posed a challenge to the British.<sup>10</sup> It therefore became necessary to tame it, and keep it down by force (whenever it led any mass movements against them) and to build up a counterweight to it, by propping up communal organisations.

At the same time, the British had to admit that there was more to the Congress than being merely "revolutionary". Hallet, Governor of UP, writing to Linlithgow said, "But what we must face is that we cannot destroy Congress as a political party; even if Gandhi died tomorrow, the party would still be effective .... We cannot treat Congress as a purely revolutionary organization, it is not, though it may adopt revolutionary methods; it represents a national movement and

---

10 Ibid., pp.86, 309.  
"Revolutionary" as the British understand it, was used in the sense of Congress being a trouble-making, destructive body.



a vast amount of support from the educated classes."<sup>11</sup>

This is a very revealing admission indeed. But interestingly this admission came as late as 1940, after the Congress had proved its political potential — its competency in both leading mass movements as well as running the government. All earlier denouncements of Congress being a "revolutionary" (rebel) body, could be seen to a large extent as wishful thinking on the part of the British. It was in 1940, with the changed situation, that they finally, gave up all pretences of assigning a solely "destructive" purpose to Congress activities.

Although the British preferred to treat the Congress as a 'Hindu' body, they could not avoid the fact that it was a national body with a secular outlook. Hence the continuous effort to underscore its importance. But they could not be completely dismissive of it. One of the best official summaries yet, of the attitude and policy they adopted towards the Congress

---

<sup>11</sup> Hallet to Linlithgow, 7 December 1940, Linlithgow Papers, vol. Roll no.103.

came from Haig who wrote:

"... for a Congress Party to achieve power at the outset of the new constitution ... would be dangerous. They would almost certainly try to exploit that position and come into conflict with the safeguards and H.M.G..... our policy is to prevent any marked accession of strength to Congress...we should recognize that the Congress are, and for a long time will remain, our enemies, we should treat them not vindictively, but coldly, keeping them at arm's length."<sup>12</sup>

The Muslim League on the other hand was perceived for what it was — a Muslim political organisation. This is, however, not to say that their perception of the League was an unchanged one. Their policy towards and perception of the League changed with the changing political fortunes of the League. It was initially a politically weak organisation and was perceived as such by the British and was later recognised as the sole representative organization of all Muslims in India. From being a politically weak, disorganised and negligible force in the early thirties, the League

---

<sup>12</sup> Haig's note, 30 March 1934, Home Poll. 4/4/34.

swiftly grew in strength, to make a convincing claim for a separate state in 1940 and achieved this at amazing speed by 1947. The British eagerly recognized the then stronger position of the League. In this meteoric transformation the League was assisted by the British, who increasingly saw the Congress as becoming a threat to their own existence in India. The need to have an ally dictated their policy towards the League, whose cause the British increasingly espoused.

The League was encouraged in a variety of ways — by treating it on par with the Congress, recognizing its claim as the sole representative organization of the Muslims, and ignoring its numerical position as the minority and giving it importance according to its political position.

In thus elevating the status and importance of the League and Jinnah, the British did not do so out of any admiration or new found respect. Though frequently infuriated by Jinnah's ways, expediency dictated their decision to patronize the League and

pander to Jinnah's demands. Thus Linlithgow thought it "important to hold the Muslim League together if we can do so, ..." <sup>13</sup>, frequently the British officials spoke of how 80 to 90 million Muslims could not be ignored.

Pleased at the steady hardening of the League's attitude towards the Congress, Linlithgow wrote, "that the Muslims as a whole have reached the conclusion that, in their own interests they must, if they are to hold their ground, now organize and put up an effective counter-opposition to the Hindu elements in the Congress." <sup>14</sup>

Thus encouraged by the British, the gap widened between the League and Congress and between the Indian communities on communal lines. So that once the Pakistan declaration was adopted by the League, the British soon spoke of and accepted the two-nation

---

13 Linlithgow to Amery, 5 September 1940, Linlithgow Papers, vol.V, Roll no.9.

14 Linlithgow to Hyde Gowan, reported to Zetland, 20 October 1937, Linlithgow Papers, vol. Roll no.

theory. Linlithgow wrote to the King Emperor:

"This plan has been adopted by the leaders of the League because it offered the sole means of escape from the dilemma in which the Muslim minority finds itself in the face of the introduction of democratic institutions,... They refuse to contemplate a future in which they would be in constant subordination to the Hindu majority. They are therefore constrained to suggest the constitutional severance of the country in such a manner as to secure to them political control in those areas in which the Muslim population exceeds the Hindus."<sup>15</sup>

## II

The first major development which marked the beginning of our period, was the Government of India Act of 1935, which was the logical outcome of the attempt at constitutional reforms flowing electoral institutions. But before discussing the Act itself, it is necessary to trace the developments in the early years of the decade which led up to the passing of the Act of 1935.

---

15 Linlithgow to King Emperor, 4 June 1940,  
Linlithgow Papers

In the wake of the collapse of the Civil Disobedience Movement launched by the Congress, the British initiated a series of Round Table Conferences to decide the future constitution of India. Although the announcement was received with initial enthusiasm, in India, it soon became evident that too many differences of opinion existed, not only between the British and the Indians but also among the Indian leaders themselves; with the All-Parties Conference convened by Sapru in New Delhi in February 1930,<sup>16</sup> coming to naught as the Hindu Mahasabha refused to cooperate. The first Round Table Conference was held in November 1930, unattended by the Congress and ended in January 1931, without reaching a settlement on the communal problem. The British Prime Minister appealed to the Hindus and Muslims to reach an agreement among themselves and declared:

".... the British Government has no desire to use your disagreement for any ulterior motives .... We sitting

---

16 Cited in Uma Kaura, Muslims and Indian Nationalism, pp.57-58.

here cannot impose pains and penalties. We sitting here can declare rights and hand over to you political power to see that these rights are enforced and respected."<sup>17</sup>

But while professing to be free of vested interests and ulterior designs, imposing their will was precisely what the British proceeded to do. When the Second Round Table Conference was held in September 1931, (this time attended by Gandhi as the only representative of the Congress), the communal deadlock remained unresolved and this Round Table Conference also made no headway. The composition of the conference was designed to foment dissensions among Indians. Nehru recognising this wrote:

"By careful selection of its nominees for the conference, the British Government had collected these reactionary elements and by controlling the procedure, they had made the communal issue the major issue, and an issue on which no agreement was possible between the irreconcilables gathered there."<sup>18</sup>

---

17 Proceedings of the Minorities Sub-Committee, p.231, quoted in Uma Kaura, Ibid., p.66.

18 Jawaharlal Nehru, An Autobiography, p.294. In addition, Nehru claimed that Indian members represented groups of vested interests in India, who were tied to British Imperialism and represented prominently the 'minority' & 'majority' groups on the communal issue, whose sole interest was to gain a communal advantage. p.292.

The British anxious to prevent a polarisation with the British on one side and a united India on the other, seized the initiative in their hands.<sup>19</sup> Using the deadlock at the conference to show how the Indians were basically incapable of self government and how therefore, the imperial presence was imperative; the British Prime Minister now came forward with his own Award on that question. The Viceroy, Lord Willingdon, wrote to Samuel Hoare, the Secretary of State for India:

".... I have always felt that it was quite difficult for the communities to agree among themselves and His Majesty's Government is bound to have to decide the communal question and say to them, 'you cannot settle this for yourselves, here is a scheme we lay

---

19 The British anxiety to safeguard Muslim position and gain their support for the Raj is reflected in Willingdon's thinking: "...we are dealing with people emotional, suspicious, apprehensive of the future and apt to be hasty in opinion and violent in action. If the Muslims are now carried away into opposition,... We should have the whole forces of the country against us, Hindus and Muslims. .... We cannot afford to be wholly without friends" (emphasis added). Willingdon to Hoare, 9 July 1932, Templewood Collection, quoted in Uma Kaura, op.cit., p.85.



down and this must hold good until such time as you can knock your heads together and agree!"<sup>20</sup>

Thus by projecting the breakdown of the Round Table Conferences and the need for the declaration of the Communal Award as the failure of the Indians to overcome communal dissensions, the British could assume a self-righteous pose and declare that they were compelled to intervene, against their will, in matters that should be the concern of Indians only.

The Congress recognised this pose for what it was, and Nehru declared that it was the deliberate policy of the British to make the Round Table Conference exhaust itself on petty issues and ignore fundamental questions. "Their major trump card was of course, the communal issue and they played it for all it was worth."<sup>21</sup>

---

20 Willingdon to Hoare, 13 November 1931, Templewood Collection, quoted in Uma Kaura, op.cit., p.76.

21 Nehru, An Autobiography, p.294.

The Communal Award conceded the demand of separate electorate and reserved seats not only the Muslims, but also to the Indian Christians, Sikhs, Europeans, Untouchables and Anglo-Indians. Though some sections of the Muslims were fairly satisfied with the Award, the British made sure that even while conceding their demand in the main, the Muslims did not get a clear majority in the two Muslim majority provinces of Bengal and Punjab,<sup>22</sup> and the weightage to the Europeans would tilt the balance in their favour. This, again, was a clear evidence of their policy of checks over supposed concessions.

Thus while professing non-interference, the imposition of the Award ensured the division of political opinion in the country, and determined the options open to the Indians. It ensured that all political organizations were forced to take a position; and one moreover that was determined by the Government.

---

22 Ram Gopal, op.cit., p.237.

In responding to the Award, the Congress found itself in an extremely difficult position. Given its claims to represent equally all communities and with its history of concessions to the minorities, rejecting the Award would have meant, taking up a position which did not give due consideration to the minorities and thereby giving the more rabid among the Muslim communalists an opportunity to reiterate their assertion that the intention of the Congress was to wipe out the minorities and establish a 'Hindu' Raj. This was recognised by Gandhi when he said: "There is no escape from the communal award, if we are to secure Musalman's co-operation and if we are to secure any advantage for the nation".<sup>23</sup> Accepting the Award meant accepting the communal framework which the British government had laid down and within which it would be forced to operate. This would mean a compromise with the Imperialists. Minor changes in the Award could not materially change the nature of the Award and even so these changes would be effected within the framework of British imperialism.<sup>24</sup>

---

23 Gandhi to M.M. Malviya, 7 January 1934, Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol.LVII,p.360.

24 Letter from Nehru to Sarat Chandra Bose, 26 September 1936, Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru, vol.VII, p.395.

The Congress recognised the Award as anti-national and as giving strength to disruptive tendencies and thereby strengthening the hold of imperialism.<sup>25</sup> Yet, though in principle the Congress rejected the Award completely, in its public pronouncements it could not openly reject it and had to adopt an attitude of neutrality towards it. Articulating the Congress position the All-India Congress Committee declared: "Since however, the different communities in the country are sharply divided on the question of the communal award it is necessary to define the Congress attitude on it. The Congress to represent equally all the communities comprising the Indian nation, and, therefore, in view of the division of opinion, can neither accept nor reject the award as long as the division of opinion lasts."<sup>26</sup>

---

25 Nehru stated in "Hindu and Muslim Communalism", Selected Works, Ibid., vol.VI, p. 168.

26 See CWC Resolution, Wardha, 12-13 June 1934, in M.A. Zaidi, Development of Muslim Political Thought in India, vol.IV, pp.

This position of neutrality also carried its own dangers. Even by maintaining a neutral attitude the Congress could not hope to be free of criticism. This time criticism came from Hindu quarters. The Hindu Mahasabha, for one, was extremely critical of the Congress decision to not openly condemn the Award. So were some Congress nationalists.<sup>27</sup>

However, on paper at least, the Award left it open to the Indian communities to reach an agreement which if unanimous, would replace the Award. So negotiations began in September 1932, and in November 1932, a unity conference was held and representatives of all shades of opinion — the Hindu Mahasabha, the Sikh League, the Muslim League, the Muslim Conference, the Christians and the Congress attended. The major achievement of this conference, was that the representatives agreed upon a joint electorate, provided that a candidate to be declared elected should get at least

---

27 Anand and Malviya resigned from Congress to form the Nationalist Party, which organised a campaign against the Communal Award. It was supported whole-heartedly by the Hindu Mahasabha.

30 per cent of the votes polled of his own community, failing which the candidate with the highest number of votes of his community would be returned.<sup>28</sup>

But even while this Conference was in progress, Samuel Hoare announced at the Third Round Table Conference that the British Government had decided to allot  $33\frac{1}{3}$  per cent of the seats in the central legislature to the Muslims. This announcement offered more to them, than had been agreed upon in the Unity Conference.<sup>29</sup> Once again, the British had successfully blocked the achievement of unity. While ostensibly giving the Indians a free choice, the British were in reality following a policy which guaranteed disunity and division. This was entirely in keeping with imperial objectives and their long standing policy of preventing the fusion of the two communities and thus effectively preventing the achievement of a common

---

28 Text of the Agreement arrived at by the Committee of the Unity Conference, 18 November 1932. M.S. Ane y Papers, cited in Uma Kaura, op.cit., p.90.

29 Abstract of the Secretary of State's Statement to the Conference on 6 December 1932, Indian Round Table Conference, Third Session, 1932, pp.57-58, cited in Uma Kaura, ibid., p.92.

national identity. The first tentative step towards an understanding was crushed and the Unity Conference naturally collapsed.<sup>30</sup>

In spite of the disposition shown by the Indian communities to gravitate towards a modest effort at attaining joint electorate, and in spite of the conference's near realisation of such an attempt, the British rulers adhered firmly to the belief that the Hindus and Muslims were basically incompatible and a common nationality for the two was absolutely inconceivable, and their own sage presence as indispensable. This attitude is clearly evident in the report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee session:

"In India .... there are no parties as we understand them and there is no considerable body of political opinion which can be described as mobile. In their place, we are confronted with the age old antagonism of Hindu and Mohammadan representatives not only of religions but of two civilisations with numerous self-contained

---

30 For an account of their earlier record of sabotaging unity see chapter-I, Introduction.

exclusive minorities .... with the rigid divisions of caste, itself inconsistent with democratic principle. In these circumstances communal representation must be accepted as inevitable at the present time."<sup>31</sup>

Thus perpetuating the theory of basic disharmony and divergence between the two communities.

Stressing this point further and justifying the need for British presence as arbitrators, the Committee further said:

"There must be an authority in India armed with adequate powers able to hold the scales evenly between conflicting interests and to protect those who have neither the influence nor the ability to protect themselves."<sup>32</sup>

In 1934, another abortive effort at unity was made between Jinnah, Rajendra Prasad and Malviya. Well aware of the British role in all this, Nehru reflecting on the causes of the communal deadlock that frustrated the efforts at Unity all along and blocked

---

Report of the  
31 Joint Parliamentary Committee Session  
1933-34, vol.I, part-I, p.11.

32 Ibid., p.14.



the smooth functioning of the Round Table Conference, said that no amount of political bargaining could take the country far, as

"whatever offer we make, however high our bid might be, there is always a third party which can bid higher and, what is more, give substance to its words.... the third and controlling party inevitably plays the dominant role and hands out its gifts to the prize boys of its choice."33

### III

It was from such a situation of deadlock that the Act of 1935 emerged. Once it was pushed through, to ensure the smooth functioning of the Act became the principal preoccupation of the British. But the Act threw up new problems and controversies and was condemned by all parties concerned, thus reflecting the complexity of the situation.

The Act following the general drift of British policy, created a central government in which

---

33 Nehru, An Autobiography, p.137.

responsibility at the centre was retained, but the weight of nationalist forces, was counterbalanced by the Muslims and the Princes, who were to be nominated by the British and who would therefore act as a bulwark against popular forces and check nationalism.

