

## The Delhi Proposals: A Study in Communal Politics

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On 20 March 1927, thirty Muslims assembled in Delhi and in a dramatic gesture, agreed to forego separate electorates if their four proposals were accepted *in toto*.<sup>1</sup> The first of these was that the Bengali and Punjabi Muslims should be represented in the legislative councils in proportion to their population; the second was that one-third of the seats in the Central Legislature be reserved for the Muslims. And the last two demands were that Sind be separated from the Bombay Presidency and constituted as an independent province, and reforms be extended to the Frontier Province. These were popularly known as the Delhi proposals. "We have after all succeeded," Mohammad Yaqub wrote triumphantly, "in finding out a formula on which there was a unanimity of Muslim opinion, and which has shifted the burden of proof on the other party; [and] it is for them to clasp the hand of friendship which the Muslims have extended."<sup>2</sup>

The Delhi proposals embodied the political demands of a large and representative body of Muslim opinion, and quite significantly, formed the basis on which all future negotiations with the Congress were conducted. In fact, the proposals were the cornerstone of Muslim politics in the late 1920s and the early 1930s. They were important in another respect. They signified the Muslim League's success in drawing such regions, which were hitherto outside the pale of institutional politics, into the mesh of communal wranglings. In a sense, therefore, the issues of Sind and the Frontier were used as pawns in the chessboard of all-India communal politics. By espousing the so-called Muslim cause in those regions, men like Jinnah and Mohamed Ali

\*I am grateful to Simon Commander for his invaluable comments.

<sup>1</sup>Jinnah presided over the meeting. Among those who attended the Delhi Conference were the Raja of Mahmudabad, Mohammad Ali, Mohammad Yaqub, Mohammad Ismail, N.A. Ansari, and Ali Nabi from the United Provinces; Mohammad Shafi, Mohammad Nawaz Khan, Raja Ghazanfar Ali Khan, Mohammad Shah Nawaz, Abdul Qadir and Abdul Qayyum from the Punjab; C.H. Ariff, H.S. Suhrawardy, Abdul Matin Chowdhry, Maulvi Mohammad Shafi from Bengal and Bihar. *Leader* (Allahabad), 23 March 1927.

<sup>2</sup>Abdul Qadir to M.C. Chagla, 20 March 1927, Chagla Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library (NML). Zulfiqar Ali Khan of the Punjab expressed the hope that the Hindu politicians would respond favourably to the offer made by him and his colleagues, and awaited the result of our "*demarche* with the keenest interest." *Leader*, 27 March 1927.

sought to acquire legitimacy for their status as leader of their community.<sup>3</sup> In so doing they also hoped to provide credence to the argument that the political interests of their co-religionists were not only identical but distinct from the Hindus and that they shared the fear of a "Hindu Raj."

This paper seeks to examine the significance of the Delhi proposals in the development of Muslim separatist politics, to highlight the issues which divided Indian politicians along communal lines, and to focus on how certain groups in Indian society sought to protect and foster their communal interests. This is done by examining the two most important aspects of the Delhi proposals—creation of Sind as an Independent province and extension of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms to the Frontier—and analyzing the responses to them. An attempt is also made to assess the role of the Congress in removing the communal malaise, its perception of the problem and, more specifically, its reactions to the Delhi proposals.

## I

The controversy over the status of Sind in British India raged throughout the 1920s and was the cause of much Hindu-Muslim estrangement. Sind formed the extreme North-West portion of the western presidency with an area of nearly 50,000 square miles and a population of just over 3 million in 1921. Annexed by the British in 1843, it was placed under a separate Commissionership and attached to the Bombay Presidency.<sup>4</sup> Soon after, various proposals were mooted to merge Sind with the Punjab—an idea which found favour with Dalhousie and some of his successors: Northbrook and Lytton.<sup>5</sup> But these came to nothing; Sind remained an integral part of the Bombay Presidency because of supposedly common geographical, ethnic, cultural and historical interests. In the 1920s, however, the dispute over Sind acquired serious dimensions and, like several other issues of the day, developed along communal lines. What was unmistakably an administrative problem proved to be the cause of Hindu-Muslim discord. Both the supporters and the detractors

<sup>3</sup>Government reports interpreted Jinnah's initiative in terms of his desire to conclude an agreement with the "Hindus." "Some form of compromise with the Hindus is not only demanded by his political beliefs, but is probably an essential condition of his retaining position as a political leader." Home Public. F. No. 6, 1927, NAI. The Viceroy, however, maintained that "Jinnah's idea was to create a temporary rapprochement between Hindus and Muslims in order to defeat the final carrying of the Currency Bill." Irwin to Birkenhead, 24 March 1927. Irwin Papers, MSS. EUR. C 152(3), India Office Library, London.

<sup>4</sup>For the history of Sind during early British rule, see Robert Huttenback, *British Relations with Sind, 1799-1843* (California, 1962); P.N. Khera, *British Policy towards Sind upto its Annexation* (Delhi, 1943); H.T. Lambrick, *Sir Charles Napier and Sind* (Oxford, 1952); H.P. Lambrick, *Sind: A General Introduction* (Hyderabad, 1964).

