

Muslim Politics in British India: 1924-1935

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Backdrop:

The Khilafat movement brought Hindu-Muslim communities to cooperation. The leaders made the efforts to revive harmony for preparing constitutional proposals.

1: Delhi Muslim Proposals: March 1927

Important Muslim leaders on the initiative of the Quaid met in Delhi to discuss constitutional and political issues. The major demands were:

1. Punjab and Bengal: statutory Muslim majorities
2. No Weightage in provinces
3. Sind to be separated from Bombay
4. Constitutional Reforms in NWFP
5. One-third seats for Muslims in Central Legislature
6. On communal issues, no law will be passed if three-fourth members of the concerned community oppose it.

If these demands are accepted, they will give up „separate electorate.“ Subsequently, the Muslim League was divided in the Punjab, Shafi League and Jinnah League. Sir Muhammad Shafi opposed Jinnah on the issues:

- > Separate electorate
- > Attitude towards the Simon Commission. Jinnah continued his unremitting efforts to promote Hindu-Muslim unity.

2: The Nehru Report: 1928

The main objective was to constitute proposals for the Indian Constitution. The Congress called All Parties Conference that appointed a 10-member committee in May 1928 under the Chairmanship of Motilal Nehru and Secretary ship of Jawaharlal Nehru.

Recommendations that threatened Muslim interests are:

1. No Separate electorate
2. No One-third seats for Muslims in Central Assembly
3. No reservation of seats for Muslims in Punjab and Bengal. In Hindu- majority provinces, the Muslims may be given seats according to population
4. Sind to be made a province if it can bear its expenses. Balochistan, NWFP were accepted to be given constitutional status on certain conditions.

Quaid-i-Azam tried to get amendments in the Report in the All Parties Conference in Calcutta but did not succeed. This is the very moment when Jinnah remarked, “it is parting of the ways.” He presented the 14 points as a Muslim leader.

3: Jinnah’s Fourteen Points: 1929

1. Federal system with residuary powers with the provinces
2. Provincial autonomy.
3. Separate electorate for Muslims.
4. Effective representation to minorities in the provinces but the majority should not be reduced to minority
5. One-third representation of Muslims in Central Legislature.
6. One third Muslim representation in cabinets.
7. No changes in the boundaries of the Punjab and Bengal that would adversely affect Muslim majority.
8. Religious freedom to all.
9. No law will be passed if three-fourth elected members of a community declare that it is against their interests.
10. Sind to be made a separate province.
11. Constitutional Reforms in NWFP and Balochistan.
12. Muslim representation in govt. jobs.
13. Constitutional safeguards for Islamic culture and civilization, education, language, personal laws and Muslim institutions. Government should provide financial assistance.
14. No constitutional amendment unless all constituent units of the federation agree to it.

These points reflected the aspirations of every Muslim living in India. 4: The Simon Commission: The British government sent a commission to seek the opinion of Indians on the future shape of constitutional arrangements. It arrived in India in 1927 and it published the report in 1930. Most political parties boycotted it. It presented its report containing several constitutional proposals:

- > Federal system of government with strong centre
- > Two Houses.
- > Abolition of Dyarchy system in provinces
- > More powers to provincial governments.
- > Governor not to interfere in day to day affairs.
- > Constitutional changes in NWFP

5: Roundtable Conferences: 1930, 1931, and 1932

First Session of the Conference: In the first session, a number of prominent Muslims like M. A. Jinnah, Sir Shafi, Maulana M. A. Jauhar, Zafarullah Khan participated. They emphasized federalism, selfgovernment, safeguards for minorities, separate electorate, preferential representation in central legislature, secure majorities in Punjab and Bengal.

Second Conference: Maulana M. A. Jauhar had died after the first conference. Iqbal, Jinnah and others participated in the second conference. Gandhi represented the Congress. The key issues of the session were „Federation“ and „Minorities.“

The Communal Award, August 1932

Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald announced the Communal Award:

1. Separate electorate for all minorities of India.
2. Weightage to minorities
3. No Muslim majorities in Punjab and Bengal as was followed in Lucknow Pact
4. One third representation for Muslims in Central legislature
5. One fourth representation for Muslims in services
6. Sind to be made a province

Poona Pact, September 1932

The Congress expressed strong reaction against the right of separate electorate to the Indian minorities, especially to low caste Hindus whom Gandhi named Harijan (sons of God).

Dissonance in Gandhi is conspicuous that he observed fast unto death on the right to the „sons of God.“ An agreement with low caste to surrender the separate electorate right was concluded to save Gandhi’s life.

3rd Roundtable Conference: Nov. 17-Dec. 24 1932

The main issues had been discussed in the first two conferences and now the rest of them were to be discussed. It was poorly attended conference. Quaid did not participate despite living in London. Gandhi did not attend as he had been detained.

The conference brought no change in party positions and widened Hindu-Muslim gulf. White Paper on Constitutional Proposals: March 1933

The British government issued a small document in the form the White Paper. It included detail of working basis of the Indian constitution with Dyarchy in the centre and full responsible governments in the provinces.

Government of India Act, 1935: Approved by the King: August 1935

Despite these efforts the communal problems could not be settled as satisfactory to the nations living in India particularly the Muslim. Therefore the key issues remained unchanged:

1. Hindu Muslim Relations
2. Failure to arrive at settlement
3. Muslim demands transmuted from safeguarding rights to complete independence---Pakistan.