To the Conservatives in Britain, represented by Churchill, the federal clauses of the Act, represented an unseemly hastening towards self-government for India, while to the Liberals represented by Atlee it did not give enough scope for the free operation of "living forces in India",<sup>34</sup> <sup>hedged</sup> as it was, with too many safeguards, checks and balances.

The Congress characterised it as the shadow of self-government while the Muslim League was equally

---

34 Cited in Moore, R.J., "British Policy and the Indian Problem 1936-40", in Philips and Wainwright (eds.), The Partition of India : Policies and Perspectives, 1935-1947, p.79.

dissatisfied with it.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, the Act was there for whatever it was worth and the Indian organisation, once again were forced to either accept the Act with all its limitations and work it, or reject the Act. But they could not ignore the framework which imperialism had imposed upon them.

It placed before the Congress the choice of remaining outside the Legislature or being co-opted into the folds of imperialism. It now found itself in the paradoxical position of being both a protest movement as well as the government. As B.R. Tomlinson

---

35 "Resolved that the All-India Muslim League enters its emphatic protest against forcing the Constitution as embodied in the Government of India Act of 1935, upon the people of India, against their will and in spite of their repeated disapproval and dissent, expressed by various parties and bodies in the country, .... the most objectionable features contained therein, ... render the real control and responsibility of the Ministry and the Legislature over the entire field of the Government and the administration nugatory.

The League is clearly of the opinion that the All-India Federal Scheme ... is fundamentally bad."

All-India Muslim League Session, Bombay, 12 April 1936, Jamil-ud-din Ahmad, Historical Documents of the Muslim Freedom Movement, p. 193.

observes:

"They ran both the politics of the establishment — the search for power and influence through control of government institutions — and the politics of dissent — agitational movements against government power."<sup>36</sup>

The Act led to differences within the Congress between the right-wing and the left-wing, over the issue of contesting elections and then over the question of office acceptance. This was keenly observed by the British who hoped for a split within the Congress and were ready to throw their weight behind the right-wingers if a split seemed imminent.<sup>37</sup>

For the Muslim League, the prospect of entering the legislature provided it with a new vitality as it meant one way of counteracting "Hindu" dominance and the imposition of a "Hindu Raj". It thus set about reorganising itself and geared up for the coming elections to be held as specified under the Act. It

---

36 B.R. Tomlinson, The Indian National Congress and the Raj, p.85.

37 See Zetland to Linlithgow, 3 May 1937 and 28 June 1937, Linlithgow Papers, vol.II, Roll no. 4.

was later to transform itself from the dormant political force that it had been to become a mass based organisation. The Federal part of the Act depended for its success on the Princes, who had it in their power to veto the federal plan if they refused to co-operate. They, therefore, had to be wooed <sup>38</sup> by the British.

The introduction of Provincial Autonomy under the Act encouraged the provincialisation of politics, while franchise based on separate electorates encouraged separatism and communal feelings. <sup>39</sup>

The widened franchise gave an opportunity for nationalism to come to the fore, but this was frustrated by the British, by the division and fragmentation of the electorate; with separate electorates for

---

38 This was recognised by the policy-makers. Zetland writing to Linlithgow remarked, the Princes "were shy birds ....and might easily take fright." Zetland to Linlithgow, 28 June 1936, Linlithgow Papers, vol.I, Roll no.3. Also see the Report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee, op.cit., p.88.

39 Nehru pointing out the dangers of diverting attention to the provinces wrote: "First issues will sink into the background, independence itself will fade away and the narrowest provincialism will raise its ugly head". Nehru, J., The Unity of India, p.401.

women, and Indian Christians.

Under the scheme for Provincial autonomy, effective safeguards were provided by the British to keep the upper hand. Care was taken to see that the authority was able to intervene promptly and effectively at all times, if the elected ministers failed in their duty or if the British found sufficient reason to think so. Thus the Governors (incidentally all Englishmen), were vested with special powers of intervention, to see that the ministries were not carried away by their enthusiasm and did not overstep limits.

Thus, under the Act, communalism and separatism received further nurture. The Act retained the ultimate levers of authority in British hands. It also aimed as in case of earlier reform measures at the representation of interests, not of Indians as individuals and thus encouraged communalism.<sup>40</sup>

---

40 Lord Minto had said in 1907: "the position of a community should be estimated not on its numerical strength but in respect of its political position and the services it has rendered to the Empire". Quoted in Mehta and Patwardhan, op.cit., pp.73-74. To this Mehta and Patwardhan added the unstated criteria which determined the application of this policy: "the position of a

Sharing power with imperialism gave a fillip to communal politics and it soon assumed formidable proportions.

An estimate of the Act straight from the horse's mouth could be had when Linlithgow wrote to Zetland in his capacity as Viceroy of India as well as Chairman of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the 1935 Bill, stating reasons for the framing of the Act, he said:

"We framed the constitution as it stand in the Act of 1935, because we thought that was the best way... of maintaining British influence in India. It is no part of our policy, I take it, to expedite in India constitutional changes for their own sake or gratuitously to hurry the handing over the controls to Indian hands at any pace faster than, that which we regard as best calculated on a long view, to hold India to the Empire."<sup>41</sup>

---

community is estimated according to its opposition to nationalism and its strategic importance to the rulers." Ibid., p.75. Hence unequal weightage given to the British community itself.

41 Linlithgow to Zetland, 21 December 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.IV, Roll no.8.

Assessing the political situation and the direction that party organisation was taking, on the eve of the elections, the British noted that separate electorate had indeed achieved the desired result of keeping the Indian parties divided on communal lines. In the discussion of party organisation there was no talk of unity between the 'Hindus' and the 'Muslims'. Haig noted with satisfaction that,

"Recent developments have emphasized the fact that the Muslims intend to stand together as a community against the Congress, the fact that they are almost solid against the Congress shows that they are acting as a community and not as individuals influenced by general political or economic views."<sup>42</sup>

After securing an assurance from the Nawab of Chehatori that the 'Muslims' would not merge themselves in a non-communal party, he concluded that "the Muslim members intend to give their primary allegiance to the Muslim League and are determined not to come into a non-communal party"<sup>43</sup>, whereas the 'Hindus' urged the

---

42 Report prepared by Haig, 16 May 1937, under notes and orders, Haig Papers, F.115/8.

43 Haig to Linlithgow, 24 May 1937, Ibid.



necessity of forming a non-communal party, if any effective results were to be achieved.

This situation, was observed anxiously by the British, whose greatest fear was that of the Hindus and the Muslims presenting a united front against them. It was to prevent such a turn of events, that all their energies were directed. Thus this stand, of not wanting the two to unite was maintained well after elections. Linlithgow remarked,

"From our point of view, desirable as agreement between all parties may be in principle, I am not sure that a such a consummation is entirely to be welcomed. But the alternative—absorption of the Muslims by Congress would be equally undesirable."<sup>44</sup>

The Muslims must remain the allies of the British and not of the Congress.

Once campaigning for the elections began, the Congress and the League put aside their differences and brought forward very similar election programmes.

---

44 Linlithgow to Zetland, 27 October 1937, Linlithgow Papers, vol. II, Roll no. 4.

Communal differences were hardly touched upon, as each concentrated more on an economic programme to win the electorate, in their election campaign.<sup>45</sup>

Yet, the election results portrayed a different political reality, from what the Congress, the Muslim League or the British had expected. The results showed that neither the Congress nor the Muslim League could effectively claim to represent the Muslims or the country. The extent of representation of each party among the masses was clearly revealed, both to the parties themselves, and to the onlookers, i.e., the British. The elections did, however, reveal the strength of the Congress as an all-India movement at least in the general constituencies.<sup>46</sup> Much as the British

---

45 For the details of the League's election programme see Jamil-ud-din Ahmad, op.cit., pp.202 - 03.

46 The results of the election were as follows: The Congress contested 1165 out of 1585 seats and won 711 seats. It had a clear majority in 5 provinces and was the largest single party in 3 others. Out of the 482 seats (the Muslims), it contested 58 and won 26. The Muslim League by contrast contested all, but won only 109 out of 482. See Parliamentary Papers showing the results of Elections in India (1937), Cmd. 5589, quoted in S.R. Mehrotra, "The Congress and the Partition of India", in Philips and Wainwright (ed.), op.cit., p.189.

tried to ignore and to deny the strength of the Congress it emerged victorious.

#### IV

Once the elections were over, the focus of attention shifted to the question of office-acceptance. The British keenly observed the developments and preoccupations of the Congress on this question, with a view to co-opting the Congress from a revolutionary body to acquiescence<sup>47</sup>, as well as, if possible, to effect a split within Congress ranks between the Left and the Right Wings, thus weakening it.

Part of the British strategy of co-option depended on the acceptance of office by Congress. This was why they anxiously hoped that Congress would accept office. Emerson, Governor of Punjab, reasoned that

---

47 For an insightful and extensive discussion of this strategy of co-option, see Gyanesh Kudaisya, Office-Acceptance and the Congress 1937-1939, Premises and Perceptions, Unpublished M.Phil. dissertation, submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1984, pp.22-24.

once office was accepted from Congress ministries may turn into genuine co-operators, ministers will find it difficult to wreck the constitution from within, some of them were likely to resent attempts by the Congress to dominate their policy from outside and even if a crisis developed, it would be a specific issue not on a general programme and therefore easier to handle.<sup>48</sup> Hence the anxiety that Congress should accept office was great.

The Congress had fought the elections with a view to wrecking the constitution from within.<sup>49</sup> With its phenomenal success, the British were alarmed about Congress' ability to carry out its threat. It was now "quite clear that if the Congress really desire to make the new constitution unworkable, they will be in a position to achieve their object in more than one Province."<sup>50</sup> Their only hope lay in their belief that

---

48 Emerson to Linlithgow as reported to Zetland, 19 February 1937, Linlithgow Papers, vol.II, Roll no.4.

49 See The Election Manifesto adopted by the All-India Congress Committee, Bombay, August 22 and 23, 1936, in A.M. Zaidi and S.G. Zaidi, The Encyclopaedia of the Indian National Congress, vol.XI pp.135-136.

50 Zetland to Linlithgow, 1 March 1937, Linlithgow Papers, vol.II, Roll no.4.

except for a few leaders, to the rank and file, the attraction of being in a position to form government would be sufficiently great to break away from the "control of the party machine... . if on the other hand, the Congress machine is successful... we shall have to consider seriously what action we ought to take".<sup>51</sup> With Congress asking for assurances that the Governors would not interfere in the day-to-day working of the ministries, or employ their special powers of intervention, the British began to speculate on the possibilities in event of non-acceptance of office by Congress. "There would be no course open to us but to give the next strongest parties the opportunity of forming ministries if they are prepared to do so."<sup>52</sup> They even went so far as to contemplate the situation in the event of the failure of such ministries, where they themselves would have to take over government.

If Congress continued to maintain its stand, the British had to decide what their next move would

---

51 Zetland to Linlithgow, 8 February 1937, Ibid.

52 Zetland to Linlithgow, 1 March 1937, Ibid.

be, Should they ask the electoral minorities to form a ministry? If so, what would be the consequences of such a move, and how far would it be in their own interests to do so? How would the Congress react to such a step? The British feared that the Congress, if it decided not to accept office, may start a civil disobedience movement, this time with a renewed vigour. If it did so, would the League join hands with the Congress?

Seeking a clarification for all these doubts, Haig, the Governor of UP, had a talk with the Nawab of Chchatri, who consulted Jinnah and other Muslim League leaders. Taking Chchatri's views to represent the general trend of opinion among the Muslims, Haig wrote to Linlithgow that Chchatri had indicated,

"that if the present crisis indicated a definite change in the policy of the British government and was likely to be a real and decisive struggle with Congress, then Muslims and conservative forces would be solidly with the British. It would be worthwhile taking office and there would be some prospect of securing a considerable and perhaps growing degree of popular support. But if this is to be a friendly quarrel with periodical waiting on events and hopes of reconciliation

before long, then he considers it would be useless and definitely damaging to the position of the minorities to fill this gap...."53

Taking this position to be fairly "reasonable" and having secured an assurance from Chchatri that "in case of civil disobedience the Muslim are likely not merely to be indifferent but actively hostile to such movement",<sup>54</sup> Haig proceeded to consider ways and means of associating them in the administration of the provinces. Agreeing with Chchatri, Haig wrote,

"From the point of view of minorities this position seems to me not unreasonable. From our point of view, I can see no advantage in stop-gap minority ministry. It would be weak at a time when we may want to be strong. It will not lessen the hostility of the Congress while expedients that would be required to keep it in office would in my opinion

---

53 Haig reporting his conversation to Linlithgow, in a telegram dated 20 February 1938, Linlithgow Papers, vol.I, Roll no.44.

54 Ibid.

invalidate any claim that we were still substantially working the constitution."55

So he felt, that an alternative Ministry would be unwise. Completely alienating the Congress was also not in British interests as that might provoke a strong reaction from Congress, which despite all wishful thinking on the part of the British, <sup>to</sup> underestimate its position, was privately recognized as strong enough to threaten the British. A prolonged struggle with the Congress, was in opportune. Other means had to be devised. "If better contingency arose we could then consider whether it was desirable by some amendment of the Act or other expedients to try and form a Moslem plus minority or in some other way associate the opponents of Congress with administration".<sup>5</sup>

The situation reached an impasse with the British refusing to give an assurance to the Congress regarding the Governor's powers, and the Congress refusing to accept office until such an assurance was given. The

---

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.



British saw no chance of resolving the deadlock unless the Congress gave up the idea of wrecking the constitution or if the Right-wing of the Congress broke away from the main body.<sup>57</sup>

The British now began hoping and planning for a split in Congress between the Right and Left wings. Zetland's letter to Linlithgow speaks for itself.