<sup>5</sup>Parliamentary Papers, 1878, Cd. 1898, p. 5, quoted in C.C. Davies, *The Problem of the North-West Frontier* (London, 1932), p. 115.

of the idea of an independent Sind province distorted the political and administrative implications of their stance in order to preserve and promote their vested interests. They also deployed patently communal arguments in defence of their position. The overall deteriorating communal situation in the country provided an ideal setting for them to do so.

Various arguments were advanced to oppose the separation of Sind from the Bombay Presidency. These included the limited economic resources of the region,<sup>6</sup> its inability to bear the heavy cost of administration,<sup>7</sup> and the fear that the Hindus would be left to the "tender mercies of the Muslim majority."<sup>8</sup> The *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, a crusader of many nationalist causes, went a step further. It opposed the creation of provinces where "the ignorant, fanatical majority having more affinities with Arabia and Afghanistan than with their countrymen will have the ultimate voice in public life."<sup>9</sup> But the real reasons behind this extraordinary outburst remained unstated. These were mainly economic and stemmed from the fear that the creation of a Muslim-majority province would threaten the dominance of Hindu traders, government servants and professional men. The memories of the East Bengal experience were fresh and could hardly be forgotten by the anti-separationists. "If the plight of the Hindus of Sind and East Bengal," observed the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 14 April 1927, "are an index of the treatment to be meted out by the Muslim majority, what Nationalist Hindu is there who would contemplate with equanimity the creation of autonomous Muslim states of Baluchistan, N.W.F.P., Punjab and Sind—a great belt stretching from Himalayas up to the sea?" The *Hindustan Times* of 19 April explicitly stated:

If Muslims desire separation of Sind to ensure their dominance in one province, there are Hindus who would like to readjust the boundaries of Bengal and the Punjab to eliminate Muslim majorities from these two provinces.

The fears echoed in a section of the press were highly exaggerated because the Hindus of Sind, who formed just over 25 per cent of the population, were an influential group and there was no impending danger to their dominance in trade, agriculture, administration, and the professions. The commercial

<sup>6</sup>Professor H.L. Chablani of the University of Delhi argued that Sind was a deficit province since 1843; its expenditure exceeded its revenues by 67 lakhs in 1843, by over 13 lakhs in 1914-15, and by 41 lakhs in 1924-25. *Financial Aspects of the Separation of Sind from the Bombay Presidency* (Karachi, n.d.) p. 3, in P. Thakurdas Papers (72-R1), 1928, NML.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 10-11; Jairamdas Daulatram, *Separation of Sind: Why it is not Advisable?* Thakurdas Papers (72-P2), 1928, NML.

<sup>8</sup>Jairamdas Daulatram and Professor Chablani, quoted in *Servant of India*, 2 February 1928.

<sup>9</sup>*Amrita Bazar Patrika* (Calcutta), 14 April 1927.

group, which benefited from the increase in the volume of trade from the Karachi port and from the opening of direct railway communication with Upper India and the western province, was predominantly Hindu. Karachi was the fourth biggest city in the Bombay Presidency and the total value of trade from its ports increased substantially from the last quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> The advantage of this accrued mainly to Hindu traders and only to a few Khoja and Bohra merchants.

Hindus also held the great majority of government posts. The Amils of Lohana caste, in particular, occupied in Sind a position analogous to that of the Kayasths in U.P. or the Pandits in Kashmir. They were integrated with the Muslim courts where they served as clerks and writers and, after the establishment of British rule, adopted western habits and acquired western education. A small number of *baniyas* also availed themselves of western education to enter government service, but the majority continued to follow purely mercantile pursuits. They were also involved in moneylending in which they acquired fortunes in both real and personal property.<sup>11</sup>

As a result of their strong economic position, the voting strength of the Hindus in the provincial franchise was greater than that of the Muslims.<sup>12</sup> Not surprisingly, they controlled the municipalities of Karachi, Hyderabad, Sukkur, Larkana, Nawab Shah and Thar Parkar.<sup>13</sup> This inevitably spurred the Muslim demand for reservation of seats and separate electorates, a concession they enjoyed in most provinces of British India. At a meeting of Karachi Municipality in February 1917, some Muslims voiced their grievance and sought necessary safeguards which would reflect their numerical strength in the region. But the Hindu members remained intransigent leaving their Muslim colleagues disappointed.<sup>14</sup>

Clearly, the continued amalgamation of Sind with the Bombay Presidency ensured Hindu dominance in many spheres; hence the vigorous campaign of the Sind Provincial Sabha, the Sind Hindu Association and the Sind Zamindar Association against a change in the *status quo*. These bodies represented the interests of rich traders, landowners and professional men and their members were faced with the cheerless prospect of declining fortunes. The creation of an independent province meant the setting up of a legislative council where power would be distributed, at least in some measure, to the Muslim majority. It further meant that Muslims would have greater opportunities to compete with

<sup>10</sup>See Herbert Feldman, *Karachi Through a Hundred Years, 1800-1960* (London, 1960), p. 142; *Report of the Karachi Chamber of Commerce, 1926* (Karachi, 1927).

<sup>11</sup>*Imperial Gazetteer of India* (Oxford, 1908), Vol. 22, p. 403.

<sup>12</sup>Deputation from the Sind Muhammadan Association, in *Indian Statutory Commission (ISC)*, Vol. 6, Part i, p. 206.