"If the attitude of the Congress is as I have depicted it (i.e., the Congress leaders remained bent upon making things difficult for the British), we shall have to try and win over to constitutional ways those members of Congress who in their heart of hearts are willing to work the Act. How best can this be done?... the questions that seem to present themselves are these — (1) Is there any real chance of a serious split in the Congress? (2) If so, should we direct our efforts towards an attempt to bring it about; and (3) if so, can we do this without serious risk of driving the Right wing back into the arms of Nehru and Gandhi by maintaining a rigid and outspoken attitude on the letter of the Constitution."<sup>58</sup>

---

57 Zetland to Linlithgow, 3 May 1937, Linlithgow Papers, vol.II, Roll no.4.

58 Zetland to Linlithgow, 12 April 1937, Ibid.

Such an attitude carried the dangers of the left-wing gaining in power and prestige — an undesirable event for the British — whereas co-operation offered possibilities of being able to 'co-opt' the nationalists and absorb their attention in the problems of administration.<sup>59</sup> While Zetland was of the opinion that the demand of the Congress should be conceded, Linlithgow felt that "it would be a capital error to yield anything material to the Congress in the hope of finding a way out of our immediate difficulties."<sup>60</sup> He was afraid that any concession to the Congress would impede the smooth introduction of Federation and would adversely affect the stability of the non-Congress governments in the Provinces. "A moment's consideration will suggest how damaging such a position would in... all probability be... and how hurtful there to the future prospects of parties opposed to Congress,"<sup>61</sup> (emphasis added). Protecting "parties opposed to Congress", having always been their primary aim, their unwillingness to

---

59 See Zetland to Linlithgow, 28 June 1937, Ibid.

60 Linlithgow to Zetland, 22 April 1937, Ibid.

61 Linlithgow to Zetland, 10 June 1937, Ibid.

give concessions to Congress was not surprising. Moreover, a concession to Congress would seem like a victory for the Congress and would raise its prestige to what Linlithgow described as a "dangerous level".<sup>62</sup> Besides, any concession to the Congress may strengthen it at the expense of the League and give the Congress a chance to get the upper hand vis-a-vis the League. He was also afraid that the Congress might start another civil disobedience <sup>movement</sup> of greater intensity than in 1930 and of the Muslims joining hands with the Congress. Ominously he wrote, that there would be "widespread resistance, through civil disobedience and nonpayment of taxes. The situation in fact, will be much graver than the one which arose in 1930, as there is every chance today of large bodies of Mohamedans co-operating with the Congress."<sup>63</sup>

Not wanting the Congress to assume that the British were likely to be easily frightened by its threats and concede its demands, they stoutly resisted all attempts

---

62 Linlithgow to Zetland, 9 April 1937, Ibid.

63 Ibid.

by the Congress to get the British to concede their demands, regarding the governor's powers. They now patted themselves on the back and noted gleefully the surprise and chagrin of the Congress at the consistency of their refusal.<sup>64</sup>

"...there can be no question of any bargain between the Congress and ourselves",

wrote Zetland to Linlithgow firmly,

"It is quite conceivable that in taking up the attitude which they have done towards the new Constitution, they may find that they have got themselves into a considerable mess, and in view of their attitude towards us I do not see why we should do anything to help them out of it. Incidentally, it is pretty certain... that the Muslims would view with great suspicion and very grave dislike anything which tended to centralise control, and, therefore, to minimise the independence of the Provinces."<sup>65</sup>

thus clearly revealing their hostility towards Congress and their eagerness to keep the viewpoint of the

---

64 Linlithgow to Zetland, 30 March 1937, Ibid.

65 Zetland to Linlithgow, 8 March 1937, Ibid.

'Muslims' in mind in all policy decisions. This would also serve to quell the assumption by Congress that, if they shout loud enough, they are bound to get what they want.<sup>66</sup>

This long controversy was settled when the Viceroy Linlithgow issued a statement in June 22, 1937, clarifying what was meant by the special powers of the Governors.<sup>67</sup> Though not very explicit, the assurance was accepted by the Congress on the sophistic logic that the situation warranted the belief that it would not be easy for the governors to use their special powers. Congress ministries now began functioning in seven of the eleven provinces.

Having displayed such eagerness that the Congress accept office (and thereby assist them in their long-term strategy of co-optation), the British were now, curiously enough, sorry to see the end of the interim

---

66 See letter from Erskine, Governor of Madras, enclosed in Zetland's letter to Linlithgow, 18 March 1938, Linlithgow Papers, vol.III, Roll no.5.

67 See Linlithgow : Speeches and Statements 1936-1943, pp.80-82. See also J. Ahmad, op.cit., pp.191-92.

ministries. Linlithgow wrote to Zetland regretfully:

"... the minority ministries...have encouraged the Muslims by giving them the chief minister's post in the UP and Bihar.... This is another reason why I am loathe to parley with the Mahatma at this moment. I recognize that if Congress is prepared to say they will take office under the Constitution, we can hardly avoid summoning the legislatures and submitting the minority ministries to the axe, but short of that, I don't want, if I can discourage these good chaps who came forward to take office in most uninviting circumstances or to damp down their readiness to have a go with constructive policies."<sup>68</sup>

When the Congress finally did accept office, the success of the Congress governments alarmed the British. Agreeing with Nehru that the existence of the Congress government had greatly strengthened the hold of the Congress on the provinces, the British officials nevertheless hoped that, this tendency would soon reverse itself and Congress would begin to lose

---

68 Linlithgow to Zetland, 9 April 1937, Linlithgow Papers, vol.II, Roll no.4.

its popularity, and stand discredited in the eyes of those who voted it to power. Thus Haig wrote: "But my own feeling is that the power and prestige of the Congress are getting somewhere near the peak.... before long opposite tendencies may begin to make themselves felt and that after a year not only the Congress government, but the Congress organization will not command the same degree of popular support which it does at present."<sup>69</sup>

But the popularity of the Congress could not be wished away so easily and continued to remain a thorn in their side. Whereas the British could easily admit to the 'Muslim' discontent as being "sectional", they did not want to admit to a strong nationalist sentiment which the Congress generated, and quickly hastened to dismiss it as 'Hindu' enthusiasm. This way all unpalatable facts would be brushed under the carpet.

"As against this discontentment which is either sectional as in the case of the Muslims, the landlords and the

---

69 Haig to Linlithgow, 10 January 1938, Haig Collection, F.115/17B.

industrialists or vague, as in the case of men with moderate views, we have to place the immense prestige that the Congress have won in the province since the general election, and particularly since they took office, the authority they possess and exploit fully by virtue of being in Government, the nationalist sentiment which extends probably to a much larger proportion of the population than one might suppose..."70

## V

This was one side of the picture. The other side was represented by the Muslim League and its activities. As regards the election results, to the League as well as to the British, much to their dismay, the writing on the wall was clear. The elections brought home the painful realisation that even in a system based on separate electorates it had failed to make an impression on the community that the Muslim League claimed to represent. Ram Gopal was

---

70 Haig to Linlithgow, 19 December 1938, Haig Collection, F.115/2A.



thus to speculate: "If some kind of elections had preceded and not followed the deliberations at the Round Table Conferences, the complexion of the demands for various communities would have been different and the results would also have been different."<sup>71</sup>

Jinnah's political demands in his Fourteen Points had been almost wholly conceded by the British, but had failed to yield fruit. The assumptions on which he had based his policies all these years collapsed. At the close of the elections, Jinnah's influence was at a low ebb and he did not command any standing in the eyes of the British.<sup>72</sup> Under these circumstances, Jinnah had to do something quickly if he wanted to prevent the League from going into complete political oblivion.

The Congress not unnaturally took their victory to be a vote against communalism and Nehru tended to dismiss the communal problem as not very serious.

---

71 Ram Gopal, op.cit., p.247.

72 See Linlithgow to Zetland, 9 September 1937, Linlithgow Papers, vol.II, Roll no.4.

Piqued by Nehru's taunt that: "In the final analyses there are only two forces in India today — British Imperialism and the Congress representing Indian nationalism.... The Muslim League represents a group of Muslims... having no contact with the Muslim masses..."<sup>73</sup>, Jinnah deliberately set out to prove that there was third force. Nehru practically spelt out for Jinnah what he must do. "The more important the organization, the more attention paid to it, but this importance does not come from outside recognition but inherent strength..."<sup>74</sup>

Jinnah drew his moral lesson from this contemptuous dismissal and proceeded to shore up the League. "Unless the Congress recognizes the Muslim League on a footing of complete equality... we shall

---

73 Star of India, 12 January 1937, quoted in Z.H. Zaidi, "Aspects of the Development of Muslim League Policy", 1937-47, in Philips and Wainwright (ed.), op.cit., p.255.

74 Nehru to Jinnah during his abortive correspondence with Jinnah, 6 April 1938.

have to depend on our 'inherent strength' which will determine the measure of importance or distinction it possesses."<sup>75</sup> The British proceeded to give it "outside recognition". The British and Jinnah now began to play a game of chess with Jinnah snatching every opportunity to advance the League's cause and the British conceding to Jinnah and the League its demands, bolstering the League's position was not done out of any love for it, but for the sake of expediency.

Between 1937 and 1940, the Muslim League concentrated on strengthening its base among the Muslim masses. It now launched forth on a programme of consolidation and revivification Jinnah's success in his campaign to popularise the League was noted with

---

75 Jinnah to Nehru, 10 April 1938.

immense satisfaction by the British.<sup>76</sup> Earlier they had not set much store by Jinnah and were under no illusions as to the strength he commanded. Linlithgow summed up his opinion of Jinnah thus: "I do not quite frankly feel any deep confidence in him, and I suspect that he is one of those political leaders who can play a personal hand but no other, and whose permanent control on the allegiance of their followers is frequently open to question."<sup>77</sup> Zetland agreeing with him added that to depend on him would be like "leaning on a very broken reed".<sup>78</sup> This scornful dismissal

---

76 Linlithgow commented approvingly: "It is no doubt inevitable that a minority so important as the Muslim minority and so apprehensive that any decline of the degree of our direct control in this country can only be to their disadvantage, should think that the course of wisdom is to develop their own organization, and to endeavour to initiate the central control which the Congress have been able to establish and maintain so far as the Congress provinces and the Hindu electorate are concerned".  
 Linlithgow to Hallet, 14 January 1939,  
Linlithgow Papers, vol.III, Roll no.46.

77 Linlithgow to Zetland, 9 September 1937,  
Linlithgow Papers, vol.II, Roll no.4.

78 Zetland to Linlithgow, 2 September 1938,  
Linlithgow Papers, vol.III, Roll no.6.

changed later, once the League had toned up and Jinnah soon rose in British esteem: "It would be...the greatest mistake in any way to discount the importance of expression of opinion... particularly from a man of the standing of Jinnah and we must give full weight to them."<sup>79</sup>

Zetland's appreciation of the League's revitalisation came in his letter to Carl Heath where he cut the Congress down to size:

"... while the Congress is undoubtedly a powerful political body, they could (not) be the representatives of India as a whole, ...he ... had not failed to notice the extent to which the All-India Muslim League had been organising itself during the past eighteen months or more as a body representing a very substantial part of the Indian peoples".<sup>80</sup>

It was naturally in British interests to see that an effective counterpoise to the Congress was built up. This explains the tremendous appreciation and enthusiasm

---

79 Linlithgow to Zetland, 28 March 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.IV, Roll no.7.

80 Zetland to Carl Heath, reported to Linlithgow, 20 December 1928, Linlithgow Papers, vol.III, Roll no.6.

in all quarters on the part of the British officials<sup>81</sup>, when the League from its state of suspended animation, determinedly launched forth on a programme of strengthening itself and broadening its base by fanning communal flames. This was done by attacking the Congress and raising the cry of 'Islam in danger'. Jinnah charged, " the present leadership of the Congress for alienating the Musalmans of India.... by pursuing a policy which is exclusively Hindu.. .."<sup>82</sup>

The organisation of the League was overhauled, provincial and district branches were reshaped, the membership fees was reduced two annas.<sup>83</sup> The Congress

---

81 At the provincial level, Haig wrote exultantly: "The Muslims are strongly opposed to the (Congress) government and the Muslim League movement shows signs of great vitality. It has captured practically the whole body of Muslim in the provinces and is working under aggressive leadership".

Haig to Linlithgow, 19 December 1938, Haig Collection, F.115/2A.

82 Presidential Address of Jinnah, Lucknow Session of All-India Muslim League, in October 1937, in Zaidi, M.A., op.cit., vol.V, p.37.

83 For a detailed discussion on the reorganisation of the League, see Khaliquz zaman, Pathway to Pakistan, chapters-XVIII & XIX.

ministries were used as a convenient peg on which to hang their grievances.

Jinnah began an all out propaganda war against the Congress. Inside the legislature, the League was in opposition and made it a point to oppose and obstruct every proposal made by the Congress. Khaliqzaman admits, "Tactically I thought that by downright opposition to Congress in the Assembly we might be able to put life not only into the Muslim League organisation but also into the masses who had already become very restive, and that with our opposition to the Congress policies the mass mind would begin to rally round the Muslim League,...."<sup>84</sup> Thus an unrelieved opposition to the Congress in the Assembly was more a strategical move than any real disagreement with the Congress. The same logic was applied as far as the other grievances in the League's attack on Congress was concerned. The British recognized this tactic and sympathised with the Muslim League. Haig (Governor of UP) wrote to Linlithgow that <sup>the</sup> cause of all the communal

---

84 Khaliqzaman, Ibid., pp.163-64.

trouble was the arrogant attitude of the 'Hindus' (managing the Congress) and the feeling of deprecation among the Muslims:



"....a position in which practically the whole of the important minority community of Muslims is ranged.... The minority cannot get their own way in the legislature, and as a permanent communal minority have no prospects of ever getting it, and they are tempted inevitably to redress the weakness of their parliamentary position by rousing religious feelings and emphasizing the importance of the community outside the legislature..."<sup>85</sup>

In another letter he wrote, "The Muslims, feeling themselves politically impotent, stir up religious issues. The Hindus, feeling themselves on top tend to show an aggressive and intolerant spirit and apart from these... intrigue and petty political jobbery which is so prevalent gives the Muslims a sense of grievance and unfair treatment."<sup>86</sup>

---

85 Haig, Governor of UP to Linlithgow, the Viceroy, 23 March 1938, Haig Collection, F.115/17B.

86 Haig to Linlithgow, 10 April 1939, Haig Collection, F.115/2A.



The British thus implicitly accepted the League position that Congress government was 'Hindu' Raj, and were critical of the Congress decision to not form a coalition government with the League. In such a situation they felt the Muslim sense of grievance was not unjustified and that Congress by not sharing office, was responsible for the perpetuation and persistence of the communal problem.

The League had been pressurising the British to get the governors to exercise their powers and compel the Congress into forming coalition ministries.<sup>87</sup> The League saw the Congress refusal as a vindication of their fears of a 'Hindu' Raj and saw in it an ominous indication of the future. Once it became clear that coalition would not be effected, the British officials were firmly convinced that 'Hindu' Raj was

---

87 See Jinnah's Presidential Address, at the Lucknow Session of the League, October 1937, in J. Ahmad, op.cit., pp.224-25.

the root cause. Haig wrote,

"To my mind there is no doubt that the root cause of the trouble is that the Muslims look upon the present Government as Hindu Raj and to a very large extent the Hindus also have the same feeling. In these conditions, it does not require any striking and obvious examples of injustice, which indeed are really lacking, to keep alive the flame of communal animosity."<sup>88</sup>

Nevertheless, Haig affirmed that "the Muslims have now been given a very strong and definite communal lead which seems to have inspired great enthusiasm and will obviously have a most important bearing on political developments in the near future."<sup>89</sup>

While there could be no doubt that "war has been declared unmistakably between the Congress and the Muslim League",<sup>90</sup> the official solution for this condition again reflected an implicit acceptance of the position of the Muslim League and <sup>attempt</sup> to allay its

---

88 Haig to Linlithgow, 10 April 1939, Haig Collection, F.115/2A.

89 Haig to Linlithgow, 24 October 1937, Haig Collection, F.115/17B.

90 Ibid.

fears and phobias. The British would have liked to use the Governor's powers to include representatives of the Muslim League in Cabinet just as Jinnah demanded. Wrote Haig;

"I can myself see no cure for these conditions short of admitting to the Government real representatives of the Muslim community,... Circumstances have rendered it out of the question hither to for Governors to take any effective action in regard to including members of important minority communities in their Cabinets.... The inclusion of two Congress Muslims in my Cabinet of course is not the slightest solace to the feelings of the Muslim community as a whole, who regard the present Ministry as a Hindu administration, the Congress as a Hindu body and the Congress ministers as renegades."