<sup>13</sup>See table in Mushirul Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India, 1916-1928* (Delhi, 1979), p. 269.

<sup>14</sup>*Tribune*, 25 February 1917.

the Hindus in education, government service, and the professions and, with the encouragement of a Muslim-dominated Ministry, improve upon their representation. While this was a daunting prospect for many Hindus, it offered hopes of a bright future to the Muslims.

Of the total population of 542,065 in Sind, Muslims made up 386,151, or about 71 per cent. The great majority of them were petty cultivators. There were a few Muslim zamindars but many amongst them were gradually losing land to Hindu moneylenders and to the rich Hindu immigrants from outside Sind. The Sind Muslim Association raised this issue in its address presented to the Governor of Bombay in 1925; S.H. Covernton was asked to enquire into the matter. The results of his enquiries revealed that, from 1905 to 1925, over four lakh acres of land had passed from the possession of agriculturists to that of non-agriculturists. Covernton observed that, after the irrigation of the Barrage area Muslim agriculturists were likely to lose land with greater rapidity both to local capitalists and those from other provinces and to immigrants from outside Sind. He noted: "The resulting expropriation of a considerable number of Muslim agriculturists, who form the greater part of the population, cannot be contemplated with equanimity." Covernton proposed legislation on the lines of the Punjab Alienation Act, leading Jairamdas Daulatram to comment: "By one stroke of pen, the Government of Bombay intend . . . to condemn nearly 40,000 of Hindu agriculturists of Sind to the position of non-agriculturists."<sup>15</sup> Much to his relief, however, the government deferred introducing legislation.

Like their co-religionists in Bengal, the Sindhi Muslims were at the bottom of the educational scale. In 1921, only 3 per cent of the male population was literate in English. Table I indicates that, in 1906, the percentage of College-going Muslims was 5.7 per cent; in 1916 it was 15.2 and in 1926 it came down to 13.2 per cent. In consequence, there were only a few Muslims who could qualify for government posts, the law courts and the educational establishments.<sup>16</sup> In January 1909, the Sind Muhammadan Association urged the Governor of Bombay, George Clark, to reserve seats for the Muslims in public services. But he remained unconvinced, refusing to give preferential treatment on the ground that this would lower the standard of administration.<sup>17</sup> In December 1924, the third Sind Educational Conference, modelled on the lines of the Mohammedan Educational Conference founded by Syed Ahmad Khan of Aligarh, reiterated the demand on the plea that, since three-

<sup>15</sup>This paragraph is based on the pamphlet, "Communalism in Land," Thakurdas Papers (72-2), 1928, NML.

<sup>16</sup>In various grades of pay in government departments Muslims were mostly represented in the lower grades. This was true of the Police Department, the Karachi Port Trust and the Public Works Department. Table II shows the number of Muslim and Non-Muslim clerks in the Divisional and Sub-Divisional offices in the Public Works Department.

<sup>17</sup>*Tribune*, 28 January 1909.

fourths of the population of Sind was Muslim they had a proportional claim in all public services and institutions. Ibrahim Rahimtoola, an influential Bombay Muslim and member of the legislative council since 1899, pleaded that 70 per cent of appointments of teachers in public schools and to the post of Education Inspectors and Deputy-Inspectors be reserved for his co-religionists.<sup>18</sup>

The idea of a new Muslim province, contiguous to the predominantly Muslim areas of Baluchistan, the N.W.F.P, and the Punjab offered a stronghold against the fear of Hindu domination. Besides, many Sindhi Muslims expected to gain a fair share in the administration and in the government employment market. The more powerful groups, led by the wealthy merchant Seth Haji Abdolla Haroon and his erstwhile comrades of the Khilafat days, nursed substantial political ambitions. They hoped to control local bodies—district boards and municipalities—and other levers of power in order to distribute patronage amongst their clients and to establish themselves as leaders of their community.

The glorious prospect offered by an independent province prompted local leaders to renew their links—established during the Khilafat movement—with national organizations and their leading members and to enlist their support for promoting the cause of Sind. Mohamed Ali and Jinnah responded enthusiastically. So did the Muslim League. Anxious to acquire the status of an all-India body and to secure the adherence of groups outside its traditional areas of support, the Muslim League espoused the cause of the Sindhi Muslims. But these were not the only reasons. In the context of the politics of the post-1922 period, the issue of Sind formed an integral part of the strategy to press for further Muslim-majority provinces being carved out of British India so as to form a northern bloc in which the Hindus would be hostages for the good behaviour of their co-religionists in the centre and south. It therefore contemplated as an essential feature the constitution of three new provinces all with substantial Muslim majorities. Mohamed Ali bluntly stated that the presence of the Hindus in the Muslim-majority provinces would guarantee the safety of Muslims in the Hindu-majority provinces, and that the establishment of Sind as an independent province was necessary for the so-called balance of power between Hindus and Muslims in British India.<sup>19</sup>

This was also the logic behind the demand for introducing reforms in the Frontier Province, incorporated in the Muslim League resolution of May 1924.<sup>20</sup> In February 1926, Syed Murtaza Ali of Madras introduced a resolu-

<sup>18</sup>*Tribune*, 30 December 1924.

<sup>19</sup>*Hemdard*, 4 and 28 April 1927.

<sup>20</sup>The North-West Frontier Province was carved out by Curzon in 1901. In 1921, the province had a population of 2,062,786 with Muslims constituting 91 per cent of it. The Morley-Minto Reforms and the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms were not introduced in the

tion on the subject in the Legislative Assembly which was supported by Jinnah and the Muslim members of the Independent Party. But the Hindu Mahasabha vigorously opposed the resolution. Madan Mohan Malaviya, the self-styled champion of the so-called Hindu interest, referred to the Kohat riots of September 1924 and, to the danger of conceding power to a majority which had tyrannized the Hindu minority. At the all-parties conference in January 1925<sup>21</sup> and as President of the Hindu Mahasabha in April,<sup>22</sup> Lala Lajpat Rai had already played on Hindu fears of an Afghan invasion and prepared the ground for an intensified Hindu Mahasabha opposition to the demand for Reform for the Frontier.

The attitude of some of the Swarajists remained ambivalent, causing much suspicion amongst their Muslim followers. Motilal Nehru, in particular, remained ambiguous. At Lajpat Rai's instigation, he opposed the moving of the resolution by Syed Murtuza, firstly on the technical ground that the Executive had not been given twelve hours notice, and secondly on the political ground that the Swarajist Party could not support the introduction of Dyarchy on the Frontier whilst condemning it elsewhere.<sup>23</sup> Later, Motilal vacillated, owing to the loss of Muslim support, and produced a formula to the effect that the Reforms demanded by the Assembly in February 1924 and September 1925 were intended for the people of India as a whole, including the inhabitants of the Frontier. But Lajpat Rai insisted on adding the clause, "subject to such redistribution of provinces as may be found necessary." This gave rise to the suspicion that the Congress was only prepared to support Reforms for the Frontier at the cost of the Frontier's independence. In protest, Syed Murtuza and Shafi Daudi resigned from the Swaraj Party and the scene was set for a party split along communal lines in the Assembly.<sup>24</sup> Motilal was accused of sacrificing the Frontier Muslims in order to gain Lajpat Rai's support in the 1926 elections. Syed Murtuza wrote:

I was driven to the conclusion that a considerable part of the Hindu opposi-

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province because of its limited economic resources. In 1922, however, the Reforms Enquiry Committee noted that the people of the Frontier Province "have been awakened into full consciousness and will not be satisfied by anything short of reform enjoyed elsewhere" and recommended the establishment of a legislative council. But this recommendation was not implemented because Denis Brays, Chairman of the Committee, maintained that the NWFP would not be able to enjoy provincial autonomy and was incapable of supporting a government of its own. See *Report of Proceedings of the North-West Frontier Enquiry Committee* (Delhi, 1924), p. 28; *Proceedings of the North-West Frontier Enquiry Committee, 1922* (Simla, 1922), Vol. i, pp. 24 and 53.

<sup>21</sup>AICC Papers (G-72), 1925, NML.

<sup>22</sup>*Indian Quarterly Register*, 1925, Vol i, pp. 379-80.

<sup>23</sup>This is based on D.J.H. Page, "Prelude to Partition: All India Muslim Politics, 1909-1932" (Unpublished D. Phil thesis, Oxford, 1973), p. 115.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 116.

tion to the extension of the Reforms to the Frontier province was based on considerations that are not provincial but are imported into these discussions from other provinces of India, and in particular from the Punjab. In no other province are the Hindus in such a small minority as in the Frontier and being in most provinces in large majorities . . . the most communally minded Hindu can pose as a Nationalist and pretend that he asks for the abolition of communal representation and of separate electorates only because their existence is incompatible with nationalism. . . . If the Frontier province remains a separate province and also secures the Reforms this pose of Nationalism cannot possibly be maintained any longer. One need not be a prophet to predict that the moment the Reforms are granted. . . . the Hindu minority, which is as insignificant as our own in my own province, will begin to clamour as vociferously as the most nervous or the most greedy Mussulman seeking adequate and effective separate communal representation. . . . This is the reason why the Punjab Hindus and their Hindu supporters of other provinces brought pressure to bear on the leader of the Swaraj party, who is openly and obviously in need of their support against Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and the Hindu Sabhas at his back. . . .<sup>25</sup>

Outside the Assembly, the intransigence of the Hindu councillors raised a storm of protest from various leading Muslims. Mohamed Ali was indignant. He said:

The Hindus cry hoarse in biding Muslims to live as a minority in the country and dispel the fear of Hindu majority. They are out to deny to Muslims the very safeguards that they demand for themselves.<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, the *Mohammadi* of Calcutta deplored the "Hindu mentality" and interpreted their reluctance to extend reforms to the Frontier in terms of the "simple reason that the Hindus are in a minority there. If this be the cause, may we ask why the Reforms were given to Madras where the Muslims form only 5 per cent of the population."<sup>27</sup>

In 1926, the Muslim League reiterated its demand for introducing reforms in the NWFP so as to "allay the feelings and apprehensions of the Muslims not only of the NWFP, but of all India."<sup>28</sup> It was against this background and the mounting pressure of important Muslim groups that the demand for

<sup>25</sup>Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>26</sup>Mohammad Sarwar (ed.), *Mazameen-i-Mohamed Ali* (Delhi, 1940), Vol. ii, p. 18.

<sup>27</sup>*Mohammadi*, 26 February 1926, Bengal Native Newspaper Reports (BNNR), NAI.