Should this antagonism increase, Haig continued, the Governors might have

"to insist that the Cabinet should be recast and should include representatives of the Muslim Leagues."<sup>91</sup>

This reflected the official position not only in UP but in other parts of India too. The British

---

91 Emphasis added, Haig to Linlithgow, 10 April 1939, Haig Collection, F.115/2A.

tacitly accepted the stand taken by the Muslim League, regarding, who should be the 'real' representatives of the "Muslim community as a whole". When Gandhi complained about the Congress being represented as a wholly Hindu body, Linlithgow wrote to Zetland, "...they (Congress leaders) are so reluctant to admit that Congress does not in fact represent all parties in this country and is essentially whatever qualification the presence in its ranks of a small number of Muslims may call for a communal organization."<sup>92</sup> The Congress explanation for this discontent and its solution for combatting the forces of communalism, was to draw the masses in with an economic programme. The British skeptical of this, felt that only a political solution — such as sharing of power could solve the problem.<sup>93</sup> Linlithgow wrote to Haig, asking for "practical suggestions... for...meeting the apprehensions of the Muslims..."<sup>94</sup>, reflecting his deep concern for keeping

---

92 Emphasis added. Linlithgow to Zetland, 8 November 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.IV, Roll no.8.

93 See Draft of an undated letter from Haig to Linlithgow, Haig Collection, F.115/6.

94 Ibid.

the League's view point in mind at all times.

While Haig admitted that separate electorates encouraged communities to think communally, the fault lay with the Congress (and not with the introduction of separate electorates) for not rectifying what it had in its ability to rectify by sharing power with the League. "There was a time when the Congress ministry took office in July 1937, when a new direction could have been given to this problem".<sup>95</sup> Had they entered a coalition, 'Muslim' grievance in being excluded from a share in the government would not <sup>have</sup> taken <sub>^</sub> the form of working up strong communal feeling.

This was the British understanding and solution to Muslim League charge against the Congress for not sharing office with <sup>the</sup> <sub>^</sub> League. To the other charges the British responded in a similar sympathetic manner. But this is not to say that the British believed the Muslim League wholly and thought Congress was guilty

---

95 Ibid.

of all the charges laid by the League against it. It was convenient to accept the League's charges without enquiring into the details of its authenticity.

The major charges against the Congress were the Congress mass contact programme among the Muslims, the introduction of the Wardha Education Scheme, the singing of Bande Mataram, the use of Hindi, the playing of music before mosques, Congress flags on public buildings and the distribution of Government jobs among the 'Hindus'. The Muslim League appointed a committee to investigate the complaints of ill-treatment being meted out to the Muslims. It was presided over by the Raja of Pirpur and it submitted its report in November 1938.<sup>96</sup>

The Report attacked the 'closed door' policy of the Congress and said, "the Muslims think that no

---

96 The Report of the Enquiry Committee appointed by the Council of All India Muslim League to enquire into Muslim Grievances in Congress Provinces subsequently known as the Pirpur Report of the Committee appointed by the Council of the All-India Muslim League to inquire into Muslim Grievances in Congress governed Provinces. See Jamil-ud-din Ahmad, Historical Documents of the Muslim Freedom Movement, op.cit., pp.258-260.

tyranny can be as great as the tyranny of the majority". It argued that apart from religious and cultural freedom of the Muslims, which it claimed was being denied, it was also denied its due share of representation in Government.<sup>97</sup>

The Congress defended itself against these charges. While Bande Mataram for Congressmen was the supreme symbol of nationalism and had been used against the British innumerable times, to arouse patriotism, and had almost become a form of salvation, Jinnah, who had himself sung the song as a Congress member, now insisted on reading it as anti-Islamic. Similarly, the Hindi-Urdu controversy was very old and so was a share for Muslims in government jobs and these could not be attributed to Congress governments alone.<sup>98</sup> But it was now that it was capitalised on by the League. The latter complaint led to widespread communal rioting. This was increased by the Hindu Mahasabha which now

---

97 Ibid.

98 Sir Syed Ahmed Khan in the late 19th century had started the complaint about the inadequate representation of Muslims in government jobs. See chapter-I, Introduction.

aggressively entered the fray with its accusation of the Congress policy of appeasing the Muslims. This fanned the communal flames higher leading to further communal rioting.<sup>99</sup>

Observing this propaganda, with quiet satisfaction the British saw in it in extremely useful trade that had been launched and one that would help to promote and strengthen division. Linlithgow wrote to Zetland,

"considerable Muslim agitation has developed against the use of 'Bande Mataram' as a 'national' anthem.... that is all to the good from our point of view for it is clearly preferable that the pressure should come from independent quarters rather than from government and I am glad to think that the Muslims should appear to be waking up to the significance of the song, given its history, from their point of view. I am not without hope that a somewhat similar situation will shortly develop in regard to the Congress flag."<sup>100</sup>

---

99 According to official estimates between October 1937 and November 1939, in the space of two years, there were 57 serious riots in the Congress Provinces, the outcome of which was 1,700 casualties, of which over 130 were fatal. See Coupland, R., op.cit., p.131.

100 Linlithgow to Zetland, 27 October 1937, Linlithgow Papers, vol.II, Roll no.4.



When this "hope" was translated into reality a short while later, it seemed like a dramatic fulfillment of Linlithgow's earlier prediction.

What delighted the British even more was the fact that without being directly involved, things seemed to be going exactly as they would have it. With regard to the controversy over the flying of flags, with each organisation flying their own, Congress was compelled to consider withdrawing its own, to mollify the League wrote Linlithgow, "Nothing, I need not say could be more satisfactory from our point of view, that this problem, presenting as it does an awkward feature from our side, should be resolved by the interplay of party jealousies...."<sup>101</sup> That the British sympathies were lined up with League from the start was starkly obvious. Responding to Jinnah's threat that if the British "did not pay sufficient attention to the Muslims", Linlithgow wrote to Zetland, "that there was a real risk of the Muslims

---

101 Linlithgow to Zetland, 15 March 1938, Linlithgow Papers, vol.III, Roll no.5.

being driven into the arms of the Congress; ...if we are to remedy the situation, it is essential that more care should be taken in dealing with them both in and outside the legislature".<sup>102</sup> <sup>Soon after,</sup> Linlithgow in reply to Hyde Gowan's letter wrote:

"The recent discussions of the Muslim League seems to me to have very marked and definite significance, and I find myself moving to the conclusion that, in their own interests they must, if they are to hold their ground, now organize and put up an effective counter-opposition to the Hindu elements in the Congress. I cannot myself help feeling that Congress has played its cards rather badly in matters such as the attempt to make 'Bande Mataram', despite its associations so offensive to the Muslims, the National song; in its endeavours to substitute Hindi for Urdu; to secure recognition of the Congress flag as the National flag, and the like; and there is of course always at the bottom of this Muslim attitude the perennial suspicion that the relatively simple Muslim may always be outwitted by the cleverer Hindu if he gives the latter the least opportunity of doing so. (Emerson, Government of Madras, was of the same view)... it goes without saying that if I'm right in my conclusion,

---

102 Linlithgow to Zetland, 9 September 1937, Linlithgow Papers, vol. II, Roll no. 4.

the remoter consequences of movements of this character and of the establishment of really solid Muslim anti-Congress block may be of very marked ultimate political significance, in many ways."<sup>103</sup>  
(Emphasis added)

A crucial letter with regard to the rallying of the Muslims around the British and away from the Congress. The policy of cultivating the Muslim League as an ally was paying off.

The Congress could not remain immune to such a vitriolic campaign against them and in October 1939, Rajendra Prasad, the Congress President, offered to have the complaints investigated, by the Federal Court. Jinnah refused stating that it was the Viceroy and not the Chief Justice who was the proper authority.<sup>104</sup> This Jinnah said, probably because he assumed that he had British support, and also because perhaps, he must

---

103 Linlithgow to Hyde Gowan, 25 October 1937, Linlithgow Papers, vol.II, Roll no.4.

104 Correspondence between Jinnah and Rajendra Prasad, 5 October 1939 and 6 October 1939, in M.A. Zaidi, op.cit., vol.V, pp.518-19.

have realised that the charges would not be able to withstand judicial enquiry. The League was trying to convince neither the British nor the Congress; its propaganda was meant for 'home' consumption i.e., only for the Muslim masses, who would be sufficiently worked up about it.<sup>105</sup> In this aim it achieved remarkable success.

Even the British privately admitted that the charges were baseless. Linlithgow personally felt that there was no substance to the League allegations. He informed Jinnah that there was no evidence of "any positive instance of real oppression or the like by provincial governments... these difficulties were largely psychological, arising out of the feeling of inferiority

---

105 B.R. Nanda, "Nehru and the Partition of India", in Philips and Warnwright (eds.), op.cit., p.162. That Jinnah himself realised this is evident. Sikander in an interview with the Viceroy told him that "I (Linlithgow) need not worry about my inability to do very much to help the situation as Jinnah realised perfectly well, that there was nothing I could do, save where it was a perfectly clear cut case, which seemed very unlikely to arise." Interview between Linlithgow and Sikander Hyat Khan, on 6th October 1939, Linlithgow Papers, Vol IV, Roll-No. 8

on the part of these Muslim minorities, and their apprehension that a Hindu Raj lay at the back of the minds of the Hindus...."<sup>106</sup> Reporting this interview to Zetland, and referring to Prasad's offer to investigate the charges, and Jinnah's refusal on the grounds that it was the Viceroy's place to hold this enquiry, he wrote,

"Now I have no desire to shoulder any of Jinnah's responsibilities, or to be left as middle term between the Muslims and Congress in matters such as these ....I certainly at no stage committed myself, or intended to commit myself to any general investigation of these grievances (there would probably be) some sort of fact finding enquiry, and I shall be amused....to see the results (it would probably) substantiate the judgement which you and I have reached that specific instances would be hard to find and hard to prove..."<sup>107</sup>

To Amery, he admitted again, "As you know I never took these complaints seriously and I should be surprised if they did not prove psychological in character."<sup>108</sup>

---

106 Interview between the Viceroy and Jinnah, October 5, 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.IV, Roll no.8.

107 Linlithgow to Zetland, 22 October 1939, Ibid.

108 Linlithgow to Amery, 8 January 1942, Linlithgow Papers, vol.VI, Roll no.11.

At the provincial level this was corroborated by almost all the governors. Hallet dismissed the League charges as "baseless, untrue and unfounded".<sup>109</sup> Haig felt "obvious examples of injustice... indeed are really lacking..."<sup>110</sup> Sir Francis Wylie, former Governor of Central Provinces and Berar wrote many years later that "the accusations of gross anti-Muslim bias on the part of Congress ministries were of course moonshine."<sup>111</sup> But all this was naturally admitted in private, in his public statements Linlithgow maintained a significant silence on the subject.

The fall-out of this kind of aggressive propaganda was severe communal tension and the period witnessed a great deal of communal rioting. The worst storm centres were UP and Bihar in 1937-38 and earlier in

---

109 Hallet to Linlithgow, 8 May 1939, and 2 February 1940, Linlithgow Papers, vol. IV & V, Roll nos. 8 & 9.

110 Haig to Linlithgow, 10 April 1939, Haig Collection, F.115/2A.

111 F. Wylie, "Federal Negotiations in India, 1935-39 and After", in Philips and Wainwright (ed.), op.cit., p.523.

Punjab with the Shahidganj agitation in the forefront. Tension was particularly bad at the time of festivals like Bakr-Id, Diwali, Holi and Moharram. The coincidence of Holi and Moharram was the worst period. Throughout the period rioting persisted and had to be controlled with a firm hand.<sup>112</sup> Communal tension was particularly severe in those provinces in which Congress ministries were in power. This increase in communal tension in Congress provinces was attributed by the British to the Congress refusal to share power with the League. As has been discussed above, Haig felt that Hindu-Muslim antagonism was in the main due to the League being a "permanent communal minority" in the Legislature, and faced with this "position of permanent

---

112 The Home Political Files during this period are full of accounts of communal rioting and how much of a law and order problem this posed for the government. In particular see, Home Poll. Fortnightly Reports, File Nos. 8/1/38, 8/2/38, 8/3/38 (Shahidganj issue); 8/4/38, 8/6/38, 8/9/38, 8/12/38, 8/5/37, 8/8/37, 8/10/37. Also see Home Poll. File nos. 37/20/39, 113/1939, 30/10/40, 5/2/40, 66/40.

political inferiority", stressed and played up the antagonism between the Hindus and the Muslims, and whipped up communal frenzy with "the enthusiastic support of the masses."<sup>113</sup>

In general, in the handling of these communal disorders, the British felt that the Congress had been as repressive as it had earlier claimed that the British had been. Section 144 of the Cr.P. Code<sup>114</sup> was frequently imposed. The use of this had been the bête noire of the Congress politicians earlier. This prompted Coupland to remark that, "...the Congress governments...learned by experience that a country so back ward and...so much more prone in particular to outbursts of religious strife...is not ready to enjoy the full freedom of liberal democracy. And learning that, they had not scrupled to infringe, those freedoms..."<sup>115</sup>

---

113 Draft of a letter to Linlithgow from Haig, undated, Haig Collection F.115/6.

114 It empowered the magistrate to prevent an individual or the public to do a specific act which could cause a breach of peace.

115 R. Coupland, op.cit., p.135.



This statement is corroborated by Haig's analysis of the Congress ministries' administrative measures in the handling of the communal situation. Though not so explicitly stated, Haig expresses his satisfaction with Congress ministries co-operativeness in dealing with the situation. "So far as concerns administrative measures to deal with this (the communal) situation, the action that and being taken is in my opinion generally suitable".<sup>116</sup> Haig proposed to send a circular to all District Magistrates, summarising and calling attention to all the general orders and principles of the past for dealing with the communal situation and giving practical instructions. In addition, he wished to put before the ministers, "the necessity of making full use of (their) powers to control unflamatory speeches and writings.... So far, for the most part, these communal outbreak have been handled by European officers, and the Ministry have been good about supporting them."<sup>117</sup>

---

116 Haig to Linlithgow, 10 April 1939,  
Haig Collection, F.115/2A

117 Ibid.

Brabourne the acting Viceroy, wrote to Stewart the Governor of Bihar giving him broad instructions regarding the policy to be adopted in such situations "usually, in all communal disputes, ... the safest thing is to cling as long as possible to past practise..."<sup>118</sup> and to maintain the status quo.

These instructions reveal that the British did not want to make changes in their existing administrative measures and that the Congress by co-operating with the British officers were indirectly accepting the use of such severe measures in bringing the situation under control.

Thus, though the British admitted that the charges against Congress were false, they nevertheless held Congress responsible for the increasing communal tensions as well as for the apprehensions of the Muslims of a 'Hindu Raj', whereas, in reality, it was the communal organizations both Hindu and Muslim which

---

118 Brabourne to Stewart, 13 August 1938, Linlithgow Papers, vol.II, Roll no.45.

were responsible for the tension — the false charges of the League and cry of 'Islam in danger' which whipped up communal fervour, as well as the Hindu Mahasabha which aggravated the situation by feeding the flames. The Congress which had no part of this received the wrath of the League and the disapproval of the British. Thus Linlithgow felt that whatever be the charges, communal tension has increased, the apprehensions of the Muslims about the 'Hindu Raj' were very real,<sup>119</sup> this arose because of the "superiority complex of the Hindus"<sup>120</sup> in the Muslim minority provinces.

The most important demand that Jinnah made in addition to the charges was that he wanted the Congress to recognize "the All-India Muslim League as the only authoritative and representative organisation of the Muslims in India".<sup>121</sup> This was something that the

---

119 See Linlithgow to Zetland, 22 October 1939, "whatever the facts about particular instances, there is no question as to the depth and sincerity of Muslim apprehensions...", Linlithgow Papers, vol.IV, Roll no.8.

120 See Linlithgow to Zetland, reporting the former's interview with Jinnah, Ibid.

121 Khaliqzaman, op.cit., p.191.

Congress would find impossible to concede as it prided itself on being a national body and claimed to speak for all Indians whatever be their individual religious leaning.<sup>122</sup> Such a demand, was the League's ace. Separate electorates, weightage, reserved seats all had been granted. In other words, the League's every demand so far had been granted by the British and conceded in by the Congress. So much so that Khaliquzzaman wrote:

"The question was; what should be our demand now? .... It was a piece of good luck for us that Congress fought shy of accepting the Muslim demand for the recognition of the League as an authoritative representative organisation of Muslims on such a flimsy pretext while yet at the same time wooing and running after the League. If Congress had accepted the position at the time when the demand was made by the League, I wonder what positive demands we could then have made."<sup>123</sup>

---

122 Rajendra Prasad pointed out, "it would be denying its past, falsifying its history and betraying its future". Quoted in S.R. Malhotra, op.cit., in Philips and Warenwright (eds.), op.cit., p.201.

123 Khaliquzzaman, op.cit., p.192.

Such a position was one which the British wholly agreed with. They felt that if the Congress had accepted the League's demands then it would have taken the wind out of the League's sails. Instead they chose to rub the League up the wrong way by not sharing office<sup>124</sup> or recognizing its claim which they felt were justifiable, since the British looked upon the Congress, despite its claims, as a 'Hindu' body.

But the British soon found themselves falling into the same trap. The policy of political concessions to the League pushed the British to the wall as each concession led to the demand for further concessions. The Muslim League by the logic of its position it had adopted had perforce to continue to ask for more political concessions in an attempt to maintain its position to retain its hold over the Muslim electorate

---

124 "Had they (Congress) entered into a coalition, I cannot help feeling that Muslim solidarity would soon have been undermined. There are bound to be differences between Muslims on the main agrarian and economic issues. The Muslims in office would have to make themselves responsible for definite policies in regard to these matters. They would have the support of some Muslims and aroused the opposition of others.... The Congress, however, chose the opposite course and from that time it was easy to work up strong Muslim communal feeling..." Draft of an undated letter from Haig to Linlithgow, Haig Collection, F.115/6.

and to convince the electorate that it was looking after their interests. The British on the other hand, had to concede to every fresh demand in order to retain its only ally in the face of the threat posed by the Congress and the anti-imperialist forces of nationalism with its demand for nationalism. As Page succinctly sums it up:

"Imperialism and Democracy were incompatible bedfellows. In Britain, political reforms strengthened the existing social and economic system by absorbing and accommodating its political opponents. In India, no such absorption was possible. The Europeans who ruled the Empire were, themselves a socially and culturally discrete community, meeting and working with Indians only on their own terms. In the days of autocracy, this was their strength. In the days of electoral politics, it became their undoing. With each stage of devolution, Indian was set against Indian, caste against caste, community and community. But as each area of government and administration ceded to Indian control, it was followed by demands for more concessions. Ultimately, even the Raj's closest allies were only allies for a purpose."<sup>125</sup>

---

125 David Page, op.cit., p.264.

Chapter-III

FEDERATION AND THE WAR : 1937-1940

Chapter-IIIFEDERATION AND THE WAR : 1937-1940

"What would be equally necessary.... in India.... is some measure of agreement as to who constitutes the people or the peoples whose freedom of choice as to their form of government is to be respected.... it is precisely that feature which has brought to the fore-front the true nature of the Indian problem, namely, the existence in India, over and above all other local differences, of two great communities at least as separate, and indeed antagonistic, in culture and outlook as any of the nations in Europe. To talk of those two communities as majority and minority is a dangerous misuse of terms, because it tends to imply that the right of the numerically smaller community to have its individuality respected is less than that of the larger."

— Lord L.S. Amery in a Memorandum for the War Cabinet. 28-1-1942.

After 1937, communal politics rose surely and steadily to the fore assuming menacing proportions. From being merely anti-Congress, the British shifted their position to being definitely pro-Muslim League,



particularly with the League having launched on its programme of reconsolidation and reaching out to the masses to strengthen its base. The war added new dimensions to the already grim communal situation. The strategy the British now used was to undercut the importance of the Congress by treating the League on parity with the Congress and recognising it as the sole representative body of the Muslims in India. The other important tactic used by the British was the insistence in communal harmony and the necessity for prior agreement among the Indian 'communities' themselves before any agreement could be reached with the British. While subtly encouraging separatism and maintaining a division among the Indians, such an insistence gave them the added advantage of pretending to be doing all they could to achieve unity, and claim that it was <sup>the</sup> Indians who did not co-operate. With the war at hand and Congress demanding full independence as a pre-condition for aiding the war effort, such a strategy bought the British time. In addition, it threw the onus off the government, who could now freely claim that no constitutional advance could be made in such an inimical climate.

## I

With the elections over, and the Congress ministries functioning, the British now thought of implementing the Federation as embodied in the Act of 1935. But when the British began to press ahead, they found the forces arrayed against them were formidable. Attitudes had gradually hardened and all organisations opposed the Federation for conflicting reasons. The States were afraid of losing their 'sovereign' rights; the Congress condemned it roundly as 'undemocratic' and countered it with its own plan of a constituent assembly. The Muslim League opposed both the British and the Congress but had no plans of its own to counter its opposition to Federation. While it had earlier accepted the idea of a loose Federation with maximum powers for the Provinces, it now reconsidered its stand, and went back on its earlier acceptance of the plan. In the light of the results of the elections (despite its reorganisation, and its claims about the vastly improved hold among the Muslims, the League, still could not be completely sure of itself) and the functioning of the Congress ministries, Jinnah

feared a 'Hindu' domination.<sup>1</sup> Jinnah, therefore, told the Viceroy that "the working of Provincial Autonomy and the whole question of working the Constitution on the present franchise was so very uncertain that he quite definitely could not support anything that would give a Hindu majority at the centre."<sup>2</sup> In Britain too, reactions to the Federation were different. At the time when it was passed "it was accepted in Britain

---

1 Under the scheme of the Act, the central legislature was to be elected from the provincial legislatures. Jinnah felt, that under such a scheme, the Muslims would be in a minority in the central legislature as their representatives would be elected from the Muslim majority provinces only, while the bulk would be Congressmen and in the League's eyes, Hindus, in the Central Legislature.

2 Linlithgow's report of Jinnah's views. See Linlithgow to Zetland, 6 April 1938, Linlithgow Papers, vol.III, Roll No.5.

for reasons which had more to do with British political problems than with the reality of Imperial power in India."<sup>3</sup> Reading, a former Viceroy, said it as means of delaying dominion status. Samuel Hoare, saw it as a way of diverting attention from Dominion Status to responsibility into safer channels.<sup>4</sup>

Jinnah soon began to press the Viceroy to keep the centre unchanged. He and Sikander Hyat Khan, met the acting Viceroy Lord Brabourne<sup>5</sup>, and proposed a deal with the British on this matter. Lord Brabourne reporting the conversation with Sikander Hyat Khan, the Punjab Premier, and sympathising with the Muslims said that Sikander had said: "We (the British) are mad to go ahead with the federal scheme which is obviously

---

3 Gowher Rizvi, Linlithgow and India 1936-43, p.227.

4 Ibid., p.227.

5 Lord Brabourne was the acting Viceroy of India from June 25th, 1938 to October 24th, 1938, while Linlithgow was in England.

playing straight into the hands of Congress and that the Muslims, given a fair deal by us, would stand by us through thick and thin."<sup>6</sup> Jinnah, meeting Brabourne in August had made a similar proposal. As Brabourne reported to Zetland, Jinnah who was "even more violent than usual", on the issue of Federation, ended up with the "startling suggestion", that

"we should keep the centre as it was now; that we should make friends with the Muslims by protecting them in the Congress Provinces and that if we did that, the Muslims would protect us at the centre."<sup>7</sup>

Zetland now began to feel that the "solidarity of Islam is a hard fact against which it is futile to run one's head".<sup>8</sup> By the end of 1937, he began to feel that the strongest opposition to federation would

---

6 Brabourne to Zetland, 19 August 1938, Linlithgow Papers, vol.III, Roll No.6.

7 Brabourne to Zetland, Ibid., Emphasis in the original.

8 Zetland, "Essays", Memories of Lawrence, Second Marquess of Zetland, p.119.

come from the Muslims.<sup>9</sup> By 1938, he,

"could not resist a steadily growing conviction that the dominant factor in determining the future form of the Government of India would prove to be the All India Muslim League."<sup>10</sup>

By 1939, he was convinced that

"the accumulation of evidence of the Muslims to look for some solution of the Federal problem which will secure them against Hindu domination cannot be ignored."<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile the Congress began agitations in a number of Indian States for the introduction of a democratic system of Government patterned after the British Indian provinces. If successful, the representatives of the States for the Federal Assembly would then be elected by the people and not by the Princes. This would increase the strength of the Congress in the Federal legislature, as the representatives of the States were more likely to support the

---

9 Zetland to Linlithgow, 6 December 1937, Linlithgow Papers, vol.II, Roll No.4.

10 Essayez, op.cit., p.247.

11 Zetland to Linlithgow, 18 April 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.IV, Roll No.7.

Congress representatives in the Legislature. This was viewed with great concern by both the British and the Muslim League. Taking stock of their position, Zetland wrote to Linlithgow, that their counting on the States was going to alter as the democratisation of States seemed to be changing things.

"It will obviously strengthen still further the position of the Congress which will then dominate the Central as well as the Provincial Legislatures, and this might well result in the final stages of the journey to Dominion Status being made at greater speed than is the present stage."<sup>12</sup>

To allay the fears of the States, Linlithgow suggested that it be unequivocally declared by or on behalf of the British government or the Government of India, that it is not the intention of the paramount power to insist on the grant of partial or complete responsible government, or to fetter the choice of the States representatives to the Federal Legislature as a condition

---

12 Zetland to Linlithgow, 24 January 1939, Ibid.

precedent to Federation. The agitation would;

"almost immediately lose its All-India character. While the grievances of the subjects of particular States may remain and will have to be dealt with individually the present mass attack will cease especially if that declaration is implemented,...."

to quell fears of this being interpreted as a change of policy, he continued further,

"This will not be the enunciation of a new policy but will be a mere restatement of what.... has often been stated in private talks as the basic policy of the British."<sup>13</sup>

At the Patna session in 1938, the League voiced strong criticism of the activities of the Congress in the States;<sup>14</sup> and its distrust of the Congress claim to not accept Federation and its fear of Congress securing a majority in the majority of the provinces (seven) and so securing a Hindu majority. Zetland, taking a sympathetic view of the Muslim concern over this, and

---

13 Linlithgow's interview with S.N. Bharati, on 24 November 1938, as reported to Zetland. Linlithgow Papers, vol.III, Roll no.6.

14 See Jamil-ud-din Ahmad, op.cit., pp.249-51. Extracts from Quaid-i-Azani, M.A. Jinnah's Presidential Address at the Annual Session of the A.I.M.L., Patna, 26 December 1938, pp.249-51.



in view of the "cleavage" between the Hindus and the Muslims wrote to Linlithgow in January, 1939. "It is quite clear that the activity of the Congress in the States is being viewed with the utmost concern by Muslim League since the greater the success which attends it, the more certain will be the domination of the Congress in the Federal Legislature." The need to conciliate them and to retain the support of their allies, became the primary concern of the British. Continuing further in the same letter, Zetland wrote,

"...I was wondering whether Muslim opposition to Federation might not prove when the time came to be even more embarrassing them than that of Congress."<sup>15</sup>

This was something that the British could not afford. The Secretary of State felt that the League's present point of view should receive due consideration. He wrote to Linlithgow in near panic.

"Various indications of the growing concern of the Muslims have come to my notice during the past few days. .... we were actually accused of

---

<sup>15</sup> Zetland to Linlithgow, 24 January 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.IV, Roll No.7.

supporting the Congress in its resolve to destroy the Muslim State of Hyderabad! ...Federation was condemned as a conspiracy to establish a Hindu Raj with the support of British bayonets .... a resolution was actually passed at Patna to the effect that the All-India Muslim League would no longer be able stand aside if Congress intervention in the affairs of the States continued. Here, clearly, we have the entry of a third party into this controversy, a party moreover, whose views and feelings are as much entitled to our consideration as are those of Congress."<sup>16</sup>

It was in this frame of mind that Zetland resumed Khaliqzaman and Rahman Siddiqui for an interview on March 21, 1939.<sup>17</sup> They proposed a partition of Muslim areas from the rest of India. The States were to go to the Muslims if they were in Muslim zone or to the Hindus if they fell into that area. He thus proposed a federation of Muslim majority provinces and the States in N.W. India and of Bengal, Assam and perhaps Bihar and Orissa in the East. These would be kept out of the All-India Federation of the remaining provinces.<sup>18</sup> Commenting on these schemes for

---

16 Zetland to Linlithgow, 29 January 1939, Ibid.

17 For the special circumstances under which they were received, and the cordial reception given and the exact details of the conversation that ensued, see Khaliqzaman, op.cit., pp.204-208.

partition, Zetland wrote to Linlithgow, "I must say that as we get nearer to the date when all parties will have to lay their cards on the table, the difficulties of bringing Federation into existence seems to me to be gaining in magnitude."<sup>19</sup> With a note of finality, he asserted; "The deep-seated dislike and fear of Hindu domination on the part of 90 million Muslims is a thing which we cannot possibly brush aside."<sup>20</sup>

Thus was the Muslim League encouraged to adopt a hostile attitude towards the idea of a united India and <sup>this</sup> ultimately led to the demand for partition.<sup>21</sup>

---

18 As reported by Zetland to Linlithgow, 28 March 1939, Ibid.

19 Zetland to Linlithgow, 20 March 1939, Ibid.

20 Zetland to Linlithgow, 9 May 1939, Ibid.

21 Khaliqzaman's views confirm this sympathetic attitude of the British. "They own impression after my talk with these two British officials (Zetland and Col. Murhead, Under Secretary of State for India), was that they would not oppose the demand for Pakistan seriously." "I brought back with me from London, hopeful dreams for the future of the Muslims in India". Khaliqzaman, op.cit., pp.207-208.

The Viceroy Linlithgow, was equally anxious to mollify the League's opinion, as he saw in it an effective barrier to the Congress, but his overriding concern then was to expedite federation.<sup>22</sup> Thus though he sympathised with the League's viewpoint, he was at a loss to understand what more safeguards could be provided to the Muslims and did not take their opposition as formidable enough to prevent the attainment of federation. He wrote to Zetland, pointing out that there was nothing new in Muslim fears that they had been provided the maximum safeguards compatible with

---

22 Nevertheless worried that the Congress may gain an upper hand over the League and a stronger bargaining position vis-a-vis themselves, he wrote: "But we must give weight to our obligations and responsibilities in other quarters ... you and I... have other aspects of the matter to consider while Congress may be the strongest and most united political party in British India at the present day, we cannot overlook the Muslims, while it goes without saying that the Princes are directly and principally concerned in any more or change of policy that may be under consideration." Linlithgow to Zetland, 21 February 1939, Ibid.

the legitimate claims of other communities.