<sup>28</sup>S. Pirzada (ed.), *Foundations of Pakistan: All India Muslim Documents, 1906-1947* (Karachi, 1970), Vol. ii, p. 100.



reforms in the NWFP was included in the Delhi proposals.

## II

Writing to his colleague, M.C. Chagla, Abdul Qadir observed:

I hope our Hindu friends will be persuaded by your advocacy. But I am afraid that there will be few, if any. What is more likely to happen is that while you may regard yourself as much of a nationalist as ever, they will dethrone you from the lofty pedestal of nationalism.<sup>29</sup>

The immediate reactions to the Delhi proposals confirmed the fears of Abdul Qadir. Malaviya and his associates in the Central Legislature rejected the suggestions about the constitution of new Muslim provinces and the principle for determining the number of seats to be reserved. Many newspapers fell in line.<sup>30</sup> The *Leader* of 23 April 1927 noted:

It is not a little embarrassing that every time the demand for further constitutional reforms comes to the fore the communal Muslim demands should be put up higher and higher, and concession thereof, in whole or in large part should be made a condition of Muslim support of the demand for reforms. *We are firmly of the opinion that there is no case for further concessions to Muslims in the matter of representation in elected bodies* (italics mine).

Echoing the sentiments of his colleagues at the Hindu Mahasabha session at Patna on 18 April, Moonje declared "Unity based on the principle of bargaining can never be stable, particularly when it has to be purchased by making concessions."<sup>31</sup> The proceedings of the session, according to a government report, "exhibited anything but a conciliatory attitude towards the Muslims and seemed more calculated to fan the flames of controversy than to damp them."<sup>32</sup>

But all was not lost. In spite of the massive agitation launched by the

<sup>29</sup>Abdul Qadir to Chagla, 20 March 1927, Chagla Papers, NML.

<sup>30</sup>*Sind Observer*, quoted in *Bengalee*, 25 March 1927; *Mahratta*, 27 March 1927; *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 26 March 1927 and 2 February 1928.

<sup>31</sup>Quoted in I. Prakash, *Hindu Mahasabha, Its Contribution to Indian Politics*, (Delhi, 1966), p. 107. The Presidential Address of Moonje evoked sharp comments from several Urdu newspapers. The *Medina*, for instance, observed that the address aimed at harassing Muslims and spurning their proposals. "Judging from this speech it can be asserted that the sole object of the Hindu Sabha is to come to grips (*sic*) with Muslims in order to ruin them or at least to secure for Hindus the position of dominant but cowardly and tyrannical race." *Medina* (Bijnor), 30 April 1927, UPNNR, NAI.

<sup>32</sup>H.G. Haig to Secretary of State, 28 April 1927, Home. Public. F. No. 240, 1927, NAI.

Mahasabha, the Congress was anxious to pursue the proposals initiated by Jinnah; this offered a serious prospect of a communal rapprochement. At the All-India Congress Committee (AICC) meeting on 5 May, the Hindu party expressed its hostility to the proposals,<sup>33</sup> but the next day Motilal Nehru and Srinivasa Iyengar secured its acquiescence by accepting certain amendments proposed by the Bombay politician, M.R. Jayakar. "Nothing better could have been proposed," declared Motilal, "under the circumstances to remove the unfortunate rancour and animosity."<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Srinivasa Iyengar, who took the lead in convening the Calcutta Unity Conference in early 1927, maintained that the Delhi proposals offered a basis "for what might be regarded as safe compromise for the present and as leading ultimately to perfect nationalism."<sup>35</sup>

The Congress's conciliatory attitude can be explained in terms of its desire to maintain the facade of Hindu-Muslim unity and to reduce communal differences between leading politicians. This is not all. The announcement of the Statutory Commission on 8 November 1927 made it necessary for the Congress to initiate the process of rapprochement and to wrest the initiative from the communal organizations, such as the Hindu Mahasabha and the last remnants of the Khilafat Committees. "The advent of the Statutory Commission," wrote Ansari, "affords one more argument . . . for sinking our differences and acting jointly."<sup>36</sup> The Congress's acceptance of the Delhi proposals was clearly meant to pave the way for an *entente* with the Muslim League in order to present a united front against the Statutory Commission and to formulate a set of constitutional demands in the name of "United India." But this had serious implications as evident from the hostile reactions to the Congress's decision. Some of the Provincial Congress Committees were the first to revolt. The Maharashtra PCC, quite predictably, opposed the separation of Sind from the Bombay Presidency.<sup>37</sup> The Berar PCC did likewise.<sup>38</sup> But the most bitter critics of the Congress were the Hindu Mahasabhites and their allies in the Congress organization. Their views need some elaboration.

<sup>33</sup>The Conference passed the following resolution: "The Mahasabha deprecates any attempt to constitute new provinces or legislatures principally for the purpose of giving a majority therein to any particular community. In the opinion of the Mahasabha the question of the creation of new provinces or legislatures could be considered, if necessary, independently, any proposals for mixed or separate electorate and exclusively on their merit." Copy of the resolution, encl. in Ijaz Husain to Mohamed Ali, 5 May 1927, Mohamed Ali Papers, Jamia Millia Islamia Library, New Delhi.