"Our difficulty is that the root of these Muslim apprehensions is inherent in any system of responsible government at the centre. It is inevitable that attribution of power by count of heads must inevitably be distasteful to a minority.... I do not wish to underestimate the difficulties likely to arise as a consequence of Muslim opposition to federation, but I do not think that the Muslims have it in their power to prevent the attainment of federation or to make it unworkable — unless indeed they can discover means to prevent a sufficient numbers of rulers from acceding."<sup>23</sup>

While, Linlithgow, took a strictly legal view of things<sup>24</sup>, Zetland pointed out significantly,

"it would be difficult to contemplate ... a federation which did not include let us say the Punjab and Bengal ... I do not see how we could force the Government<sup>s</sup> of the Punjab or of Bengal to enter the federation if they were determined not to do so."<sup>25</sup>

---

23 Linlithgow to Zetland, 19 May 1939, Ibid.

24 According to the Act of 1935, the Provinces of British India were to automatically become parts of the Federation and was dependent only on the accession of a certain number of Princes. See Joint Select Committee, Report, op.cit., vol.I, pt.I, p.88.

25 Zetland to Linlithgow, 27 June 1939, Ibid.

Linlithgow was not unduly perturbed by the League's attitude as he was under the misconception that it could be mollified by lending sympathy and support. Further he felt that once Federation was attained, all conflicts would automatically end. He wrote, "it is in the achievement of Federation that there is the best hope of some alleviation of existing tensions".<sup>26</sup>

Confident in the belief that the "Muslims" did not have it in their power to prevent the attainment of federation, he wrote to Zetland firmly:

"We cannot for a moment contemplate substantial modification - much less the jettisoning - of the Federal plan on account of Muslim fears. Indeed the fact is that no considerable amendment of the scheme would meet Muslim objections... The movement we weaken in our resolve to push federation through, we shall find ourselves without a policy and without a future. Our prestige is deeply involved."<sup>27</sup>

But with the outbreak of the Second World War, Federation became a thing of the past.

---

26 Linlithgow to Zetland, 19 May 1939,  
Ibid.

27 Ibid.

## II

The Second World War, acted as a catalyst on Indian politics and dramatically changed British policy and objectives in India. One of the purposes of Federation was to secure a sympathetic Indian government at the centre. But the war changed that, as now there could be no question of handing over control at the centre to the Indians however pliant. Thus federation had to be shelved.

All British effort now concentrated on maximising Indian contribution to the war without paying Congress too high a price for it. The Viceroy, moreover, was in no hurry to terminate the British Raj, or to "gratuitously hand over control to the Indians."<sup>28</sup> It was now Linlithgow's turn to stress repeatedly, the importance of giving due weight to the point of view of the Muslims."<sup>29</sup> The continuing rivalry between the

---

28 Linlithgow to Zetland, 21 December 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.IV, Roll No.8.

29 <sup>Linlithgow decided to humour</sup> Jinnah, "irritating as he may be", Ibid., 5 September 1939.

Congress and the League, the thought would strengthen Britain's hold over India, and this became their most useful weapon against the demands of either.

While pressure mounted on the British from inside and outside India for political concessions to Indian opinion, increasing pressure from within was expressed through the Congress and Leagues with each utilising the way to gain their differing ends.

Caught between these conflicting pressures, the British decided to fall back on its past policy of strengthening the League at the expense of the Congress and of devising methods to divide Indian response to the situation, so that they could continue as before.

The war led to the crystallisation of the Congress and the League stands within a fortnight of the outbreak of the war, the working committees of the Congress and the League had framed their resolutions on the crisis. Linlithgow initiated a series of discussions with the representatives of the Congress and the League. The British did not get the ready response they <sup>had</sup> hoped to get.



Congress, determined not to support a war for the perpetuation of imperialism, called for a declaration of war aims and the implications for India of Britain's claim to be fighting for democracy. The price for co-operation with the war effort was a demand for the declaration of Independence — the right of self-determination — by framing their own Constitution.<sup>30</sup>

The Muslim League in its turn condemned the federal scheme as giving the majority the right to trample on the rights of the minorities and asked for the abandoning of the scheme. It also wanted the British to recognize the League claim of the sole right to speak for the Muslims of India and required that Britain make no declaration nor adopt any constitution without the consent and approval of the League.<sup>31</sup>

The declaration of the Congress, with its demand for a Constituent Assembly to decide the future

---

30 See Congress Working Committee Resolution, 14 September 1939, in A.M. Zaidi and S.G. Zaidi, The Encyclopaedia of the Indian National Congress (Henceforth referred to as INC Encyclopaedia vol.II, 1939-1946, pp.193-97.

31 See Jamil-ud-din Ahmad, op.cit. Resolution passed by the Working Committee of the All India Muslim League, Delhi, 18 September, 1939, pp.350-51. Also see Khaliqzaman, op.cit., pp.219-20.

of India, turned the Viceroy against the Congress, which he thought was going to prove as difficult and untractable as always. He decided that the only way to cut Congress down to size would be to deny its claim to represent the whole of India. The best strategy would be to call an all-parties conference, in which he was quite certain that no agreement would be reached. So he in turn, immediately declared:

"If Congress is going to show itself entirely intransigent, and if it becomes clear that they are prepared to continue to hold office in the Provinces only at the price of promises or immediate concessions... it may appear expedient to call an all-parties conference, at which the of the Congress claim to speak for India would very soon be exposed....for I am firmly convinced that all the more solid elements of the population are with us whole-heartedly; and in favour of India's active participation in War."<sup>32</sup>

Zetland agreeing wholly with Linlithgow, replied that even if a Constituent Assembly was formed, it would

---

32 Linlithgow to Zetland, 21 September 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol. IV, Roll No. 8.

not be able to

"remain in session for many hours without a tremendous row. This again would knock the bottom out of the pretensions of the Congress to represent the whole of India and would throw interesting light on their claims to be able to settle the communal problem provided that we ourselves did not interfere."33

Implementing this decision promptly, Linlithgow wrote to the King in an even more conclusive tone:

"As soon as I realized that I was to be subjected to heavy and sustained pressure designed to force from us major political concessions as the price of the Congress' cooperation in the war effort. I summoned representatives of all the more important interests and communities in India including the Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes and Mr. Jinnah... and interviewed them one by one... a heavy and trying task but well worth the trouble."34

For at the end of it Linlithgow could fall back on the old plea that no agreement could be reached between them and that the differences between the Congress and

---

33 Zetland to Linlithgow, 6 December 1939, Ibid.

34 Linlithgow to the King, 19 October 1939, Ibid.

other parties were very wide. Such a move would also help to reduce the importance of the Congress.

Moreover, the British needed an ally and could not afford to alienate all Indian parties, particularly the League, their old ally. "But I think we have to go a little cautiously with the Muslims at the moment ... one does not wish... to find oneself in opposition to all parties..."<sup>35</sup> So the British turned their backs on the Congress. Although, the Viceroy was under no illusions about the League as a stable political force, he was eager to cultivate the League's pretensions as the best hope of countering the Congress. He was now ready to concede to Jinnah, the bargaining power that he sought.

In the statement Linlithgow issued on October 17, 1939 he recognized though not formally, but for all intents and purposes the Muslim League as the only organization which can speak on behalf of the Muslim and represent them.<sup>36</sup> Proceeding further in his speech,

---

35 Linlithgow to Hallet, (Governor of UP), 11 April 1940, Linlithgow Papers, Roll No.103.

36 Statement by the Viceroy, Linlithgow on October 17, 1939, Khaliquzzaman quoted this in his book op.cit., p.221. See also Indian Annual Register, 1939, II, p.388.

the Viceroy promised consultations "with representatives of the several communities, parties and interests in India, and with the Indian Princes, with a view to securing their aid and cooperation in the framing of such modifications as may seem desirable."<sup>37</sup> Speaking of the minority demand for an assurance that full weight would be given to their viewpoint, Linlithgow declared:

"It is unthinkable that we should now proceed to plan afresh, or to modify in any respect any important part of India's future constitution without again taking counsel with those who have in the recent past been so closely associated in a like task with His Majesty's Government...."<sup>38</sup>

This announcement more or less satisfied the League that no step will be taken without consulting the League and gave it the due importance and say in things that it had been seeking. But the Congress was extremely dissatisfied with the declaration, as it

---

37 Extracts from the Viceroy's Declaration .  
Quoted in Jamil-ud-din Ahmad, op.cit., pp.351-52.

38 See statement by the Viceroy to Gandhi, Prasad and Jinnah, 1 November 1939.  
Linlithgow Papers, vol.IV, no.8.  
Also see Jamil-ud-din Ahmad, op.cit., p.352.

gave no indication that Britain was prepared to break with her traditional policy towards India and fulfil the demands of the Congress. On war aims, the Viceroy's statement made no commitment. Further, the declaration was proof that Congress' claim to represent the whole of India had not been accepted.<sup>39</sup> It therefore condemned the Viceroy's statement as "an unequivocal reiteration of the old imperialist policy" of divide and rule. The Congress ministries decided forthwith, to resign.<sup>40</sup>

With this decision, the British apprehensions of Congress as a force to reckon with decreased. They now felt that the Congress had lost the weapon they

---

3. See Linlithgow, Marquess of, Speeches and Statements, vol. II, op.cit., pp.145-55.

40 See Congress Working Committee Resolution, Wardha, October 22-23, 1939, in A.M. Zaidi and S.C. Zaidi, INC Encyclopaedia, op.cit., pp.201-204.

possessed in their hands (i.e., political power) by virtue of being in government. The earlier desire to arrive at a settlement with the Congress was now given up,<sup>41</sup> and the British adopted a hard line. Erskine, the Governor of Madras, wrote to Linlithgow "Personally, I think we should not bargain, for <sup>if</sup> the Congress go out (resign), it will be their funeral not ours."<sup>42</sup> Other governors expressed similar views.<sup>43</sup>

- 
- 41 Linlithgow had earlier hoped that some settlement could be reached with the Congress. "It is of course most desirable, that we should, if possible, bring the Congress in with us... on a friendly and cooperative basis." But even then the British were not prepared to go beyond cosmetic concessions and found "the demands which they (Congress) have advanced, even though they may be pitched very high for bargaining purposes, ...excessive." Linlithgow hoped that "when it comes nearer to a conclusion they will be prepared to accept something of a more face-saving character." Linlithgow to Stewart, (Governor of Bihar), September 30, 1939, Roll No.46, Linlithgow Papers.
- 42 Telegram from Erskine to Linlithgow, as reported in telegram from Linlithgow to Zetland, 16 September 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol. Roll No.
- 43 For reports of other governors see Linlithgow to Zetland, 5 September 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.IV, Roll No.8, Stewart, (governor of Bihar), advocated enlisting the support of the League, even though he recognized that the League was "apt to pitch their demands pretty high." Stewart to Linlithgow, 28 Oct.1939, Linlithgow Papers, Roll No.46.

Linlithgow himself began to regard the Congress at best as a spent force and at worst as a "nuisance value"<sup>44</sup> which did not really have it in power to obstruct the British in their war efforts or hinder administration (especially since the decision to resign).

Haig, assessing the position and strength of the Congress in UP felt that the Congress was divided with the right wing "grouping for a policy" and the left-wing whose influence, "we have been accustomed...to rate...very high.... no longer so...". In addition, he felt that "Congress influence is very much less in villages". He felt there was disunity and disenchantment among its ranks and it did not seem intent on starting a civil disobedience movement. Analysing the reasons for what he saw as a weakening of Congress strength, he said:

"This is partly due to the disappointment at the many unfulfilled promises, partly to the realisation that local Congress workers,... are very often unable to deliver the goods... left to

---

44 Linlithgow to Haig, 1 December 1939, Haig Collection, F.115/2B.



themselves, the masses are indifferent to Congress ... and are only stirred by what appears to them to be a possible improvement of their own conditions."45

Haig therefore concluded decisively:

"The Congress as a whole ... have got into a very difficult position. They have taken the occasion of a war to which they cannot really declare themselves opposed, to demand certain political concessions.... they ... seem to be making most unreasonable demands just at the time when they have voluntarily surrendered one of the chief elements of their power. By ordering the resignation of the ministries, they have ... lost a great deal of their hold over the people.... it seems to me inevitable that they will steadily lose influence and position..."46

and Congress would find this very difficult to reconcile to,

"They are of course talking very bravely, and they still hope that they will be able by means of propaganda to talk His Majesty Government into making concessions which would establish them in a position of great strength..."47

---

45 Haig to Linlithgow, 4 December 1939, Haig Collection, F.115/2B.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

Despite this rejection by the Congress, Linlithgow invited Gandhi, Rajendra Prasad (then President of the Congress) and Jinnah for discussions on November 1, 1939. He offered to expand the Viceroy's Council to include more Indian representatives, but astutely left it upto the Congress and the League to reach a settlement.<sup>48</sup> Jinnah demanded a coalition with the Congress both in the centre and the provinces. This was unacceptable to Congress which demanded the right to form a constituent assembly. A deadlock ensued with the British doing little to break it.<sup>49</sup> Congress suspicious of British motives were not unjustified. The Viceroy must have anticipated the failure of these talks<sup>50</sup> for the Congress had raised the larger

---

48 See Letter from H.E. The Viceroy, to Mr. Gandhi and the Presidents of the Congress and the Muslim League, 2 November 1939. Cited in Janil-ud-din Ahmad, op.cit., pp.353-54.

49 Instead, they condemned the position taken up the Congress in its negotiations with the League as "a wholly impossible attitude in that it amounts to an admission that the Congress are not out to negotiate an agreement with the Muslims, but by hook or crook to impose their terms upon them." Zetland to Linlithgow, 15 November 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.IV, Roll No.8.

50 In his statement of October 18th itself, the Viceroy had spoken of the failure of the talks between Indians. After speaking on an individual basis to

issue of independence and was not likely to be fobbed off with the crumbs, like sharing a few seats of the Viceroy's Council. As Rajendra Prasad wrote in his letter to Linlithgow on November 3, 1939, <sup>that</sup> both he and Gandhi <sup>had</sup> noted in the Viceroy's talk, an absence of "any reference to the main and moral issue raised by the Congress about the clarification of the war aims without which it is impossible for the Congress to consider any subsidiary proposal". Sensing the game that the British were at, he further said that, "This crisis is entirely political and is not related to the communal issue."<sup>51</sup> The present crisis had arisen out of the war and the refusal of the British to take the consent of the Indians before declaring India a belligerent country.

---

a number of leaders representing all shades of political opinion he had declared: "As was only to be expected, conversation with representatives of so many different points of view reveal marked differences of outlook, markedly different demands and markedly different solutions for the problems that lie before us." Indian Annual Register, 1939, vol. II, p. 388.

51 Indian Annual Register, 1939, vol. II, p. 243.

But the British were in no mood to make any concessions to the Congress. Zetland declared that he thought "that the Government had done all they could for the moment since Congress had slammed the door with their demand for an impossible declaration, ..." <sup>52</sup> He turned his mind to more pressing matters.