<sup>34</sup>Home. Public. F. No. 6, 1927, NAI.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup>Circular Letter, 1 December 1927, in Mushirul Hasan (ed.), *Muslims and the Congress: Select Correspondence of Dr. M. A. Ansari, 1912-1935* (Delhi, 1979), p. 24

<sup>37</sup>*Leader*, 9 April 1927; *Mahratta*, 10 April 1927.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 20 April 1927.

In May 1927, when the AICC adopted the Delhi proposals, there was a hue and cry in a section of the press. Motilal Nehru and Srinivasa Iyengar, who persuaded the AICC to accept the proposals, were attacked bitterly. The *Surya* wrote:

The Congress has become a handmaid of Motilal Nehru and the sole function of the AICC is to register his decrees. It was, therefore, a foregone conclusion that his views in the matter of Muslim offer would prevail, and it is an open secret that he favours the Muslims.<sup>39</sup>

The Congress was also condemned for accepting the Muslim demand for representation in the legislatures in proportion to their population,<sup>41</sup> and for recognizing the principle of partition along the “permanent lines of religious cleavages.”<sup>41</sup> The spectre of Muslim domination and of their “unbroken sway” from “Turkey to the bank of Jamuna in Delhi” was raised in the press,<sup>42</sup> and the Congress was warned not to entrust the destiny of the Hindus “to the tender mercies of the Muslims.” The *Pratap*, a paper with unmistakable communal overtones, pontificated:

The Congress committed a great blunder in being a party to the Lucknow Pact as the principle of separate electorates has proved an obstacle in the path of nationalism. It will commit a still greater blunder if, with the object of satisfying communal follies, it adopts the policy of communal redistribution on a communal basis. Unity cannot be brought by bargaining; it can only be established by a change of heart.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup>*Surya*, 4 June 1927, UPNNR, NAI.

<sup>40</sup>*Basumati* (Calcutta), 19 May 1927, BNNR.

<sup>41</sup>In an article entitled “Dangers of Separation of Sind” Jair. mdas Daulatram condemned the Congress for recognizing “the partition of the Indian nation along the permanent lines of religious cleavage and [giving] a stamp of its approval to a state of armed neutrality and a balance of power under which the Muslims are to use their majority in five provinces to retaliate on their peaceful Hindu neighbours for the ill-treatment, supposed or real, which Hindus give to their Muslim neighbours in any one of the nine provinces.” *Servant of India*, 2 February 1928.

<sup>42</sup>*Mahratta*, 27 March 1927. The *Sind Observer* noted that “at the back of the minds of the Muslim leaders is the idea of having Muslim autonomous provinces on the western strategic belt from Peshawar to Karachi which is the borderland of communication with the rest of the Muslim world outside on the ground of equity.” Quoted in *Bengalee*, 25 March 1927.

Savarkar, the Hindu Mahasabha leader, suspected that, if the Amir of Afghanistan invaded India, the Sindhi Muslims would support him. He, therefore, visualized serious dangers for his co-religionists in Sind if a ‘Muslim State’ was established in that region. *Collected Works of Savarkar* (in Marathi) (Poona, 1964), Vol. iii, pp. 769-71.

<sup>43</sup>*Pratap*, 9 April 1927, UPNNR, NAI.

## III

While the agitation against the Delhi proposals was gaining momentum, the Secretary of State for India dropped a bombshell by announcing the appointment of an all-British Commission in early November 1927. The exclusion of Indians from the Commission aroused much indignation and resentment among leading organizations and they united in opposition to the Commission. When the Congress met in Madras at the end of the year, it voted to boycott the Commission, proclaimed independence as its goal, and resolved to prepare a draft constitution for the country. The All India Khilafat Conference, the Muslim League and the Jamiat-ul-ulama endorsed these decisions.<sup>44</sup>

In the midst of this patriotic outburst, the agitation against the Delhi proposals subsided. But the controversies remained unresolved; they surfaced during the sessions of the All-Parties Conference.

The first meeting of the Conference (18 February 1928) debated the question of Sind. Jairamdas Daulatram, Moonje, and Lajpat Rai made spirited speeches against its separation and rejected the Congress resolution relating to the creation of an independent Sind province.<sup>45</sup> Motilal Nehru, the champion of the Delhi proposals, performed a *volte face* over the question of reserving seats for the Muslim majority in Bengal and the Punjab. He probably did so to mollify the Hindu party in the Congress who had been consistently agitating against reservation of seats for the Muslims in these provinces.<sup>46</sup>

When the Conference proceeded to review the issue of Sind, the Muslim League delegates raised loud protests. Jinnah, Hasrat Mohani and Mohamed Ali argued that, having accepted the Delhi proposals, Motilal and his Congress colleagues has no justification in changing their views. But this was of no avail. The League promptly decided to boycott the Conference. In response to an invitation to attend the next Conference at Bombay, Mohammad Yaqub referred to his party's decision to boycott its deliberations unless the Delhi proposals were accepted by the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha. "The strength of opposition on the part of these important organisations," he wrote, "cannot be overlooked and it seems nearly impossible to obtain support of majority organisations to a reasonable plan providing safeguards for all interests."

The rejection of the Delhi proposals by the Hindu Mahasabha in April 1928 was the last straw. This gave many Muslims an opportunity, which they

<sup>44</sup>See Mushirul Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal Politics*, p. 270; Hasan (ed.), *Muslims and the Congress*, pp. 23-24, 50-51, 53-54.