"I have been wondering a little what attitude we ought now to adopt towards the leaders of the All-India Muslim League and the other parties who have not thrown in their lot with the Congress. Should we, for example, consider proceeding with the establishment of a consultative body, inviting Jinnah, Ambedkar and other to nominate panels? And if so, should we ignore the Congress on the ground that they have rejected our offer, ... And if Jinnah or any of them asks to be brought into the Central Government should we agree? I suppose that action on these lines on our part would cause Congress <sup>to</sup> see red." <sup>53</sup>

Wrote Zetland, indicating thereby that the British did not intend transacting business with the Congress, if they thought the Congress were to get all the plums and

---

52 Zetland to Linlithgow, 15 November 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.IV, Roll No.8.

53 Zetland to Linlithgow, 5 November 1939, Ibid.

that no one else was to get anything. If Congress continued to maintain their "difficult" attitude, "we might have to consider going ahead without them",<sup>54</sup> wrote Zetland firmly. While proclaiming to be avoiding a serious break with Congress, the British seemed to be doing everything to bring it about. Amery put it plainly, "... if it comes to a straight fight with the Congress we should go all out in our propaganda against them." The advantages of a straight fight, as it presented itself to Amery, were that now they would be ,

"able to give Jinnah both the assurances and the extra member for which he has pleaded and a corresponding extra-member and assurances to the non-Congress Hindu elements (they) would then have an administration reasonably balanced between the two main communities and assured of its position with you and the Government here, whether it carried the legislature or not."<sup>55</sup>

"We are not going to make a deal with the Congress behind the back of the minorities", asserted Amery, "To that at least we owe at any rate the changed

---

54 Zetland to Linlithgow, 28 February 1940, Linlithgow Papers, vol.V, Roll No.9.

55 Amery to Linlithgow, 5 October 1940, Ibid.

attitude of the Muslim League to the war effort..."<sup>56</sup>

With this note of finality, the British dismissed the weight of the Congress and turned their attention to the League.

The League, on its part, saw in the war situation just the kind of opportunity they were looking for. The British were in a tight spot and prepared to concede a great deal to the League, whom they saw as an ally. It was therefore in a much better bargaining position. But first there was the Congress to be taken into consideration. The League could not openly refuse to be a party to the Congress demands for a declaration of war aims without being branded as unpatriotic and as a stooge of the British government. At the same time, in deciding whom it would be better for them on the whole to support, the League had to find out how far the British were prepared to go and how much it could push them into conceding its demands. So in his discussion with the Congress, Jinnah put forward

---

56 Amery to Linlithgow, 23 October 1940,  
Ibid.

five conditions as the price of his co-operation with the Congress.

- 1) Coalition ministries should be formed in the Provinces;
- 2) the singing of Bande Mataram should be given up;
- 3) the Congress should abandon its mass contact programme with the Muslims;
- 4) Congress flags should not be flown on public buildings, and
- 5) no measure should be passed in the Legislature if  $\frac{2}{3}$  rds of the Muslims did not agree.<sup>57</sup>

This was basically a reiteration of all the earlier grievances against the Congress. In making these demands, Jinnah must have realised fully that Congress, without sacrificing all that it stood for, could not have accepted these demands.

Having, however, thrown the onus conveniently onto the Congress Jinnah now turned to the British. In the

---

57 Cited in Rizvi, op.cit., p.113.

relations between the British and the League there was a great element of uncertainty, mutual distrust and suspicion. Each was uncertain of how far and to what lengths the other would go in offering support. But Jinnah was in a better bargaining position. His tactics were very calculated and measured. He was "hostile" to the idea of Federation and before offering his cooperation for the war, wanted clarifications of the Viceroy's statement and "guarantees for the future" — that the British would not "force democracy and majority in India".<sup>58</sup>

To further convince the British Jinnah explained that their,

"error would be that they would be regarding the Indian problem through the spectacles of the problem of England, whereas in fact the position was fundamental and entirely different. Not only were the minorities here of immense importance in terms of numbers, they were divided by cultural, religious and historical differences... it was no good trying to force the principle ... on the wholly different conditions in India."<sup>59</sup>

---

58 As reported by Linlithgow to Zetland, 6 November 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.IV, Roll No.8.

59 Linlithgow, reporting his conversation with Jinnah, to Zetland, Ibid.



Jinnah's point was well taken and achieved the desired result from the British immediately,

"I cannot help feel that the apprehensions expressed by Jinnah on behalf of his community are wholly lacking in substance and I do feel increasingly as I watch the reaction of the Muslims and the other minorities to the democratic experiment in this country, that we may have to go a good deal further than we have done in giving weight to their point of view, and the fact that they are a numerical minority cannot be allowed to be a decisive factor in the framing of our policy in relation to them and to the numerical majority."<sup>60</sup>

Nevertheless, for the British officials, lurking doubts of Jinnah's reliability remained in their minds. Claiming to be fully alive to the internal dissensions within the League and the pitching of its demands on a much higher scale,<sup>61</sup> the demand of the League as Linlithgow saw it was:

"that future arrangements in this country shall be dealt with not on the basis of population figures, but on the basis of communities, and that the Muslims, whatever their numerical strength, shall be treated on complete equality

---

60 Linlithgow to Zetland, Ibid.

61 Linlithgow to Haig, 1 December 1939, Haig Collection, F.115/2B

with the Hindus..."<sup>62</sup>

Jinnah's vacillation about his private and public stands did not escape the notice of Linlithgow who wrote: "Like so many other politicians in this country, he (Jinnah) is quite ready to give one his time mind in private but nothing would astonish me more than to imagine that he would for a moment be prepared to give utterance to the same sentiments in public."<sup>63</sup> Linlithgow expressed his doubts to Zetland thus: "...my own judgement coincides wholly with yours that if we gave him (Jinnah) the least

62 Linlithgow to Haig, Ibid.

63 Linlithgow to Zetland, 27 April 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.IV, Roll No. 1.

Haig recognized Jinnah's attempt to have a foot both in the Congress as well as British camp. He did not want to be charged with being a "toady", nor did he want a struggle between the British and the Congress alone, at the end of which, the British, if successful might not support the 'Muslims' who had not supported them. It was against this background that the doubt arose as to whether the League would be publicly prepared to cooperate with the British. Privately, the League "assured" Haig "that they had every sympathy with us (the British) in the prosecution of war".  
Haig to Linlithgow, 21 November 1939, Haig Collection, F.115/2B.

opportunity for criticism, ... on any ... pretext he would yield to none in the vigour of his criticism of our sincerity."<sup>64</sup> Zetland confirmed this adding, that he thought they would be the first of Jinnah's allies to be put, in the cart at any moment ... he will think nothing of effecting a volte face and turning and rending us."<sup>65</sup>

Thus, though the British officials found Jinnah "irritating", "difficult", "exasperating" and "tiresome"<sup>66</sup> and his tactics vacillating and opportunistic, they tolerated it as they desperately needed an ally in the face of the stiffening anti-imperialist stand of the Congress during war.

Frustrated at being forced to await on Jinnah's vanity, Linlithgow, nevertheless, thought it "important to hold the Muslim League together if we can do so,

---

64 Linlithgow to Zetland, 27 April 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.IV, Roll No.7.

65 Zetland to Linlithgow, 5 November 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.IV, Roll No.8.  
Also see Linlithgow to Zetland, 18 November 1939, Ibid.

66 See Linlithgow to Zetland, 5 September 1939; 18 April 1939; and 27 September 1939, Ibid.

and in those circumstances there is nothing for it but to be patient with Jinnah, though one's patience is beginning definitely to run out."<sup>67</sup>

It was against this background, that the Muslim League resolution regarding the Viceroy's statement on the war issue provided tremendous relief to Linlithgow. It also explains why his appreciation of the timely assurance of support was also laced with an element of doubt. He wrote:

"The Muslim League resolution, so far as it goes is very satisfactory. .... I do not at the same time regard the support of the Muslim League as necessarily something which we can hope to depend on in all circumstances .... But it is for all that of real value that at this moment a body representing some 90,000,000 people should offer us co-operation and should accept as generally satisfactory the declaration which we have made."<sup>68</sup>

While Linlithgow on his part <sup>was</sup> prepared to give Jinnah the assurance that no constitution would be put into effect without taking the League into confidence,

---

67 Linlithgow to Amery, 5 September 1940, Linlithgow Papers, vol.V, Roll No.9.

68 Linlithgow to Zetland, 23 October 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.IV, Roll No.8.

he was not prepared to spell out their position regarding their future plans of further stay in India. For the British, though sympathetic to the League's cause, could not adopt a wholly favourable attitude towards it, as "a very open, active and all-out support to Muslim communalism would have been very dangerous to British rule for it would have earned the hostility of Hindu communalism, put it and its supporters into the Congress camp and tended to spur seventy per cent of India's population against British imperialism."<sup>69</sup>

Thus when Jinnah made bold as to demand that, "the Muslim League should now be taken into full and equal partnership with His Majesty's Government in the running of this country and authority shared with them", it was regarded as sheer impertinence by the British.

"What I am afraid of is that Jinnah, by trying to blackmail us (a process in which we cannot allow him to

---

69 Bipan Chandra, Communalism etc., op.cit., p.250.

succeed) and spinning out discussion with that object in view, may have an upsetting effect on other elements which are ready to co-operate. I do not see much risk of but upsetting Ambedkar and I think we can rely on the Scheduled Castes' support; but there is always the possibility of his frightening Amery; and that type of Hindu who might otherwise have been prepared to work with us ... I see that Congress are now making a determined effort to bring the Sikhs back into line, though I doubt ... if it is likely to succeed."<sup>70</sup>

Jinnah sorely tried the British patience, but despite their frequent exasperation,<sup>71</sup> they nevertheless took great pains to placate him and went out of their way to take the League's stand into consideration. Despite, their uncertainty, of Jinnah they continued to embrace him. Linlithgow wrote to Haig:

"His (Jinnah's) general attitude... is that he is most anxious to co-operate, and that he has the Muslim League behind him; ... we must not take seriously any suggesting that the Muslim League are not, in fact, cooperating; ..."

Continuing further, and referring to Jinnah's willingness:

---

70 Linlithgow to Amery, 5 September 1940, Linlithgow Papers, vol.V, Roll No.9.

71 "It is lamentable that we should have to await in this way on Jinnah's vanity, but it of course cannot be helped". (Emphasis added). Ibid.

to accept the offer of the expansion of the Viceroy's Council, Linlithgow repeated Jinnah's argument agreeing with it fully:

"... he urges that if Congress are not prepared to accept it, we should go ahead without waiting for them. He takes the point, which has some substance in it, that it is hardly reasonable that those in this country who are willing to co-operate with us, and who are anxious to help to carry personally some part of the burden of war, should be precluded from doing so merely because another... party is not prepared to play except in terms which cannot be accepted.... It would of course mean a declaration of war on the working committee (of the Congress)..."<sup>72</sup>

But Linlithgow prepared for such an eventuality.

It is interesting to observe how the British convinced themselves of the League's reliability and attempted to dispel their doubts about <sup>the</sup> League's support. In the face of Jinnah's demand for assurances and guarantees from the British, they speculated as to whether giving such an assurance would mean giving

---

72 Linlithgow to Haig, 29 June 1940, (emphasis added), Ibid.

Jinnah too much importance or putting him in a position of being able to obstruct or veto any proposals. Weighing this, they reassured themselves thus:

"We ought to recognise that in dealing with Muslim leaders, We were dealing with people who were not mere obstructionists but who were reasonable men, and also that they were out, as much as anyone else, for India's advance. We ought not, therefore, to be tempted by the argument that an assurance would place him in the commanding position of being the arbiter of the future policy. He should be trusted to act with reason."<sup>73</sup>

The negotiations between the British and the Indians concluded in this manner, with the British progressively ignoring the Congress and embracing the League. The Viceroy kept referring to the differences between the Congress and the League, but never once in his public statements, to the differences between the

---

73 Linlithgow to Zetland, reporting his interview with Jinnah, 12 January 1940, Ibid.



British government and the Congress, giving ground for suspecting that the main objective in holding these talks was to use them to publicize these differences to the world and prove the basic incompatibility between these two political vehicles.<sup>74</sup>

Linlithgow could now adopt an aggrieved manner: "I begged them (Gandhi, Jinnah and Prasad) in the most earnest manner to spare no endeavour to reach an agreement ... I repeated the profound anxiety ... of

---

74 Speaking of Firoz Khan Noon going to America to explain the Indian situation, Zetland wrote approvingly, that it would be useful if as a Muslim himself, he could make it clear "to the American public that the Muslims of India could not be brushed aside and that the Congress Party in India about which they heard so much represented only a certain section of opinion in that country". Zetland to Linlithgow, 5 April 1940, Ibid., or when Linlithgow hoped that their efforts "have a very definite propoganda value as emphasising that we are not quite such unprincipled persons as we are made out to be from the point of view of opinion abroad." Linlithgow to Zetland, 2 November 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.IV, Roll No.8. Zetland spoke of the "fundamental difference between the Hindus and the Muslims" Zetland to Linlithgow, 5 April 1940, Linlithgow Papers, vol.V, Roll No.9. Linlithgow said "one of the curses of the situation is that there is no Muslim Press, so that public opinion both here and at home is fed in terms of any indigenous community entirely and exclusively from one source." Linlithgow to Zetland, 6 November 1939, Ibid.

His Majesty's Government to leave nothing undone ..." which would contribute to promoting better relations.<sup>75</sup> Amery spoke in an injured tone of how the Government of India "has always in the past fought with one hand behind its back."<sup>76</sup>

Linlithgow concluded that Congress reckoned that if they can "hold out for a little longer... we shall be prepared to offer them a better bargain."<sup>77</sup> He advised Zetland to "the back for the present". His letters during this period reiterate that Britain should "refrain from action", "wait upon events", "avoid running after the Congress" "lie back and not move".<sup>78</sup> All the while emphasizing the need for unity, especially as its prospects seemed remote. This was done with the conviction that the British have offered all that they should.

75 Indian Annual Register, 1939, vol.II, p.411.

76 L.S. Amery to Linlithgow, 5 October 1940, Linlithgow Papers, vol.V, Roll No.9.

77 Linlithgow to Zetland, 6 February 1940, Ibid.

78 Linlithgow to Zetland, see letters dated 13, 21 and 27 February 1940, Ibid.

Linlithgow, meanwhile, called upon the Muslim League to put forward concrete proposals to counteract the Congress demand for independence. For without definite proposals, he would appear to be talking in the air and supporting the League's supposed demand when the League had not in fact provided any concrete alternative scheme. To lend legitimacy to his support to the League (it was important for Linlithgow who had to keep in mind a wider audience, and to be able to convince the world, as well as the Indian electorate that the British support to the League's cause was sound and not based on a mere bias in favour of Muslims or promoting Muslim communalism), he called upon the League to provide an alternate scheme. Something more than "formless apprehension"<sup>79</sup> was required to convince the Parliament at home for a change in policy. He told Jinnah:

"If he (Jinnah) and his friends wanted to secure that the Muslim case should not go by default in the United Kingdom it was really essential that they should formulate their plan in the near future.

---

79 Linlithgow to Zetland, 12 April 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol. IV, Roll No. 7.

At the risk of wearying him I was bound to repeat what I had often said before that I was convinced that it was quite useless to appeal for support in Great Britain for a party whose policy was one of sheer negation."<sup>80</sup>

On March 24, 1940, the League at its now famous Lahore session adopted the Pakistan resolution, demanding a separate State for the Muslims.<sup>81</sup> With it all previous solutions, separate electorates, reserved seats, federation became obsolete.

This decision was conveyed to Linlithgow by Jinnah, before the actual announcement was made.<sup>82</sup>

---

80 Interview between Linlithgow and Jinnah, as reported to Zetland, 6 February 1940, Linlithgow Papers, vol.V, Roll No.9.

Linlithgow had earlier despaired of Jinnah, who "had no positive suggestion whatever for carrying on the government of the country in the event of the breakdown of the present scheme."

Linlithgow to Zetland, 20 March 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.IV, Roll No.7.