<sup>45</sup>*Leader*, 13 and 28 February, 1928.

<sup>46</sup>It is interesting to note that the report on Sind was held back so as to avoid a split on the question. This was done at the suggestion of Motilal Nehru to P. Thakurdas, 18 August 1928, Thakurdas Papers (72-2), 1928, NML.

most probably welcomed, to reject the principle of joint electorate.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, even those who were prepared to support the Jinnah compromise were naturally handicapped by the reception accorded to the proposals by the Hindu Mahasabha.<sup>48</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru informed the Congress Working Committee that, after the Mahasabha decision no help could be expected from its representatives. He also expressed the fear that the "conflicting viewpoints" would not agree to a common formula and "that we are therefore to prepare ourselves for this conflict and to decide on our course of action."<sup>49</sup> The rancour and bitterness which characterized the meetings of the All-Parties Conference bore testimony to the fears expressed by the younger Nehru. Muslims, in general, arrayed themselves against the Congress and initiated serious moves to provide greater unity and cohesion to their communal organizations, such as the All-Parties Muslim Conference, founded under the aegis of the Aga Khan. The only notable exceptions were M.A. Ansari and his men in the Nationalist Muslim Party who remained loyal to the Congress and its ideals and strived ceaselessly to achieve Hindu-Muslim *entente*. But they were a small group and commanded no great influence in Indian politics. With the heightening of communal consciousness their credibility amongst Muslims suffered a severe jolt and they were gradually isolated from the mainstream of their community's politics. The men who mattered most were the militant communalists who, in alliance with the group of government servants and landowners, were in the forefront of the anti-Congress campaign. At the Round Table Conferences held in London, they emerged as the spokesmen of their community. This augured ill for the future of Congress-League negotiations.

<sup>47</sup>The most prominent amongst them were the Muslim members of the legislative councils who regarded joint electorates as detrimental to the political advancement of the Muslim community. This was another way of saying that in a system of joint electorates their chances of being elected would be considerably reduced. Thus the Punjab Provincial Muslim League and the Bengal Provincial Muslim Conference, presided over by Mohammad Shafi and Abdur Rahim respectively, rejected joint electorate. In May 1927, Irwin informed Harcourt Butler that "the general feeling seems to be that there is little likelihood . . . of the Muslims following Jinnah's lead and declaring for joint electorate, and recent speeches have . . . made it clear that many Muslims still regard communal franchise as one of their greatest safeguards." The Viceroy was obviously referring to the meetings organized by Shafi and Rahim to reaffirm their belief in separate electorates. Irwin to Birkenhead, 11 May 1927, Irwin Papers; Irwin to Butler, 22 May 1927, Butler Papers, MSS. EUR. F. 116(61), IOL; Hailey to Alexander Muddiman, 13, June 1927, Hailey Papers, MSS. EUR. E. 220 (10-B), IOL.

<sup>48</sup>*Mohammadi*, 29 April 1927. BENNR, NAI.

<sup>49</sup>3 May 1928, S. Gopal (ed.), *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. iii, p. 38.

## IV

The Delhi proposals and the response it evoked illustrate the communalization of Indian politics in the 1920s. The edifice of Hindu-Muslim unity, so assiduously built by Gandhi during the Khilafat movement, crumbled down after the withdrawal of civil disobedience and there was a burst of organized communal activity in different parts of the country.<sup>50</sup> The organizations of groups on communal lines, particularly in the Bengal and Punjab legislative councils, and the revival of sectarian bodies, such as the *tabligh* and *tanzim*, *shuddhi* and *sanghathan*, threatened in the longer-term to destroy the unity of the country and of the national movement.

The Delhi proposals embodied the separatist demands of some influential groups amongst Muslims. Contrary to their protestations, they were not motivated by the desire to resolve the communal impasse but were concerned to commit the Congress to certain constitutional concessions for future statutory recognition by the government. With the growing prospect of another instalment of reforms, all talk of "national unity" and "national demands" made little sense to groups jockeying for positions of power, influence and status at various levels. What mattered most was a restatement of their political interests. This was done in the form of the Delhi proposals.

Given this conjuncture, the Delhi proposals had little chance of gaining acceptance. The demand for reserving seats for the Muslim majority, for instance, could hardly evoke a favourable response, especially after the operation of the Act of 1919. The policies of Fazl-i-Husain in the Punjab spelt danger to some Hindu groups;<sup>51</sup> they could accept reservation of seats for the Muslims only at the risk of jeopardizing their own interests. So did the demand for extending Reforms to the Frontier and the creation of an independent Sindh province. The *Abhyudaya* summed up the feelings:

Muslims want the extension of Reforms to the Frontier and representation according to their numbers in the Punjab and Bengal to ensure their domination in all the three provinces of the country, but they should bear in mind that the Hindus, in view of their Rawalpindi and Kohat experiences, will naturally feel suspicious over their demand.<sup>52</sup>

Such fears were of little concern to members of the AICC and the CWC; so they rushed into accepting Jinnah's offer. But once its implications were

<sup>50</sup>For an elaboration of this argument, see Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal Politics*, Chapter 6.