81 Ahmad, J., op.cit., Text of the Pakistan Resolution passed at the AIML Session, Lahore, 24 March 1940, pp.381-82.

82 See Khaliqzaman, op.cit., pp.233-34.

In possession of the facts in advance, Linlithgow wrote to Zetland, advising him not to accept Congress demands, "even at cost of misunderstanding abroad and of difficulty in Parliament, (to) let the situation sort itself out a little more."<sup>83</sup>

This resolution put an end to the British dilemma. They could now blame Indians for their inability to achieve unity as being the <sup>chief</sup> obstacle in achieving independence. <sup>in England</sup> To the conservatives/who had never been keen on dominion status, the resolution came as a blessing in disguise. Zetland reported that that the "dishards" in England who were opposed to Dominion Status, were "secretly delighted at the widening of the gulf between the Muslims and the Hindus".<sup>84</sup> Churchill added,

"that he did not share the anxiety to encourage and promote unity between the Hindu and Moslem communities. Such unity was in fact, almost out of the realm of practical politics, while if

---

83 Linlithgow to Zetland, 22 February 1940, Linlithgow Papers, vol.V, Roll no.9.

84 Zetland, "Essayez", op.cit., p.292.

it were to be brought about, the immediate result would be that the united communities would join in showing<sup>u</sup> the door. He regarded the Hindu-Muslim feud as a bulwark of British rule in India." 85

Convinced of their own indispensibility, Linlithgow wrote to Amery that,

"it emerges with startling clarity ... that no party in this country, neither the Congress, nor the Muslim League, nor the Princes can hope to hold the position or to administer the country without our backing, and that the energies of all of them are concentrated on endeavouring to get us to give them backing and enable them to do down the other parties...." 86

While, Linlithgow's immediate reaction was to regard the Pakistan resolution as an impracticality, 87

---

85 War Cabinet Minutes, 2 February 1940, quoted in Johannes H. Voight, "Co-operation or Confrontation? War and the Congress Politics, 1939-42", in D.A. Low (ed.), Congress and the Raj, pp.354-55.

86 Linlithgow to Amery, 23 October 1940, Linlithgow Papers, vol.V, Roll no.9.

87 "I do not attach too much importance to Jinnah's demand for the carving out of India into an indefinite number of religious areas....I would judge myself that his attitude at the moment is that, if Congress are putting forward a preposterous claim which they know is incapable of

he nevertheless felt that it would offset the equally extreme demand for independence by the Congress. He wrote to Zetland:

"... I confess, that silly as the Muslim scheme for partition is, it would be a pity to throw too much cold water on it at the moment... I am not too keen to start talking about a period after which the British rule will have ceased in India. I suspect that, that day is very remote and I feel the least we say about it... the better."<sup>88</sup>

---

acceptance, he equally will put forward just as extreme a claim."  
Linlithgow to Zetland, 25 March 1940,  
Ibid.

88 Linlithgow to Zetland, 6 April 1940,  
Ibid.

C O N C L U S I O N



CONCLUSION

The growth of communalism was the result of the social, political and economic conditions in the 19th and 20th centuries. But colonialism and the colonial political structure provided fertile ground for the growth of communalism. The guiding principle of the British in India became and remained to promote and maintain divisions among Indians and to prevent the people from being welded into a single nationality or rebelling against the Government. Thus separatist tendencies were assiduously cultivated and skilfully exploited by magnifying, widening and emphasising India's internal differences to their advantage and maintaining British supremacy over the subcontinent by the policy of divide and rule.

In the period under consideration, this basic long-term Imperial policy of fostering and exploiting communalism and communal differences, underwent very little change. The short term considerations and

strategy utilised in response to the immediate situation or development that took place, only served to reinforce and cement their long-term policy which was followed consistently.

As we have seen, between 1935 and 1940, British policy of promoting communalism gradually intensified. By 1935, the British perception of the Indian political reality had crystallised. With the developments that took place in the period, the British found it more and more convenient to follow the politics of communal division and promote the forces of disunity. This is reflected in their attitudes and the policy adopted towards the major Indian political parties or groups. In the beginning of our policy, British support to communalism was still cautious and limited. It was more anti-national rather, than actively 'pro-Muslim'. Thus it can be seen that in the debate over office-acceptance and ministry formation, the major concern of the British was to prevent the Congress from acquiring greater strength. During this period, the British, therefore, displayed a keen desire to prop all the ~~minorities~~ — political or religious —

against the Congress. The implementation of the Act of 1935, the strategy of co-opting the Congress into the fold of colonial political and administrative structure and the provincialisation of politics, could be seen as an attempt to weaken Congress and thereby nationalist forces.

It is for this reason that the British dubbed the Congress as a 'Hindu' body as this would immediately reduce the importance of the Congress and knock the bottom out of its claims to represent all sections of Indian society. Thus it was that in all discussions or negotiations with the Indians, beginning with the Round Table Conferences to the ultimate transfer of power, the British treated the Congress as one of the many political forces in India and the latter found itself pitted against the representatives of different sections of the Indian population who were themselves judiciously selected by the Government to outnumber the Congress and to challenge the claim of the Congress to represent the whole of India. Invariably when a deadlock arose in these discussions, the British could

conveniently throw up their hands and claim that no decision could be arrived at as there was no unanimity among the Indians, whereas they, on their part, could not abdicate their responsibility to the minorities. Similarly, all attempts at arriving at unity were nipped in the bud. If chances of an agreement among Indians seemed imminent, the British swiftly preempted its possible success by declaring a fresh set of proposals designed to create an uneven balance and to give to the communal organisations more than what they could get from other Indians and thus increasing their bargaining power vis-a-vis the Congress. Thus while the Congress maintained that the communal problem would be easier to solve without British interference, the British deliberately put themselves between the Hindus and the Muslims claiming to be arbitrators, but in fact acting as a check and loosening the forces of unity.

From the position of limited support to communalism the British gradually shifted to adopt a definite 'pro-Muslim' and more particularly 'pro-Muslim League' stance by 1939-40. The growing strength of the Muslim

League with its programme of reconsolidation was therefore encouraged by the British as they saw in the League an effective counterweight against the rising tide of nationalism and the increasing strength of the Congress. When the war broke out, the British were hard pressed and were desperately looking for an ally. With the Congress making independence a pre-condition for support in the war effort, the British leaned heavily on the Muslim League.

Between the Muslim League and the British a relationship of mutual dependence existed. Duly assisted by the British, the League's strength increased by leaps and bounds. In 1936, the League stirred itself from its dormant state to contest the elections under the Act of 1935. The League's claim for equality of status with the Congress and the demand for recognition as the sole representative organization of the Muslims of India was accepted and fully recognised by 1939. By 1939, the British endorsed the League's rejection of the idea of democracy as unsuited to Indian conditions. By 1940, - the grand finale to all this - the demand for separate State of Pakistan was accepted. All this reflected the unchanging policy of resisting nationalism

and promoting communalism. It took the Congress so many decades before the Government recognized its status, while the League in the short space of three years had established itself in the eyes of the British as an important political organisation whose views and demands could not be ignored in the making of any policy or constitutional change in India.

The overwhelming success of the League resulting in the partition of the country, therefore, reflects the success of British policy in India, on the other hand, the same could not be said vis-a-vis the Congress. The British failed in their strategy of the co-option of the Congress. Herein lay the triumph of the Congress, which successfully and stoutly resisted absorption. The resignation of the Congress reaction did not really weaken the hold of the Congress which three years later was to prove forcefully that its hold on the masses remained just as strong.

BIBLIOGRAPHYI. Primary SourcesA: Unpublished

- 1 Linlithgow Papers, MSS. EUR F.125, Consulted on Microfilm, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.
  - ( i) Correspondence with the Secretary of State (vols. 1-9)
  - ( ii) Telegraphic Correspondence with the Secretary of State. (vols.
  - (iii) Correspondence with the Governors of the Provinces (vols.45-47, 86-89, 100-103).
  - (iv) Quarterly Survey of Political and Constitutional Position in British India (vols. 142-145).
- 2 Haig Collection — MSS. EUR F/115  
Consulted on Microfilm, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.
- 3 Zetland Collection
- 4 The Official Records of the Government of India, Fortnightly Reports and Files, Home Department, Political Branch, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

B: Published

Ahmad, Jamil-ud-din (ed.), Historical Documents of the Muslim Freedom Movement, (Lahore, 1970).

\_\_\_\_\_, Some Recent Speeches and Writing of Jinnah, (Lahore, 1943).

Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, (New Delhi, 1972-83).

Linlithgow, Marquess of, Speeches and Statements, 1936-42, (New Delhi, 1945).

Mitra, N.N. (ed. ), Indian Annual Register, 1935-1940.

Report of the Proceedings of the Joint Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform (Session 1933-34), vol. I, Part-I, (London, 1933).

Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru, (New Delhi, 1972-82).

Zaidi, M.A. (ed.), Evolution of Muslim Political Thought in India, (New Delhi, 1975-78).

\_\_\_\_\_ and Zaidi, S.G., The Encyclopaedia of the Indian National Congress, (New Delhi, 1980-81 ).

II. Books and Articles

Aziz, K.K., The Making of Pakistan, (London, 1967).



Barrier, N.G., Roots of Communal Politics,  
(New Delhi, 1976).

Chandra, Bipan, Communalism in Modern India,  
(New Delhi, 1984).

\_\_\_\_\_, Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern  
India, (New Delhi, 1979).

\_\_\_\_\_, Modern India, (New Delhi, 1971).

Coupland, R., The Constitutional Problem in India,  
(Oxford, 1944).

Desai, A.R., Social Background of Indian Nationalism,  
(Bombay, 1976), fifth edition.

Dixit, Prabha, Communalism — A Struggle for Power,  
(New Delhi, 1974).

Dumont, Louis, "Nationalism and Communalism", in  
Contributions to Indian Sociology, vol.4, no.vii,  
1964.

Dutt, R. Palme, India Today, (Calcutta, 1983)  
revised second edition.

Gopal, Ram, Indian Muslims : A Political History  
(1858-1947), (Bombay, 1964).

Gopal, S., British Policy in India, 1858-1905,  
(New Delhi, 1975), reprint.

\_\_\_\_\_, Jawaharlal Nehru — A Biography, vol.I,  
1889-1947, (London, 1975).

Gupta, N.L. (ed.), Nehru on Communalism (New Delhi, 1965).

Haq, Mushirul, "The Background of Muslim Communalism in Indian Politics", Mimeographed, presented at the seminar on 'The Communal Problem in India 1919-47', organized by the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, (New Delhi, March 1971) .

Hardy, Peter, The Muslims of British India, (Cambridge, 1972).

Hasan, Mushirul, Nationalism and Communal Politics in India, (1916-28) , (New Delhi, 1979).

\_\_\_\_\_ (ed.), Communal and Pan-Islamic Trends in Colonial India, (New Delhi, 1982).

\_\_\_\_\_, "Communal and Revivalist Trends in Congress", in Ibid.

\_\_\_\_\_, The Muslim Mass Contact Campaign : An Attempt at Political Mobilization, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Occasional Papers in History and Society, no.XIV, (New Delhi, 1984).

Hunter, W.W., The Indian Musalmans, (Delhi, 1969) reprint.

Kabir, Humayun, Muslim Politics, 1906-1942 and Other Essays, (Calcutta, 1969).

Kaura, Uma, Muslims and Indian Nationalism : The Emergence of the Demand for India's Partition 1928-1940, (New Delhi, 1977).

Khaliqzaman Choudhary, Pathway to Pakistan, (Lahore, 1961).

- Krishna, Gopal, "Religion in Politics",  
The Indian Economic and Social History Review,  
Delhi, vol.VIII, no.4, December 1971.
- Krishna, K.B., The Problem of Minorities, London,  
1939, on Microfilm at the Nehru Memorial Museum  
and Library.
- Lochan, Rajiv, The Communal Social Process :  
Maulana Mohamed Ali, 1911-1923, unpublished  
M.Phil. dissertation, Centre for Historical Studies,  
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 1976.
- Manshardt, Clifford, The Hindu-Muslim Problem in  
India, (London, 1936).
- Mehrotra, S.R., "The Congress and the Partition of  
India", in The Partition of India, edited by  
Philips, C.H., and Wainwright, M.D., (London,  
1970).
- Mehta, Asoka and Patwardhan, Achyut, The Communal  
Triangle in India, (Allahabad, 1944).
- Misra, Satil, Nehru and Communalism : A Study in  
Transition, unpublished M.Phil. dissertation,  
Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru  
University, New Delhi, 1983.
- Moore, R.J., Crisis of Indian Unity 1917-1940,  
(Delhi, 1974).
- \_\_\_\_\_, "British Policy and the Indian Problem,  
1936-40", in The Partition of India, edited by  
Philips, C.H., and Wainwright, M.D., (London, 1970).
- \_\_\_\_\_, "The Problem of Freedom with Unity:  
London's India Policy, 1917-47", in Low, D.A. (ed.),  
Congress and the Raj, (London, 1977).

Nanda, B.R., "Nehru, the Indian National Congress and the Partition of India 1935-47", in The Partition of India, edited by Philips, C.H., and Wainwright, M.D., (London, 1970).

Nehru, Jawaharlal, An Autobiography, (New Delhi, 1986), fourth edition.

\_\_\_\_\_, Glimpses of World History (Allahabad, 1936).

\_\_\_\_\_, Unity of India, 1937-40, (London, 1948).

Page, David, Prelude to Partition : The Indian Muslims and the Imperial System of Control 1920-32, (Delhi, 1982).

Philips, C.H., and Wainwright, M.D., The Partition of India : Policies and Perspectives, 1935-1947, (London, 1970).

Prasad, Beni, The Hindu-Muslim Questions, (Allahabad, 1941).

Prasad, Bimal, "British Attitude Towards the Communal Problem in India 1937-47", mimeographed, presented at the Seminar on "The Communal Problem in India, 1919-47", Organized by the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, in March 1971.

Prasad, Rajendra, India Divided, (Bombay, 1946).

Rizvi, Gowher, Linlithgow and India : A Study of British Policy and the Political Impasse in India, 1936-43, (London, 1978).

\_\_\_\_\_, "Lord Linlithgow and the Reviewers", South Asia, March 1978.

- Robinson, Francis, Separatism Among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860-1923, (Delhi, 1975).
- Saberwal, Satish, "Elements of Communalism", Mainstream, (New Delhi), vol. XIX, nos. 29-30, 21 & 28, March 1981.
- Sarkar, Sumit, Modern India 1885-1947, (New Delhi, 1983).
- Saxena, N.C., "Historiography of Communalism in India", in Hasan, M., (ed.), Communal and Pan-Islamic Trends in Colonial India, (New Delhi, 1981).
- Sayeed, Khalid, B., "The Personality of Jinnah and His political Strategy", in Philips, C.H., and Wainwright, M.D., (eds.), The Partition of India (London, 1870).
- Smith, William Cantwell, Modern Islam in India (Lahore, 1936), reprint from 1936 edition.
- Thapar, Romila, Mukhia, Harbans and Chandra, Bipan, Communalism and the Writing of Indian History (New Delhi, 1984), fourth edition.
- Tomlinson, B.R., The Indian National Congress and the Raj, 1929-1942, (London, 1976).
- \_\_\_\_\_, "India and the British Empire 1935-1947", Indian Economic and Social History Review, vol. XIII, no. 3, 1976.

Wylie, Sir Francis, "Federal Negotiations in India 1935-39, and After", in The Partition of India, edited by Philips, C.H., and Wainwright, M.D., (London, 1970).

Zaidi, Z.H., "Aspects of the Development of Muslim League Policy, 1937-47", in, The Partition of India, edited by Philips, C.H., and Wainwright, M.D., (London, 1970).

Zetland, Lord, Essays: Memoirs of Lawrence Second Marquess of Zetland, (London, 1956).