<sup>51</sup>Their grievance against him was that he not only unfairly and unjustly distributed patronage to his community, but also extended the principle of separate representation to public services, local bodies, and educational institutions. For details, see *ibid.*, pp. 228-30.

<sup>52</sup>*Abhyudaya* (Allahabad), 26 March 1927, UPNNR, NAI.

made clear, Motilal Nehru and his colleagues reneged on their commitment and, in the making of historic Nehru Report, they opposed reservation of seats for Muslim majorities in Bengal and the Punjab. They did so in order to undo the "wrong" done to Hindus in U.P. and the Punjab by the Lucknow Pact and to take the steam out of the Hindu Mahasabha campaign against the Delhi proposals and its supporters.<sup>53</sup>

As regards Muslims, Motilal rightly assumed that the recommendations of his Committee would be acceptable to Bengali and Punjabi Muslims, particularly because they stood to gain by the introduction of adult franchise.<sup>54</sup> The U.P. Muslims, on the other hand, did not figure in his calculations. He was confident of gaining the adherence of the Nationalist Muslims, but for the rest he showed no concern. He was convinced that if the Punjabi and Bengali Muslims were won over, Muslims elsewhere "would be settled by throwing a few crumbs here and there."<sup>55</sup> In this case, Motilal's expectations were not fulfilled. The men he expected would settle for a few crumbs eventually led a massive agitation against the Nehru Report and even succeeded in enticing away its Muslim supporters in other provinces.

The Congress response was consistent with its policy of concluding agreements for short-term political gains, but was in conflict with its lofty ideals of promoting national sentiments and combating the pernicious effects of communalism. A concordant, based on the distribution of seats and forms of electorate, fostered nationalist activity and helped to exert pressure on the government to grant concessions. But this was not of lasting importance. In December 1916, the Lucknow Pact was concluded amidst widespread jubilation but it soon proved to be the cause of much communal rancour and bitterness. Such was the fate of many similar agreements.

In dealing with the communal problem, the Congress proceeded on a series of false assumptions regarding the supposed homogeneity of the Muslim community and its common interests and aspirations. The logic of negotiating the Lucknow Pact and many similar agreements lay in the recognition of the fact that Muslims required special safeguards and concessions because their interests were distinct from those of the Hindus. The political language within which such accommodation was expressed and the energy, in a sense autonomous, which derived from a recognition of this conception of society and political organization necessarily implied that the very terms of reference precluded any lasting solution to the communal tangle. In this respect the

<sup>53</sup>On this point, see Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal Politics*, p. 88; H.F. Own, "Negotiating the Lucknow Pact," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXXI, May 1972.

<sup>54</sup>Motilal reported that "barring a few die-hards of the Shafi School the great bulk of the Musalmans" had endorsed the Nehru Report. Motilal to Annie Besant, 30 September 1928, *A Bunch of Old Letters*, 2nd edn. (Bombay, 1966), p. 65; Motilal to Gandhi, 24 November, 1928, Motilal Papers (139), NML.

<sup>55</sup>Motilal to Annie Besant, 30 September 1928, *ibid.*

notion of Pakistan or at least of the Muslims as a separate and coherent unity had been embedded in the language of indigenous politics long prior to its realization.

As a consequence, the policy of negotiating with a limited number of Muslim politicians already assumed and indeed perpetuated their legitimacy as spokesmen for the whole community. This recognition flowed to a large extent from the organizational and political structures within which the Congress leadership was itself elaborated. Necessarily restricting the political ambit to the negotiable and delimited sphere of individual leaders, the respective futures of both communities appeared infinitely more malleable and open to the form of political bargaining natural to the Congress leadership. With regard to the Muslims, such an orientation substantiated and inflated the importance of men like Mohammed Ali and Jinnah whose organizational base and political stature was by no means assured. Rather than forcing these supposed leaders into a situation where they had, as it were, to demonstrate this implied support, the Congress leadership consistently refused to draw out the conditions for such a confrontation. This derived, in part, from an apparent desire not to be seen to be weakening the integral and unified nature of the national movement but also from the fear that the consequences of such a confrontation would reveal a divide so profound that later negotiations would fail to remedy. As national integrity remained the cardinal political assumption, such a confrontation had necessarily to be avoided.

TABLE I  
ENROLEMENT OF MUSLIM STUDENTS IN COLLEGES IN SIND

Year	Number of Muslim students		Total number of students	
	in college		in college	
				Percentage
1906	11		193	5.7
1916	39		256	15.2
1926	103		773	13.2

SOURCE : *Bombay Legislative Council Debate*, 18 July 1927, Vol. XX, p. 106.

TABLE II  
MUSLIM AND NON-MUSLIMS CLERKS IN THE DIVISIONAL AND  
SUB-DIVISIONAL OFFICES IN PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENTS

Grade 130-5-180		Grade 105-5-125		Grade 75-5/2-70		Grade 30-5/2-70		Grade 30-5/3-80		Grade 30-5/3-70	
Mus- lims	Non- Muslims	Mus- lims	Non- Muslims	Mus- lims	Non- Muslims	Mus- lims	Non- Muslims	Mus- lims	Non- Muslims	Mus- lims	Non- Muslims
2	32	2	31	19	69	30	98	25	106	23	38

SOURCE : *Bombay Legislative Council Debate*, July 1927, Vol. XX, pp. 179-80.