

RECONCILIATION OR CONFRONTATION: MAJLIS-I-AHRAR AND THE POLITICS OF PUNJAB IN 1930S

By the early 1930s, the Majlis-i-Ahrar-Islam (hereafter MAI) had become an important political party of Muslims in the Punjab. Its agitation in the princely states, and mobilisation on socio-religious issues, earned it an important position in regional politics. Besides these campaigns, the MAI also participated in the mainstream political developments of British India between 1931 to 1947. Its political career can be divided into two parts; the MAI's response to political and constitutional issues, and its performance in electoral politics. An examination of its role in these two areas can help in addressing the question as to whether the Majlis was a provincial party or an all-India organisation. Its leadership, political programme and its role in and outside the legislature are vital for this investigation. Such inter-connected issues may help us locate the debate on Indian nationalism, Muslim identity politics and the developments within Punjab, the political heartland of the MAI.

Introduction

The MAI strategy was the mobilization of the Muslim masses through the advocacy of emotional and topical issues. However, it did not miss the opportunity of participating in any movement, or commenting on any issue, that was likely to influence the future of India or that of Indian Muslims. Their main constituencies were the Sunni Muslims, and particularly those living in Punjab. Constitutional issues did not evoke as much interest in its ranks, as social and religious issues; which meant that the clerics and not the lawyers set the agenda. The

anti-colonial and determinedly pro-Muslim attitudes were reflected in the MAI's reaction to the constitutional issues. Soon after its formation, it aimed at projecting itself as an anti-colonial and pro-Indian National Congress (hereafter INC) party by actively participating in the civil disobedience movement of the 1930s, championed by Mahatma Gandhi. It supported the Red Shirts Movement led by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the passing of the India Act of 1935, and efforts for an agreement among different communities in India. The MAI maintained contacts with all the political parties and responded positively to other opposition groups, though its pro-INC leanings remained quite explicit. After its initial political ventures in Kashmir, Kapurthala and Alwar, the MAI turned its attention to its organisational and institutional outreach.

1 Constitutional Issues

The major contemporary constitutional issues hinged on resolving India's complex political challenges, and coincided with the formation of the MAI. The Ahrar leaders boycotted the Simon Commission in 1927-28, and subsequently rejected its recommendations; which included a federal political system for India, and separate electorates for Muslims.¹ The All-Parties National Convention held at Calcutta in December 1928, adopted the Nehru Report. The adoption of this Report led to a division of the nationalist Muslims into two groups; one group, to which a majority of the future Ahrar leaders belonged, wanted its acceptance with some amendments; while the other group favoured its unconditional acceptance.² The Nehru Report was still being debated when the INC held its annual session at Lahore in December 1929, and abandoned the Report, while adopting complete independence as its ultimate objective.³

The independence resolution appealed to the anti-imperialist sentiments of the MAI, and brought it closer to the INC. When the latter launched its civil disobedience movement, after the rejection of its demand by the British government, the MAI shelved its organisational work, and enthusiastically participated in the non-cooperation movement. Meanwhile, the

British Government had convened the Round Table Conference (hereafter RTC) in November 1930, to work out an agreed constitutional formula for India;⁴ but the MAI, in line with the INC policy, opposed the RTC.⁵ The first RTC reached a consensus on a federal system for India, and after spelling out the principles of the future constitution, set up eight sub-committees. However, the MAI stuck to its original objectives and at its all-India conference in July 1931, reiterated that, “the chief aim and object of the Majlis will be complete independence for India”.⁶

The British government realised the futility of framing a constitution without the INC, as did the other political parties that had participated in the first RTC. During the INC-led civil disobedience movement, many of its leaders and activists had been imprisoned. When the British government realised the importance of associating the INC with the constitutional negotiations, it approached its leadership. Wedgwood Benn, the Secretary of State, wrote to the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, about the desirability of coming to terms with the Congress. In order to call off the civil disobedience movement and attend the second RTC, Gandhi was released unconditionally, and the Viceroy held negotiations with him. These negotiations climaxed with the signing of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact on 5 March 1933;⁷ and consequently, Gandhi decided to attend the second RTC in London. The MAI felt the INC had bypassed it. Maulana Habib-ur-Rahman and Syed Ataullah Shah Bukhari (the leaders of Ahrars) rushed to Bombay to persuade Gandhi not to attend the RTC.⁸ They argued that the nationalist leaders should not engage in constitutional discussions with the colonialists because it would be a ‘futile’ exercise. However, they failed to convince Gandhi, and his decision to participate in the RTC resulted in the ‘parting of ways’ between the INC and MAI. The blind faith and trust that the MAI leadership had so far reposed in the INC, was shattered.⁹ Henceforth, it did not openly share a common platform with the INC.¹⁰ The INC’s participation in the second RTC made the London Conference more representative, although the participants, failed to evolve an agreed formula to resolve the communal differences, or agree on the future political

map of India. Consequently, on 16 August 1932, the British Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald, announced a Communal Award on behalf of the British Government, which was to be followed by the India Act of 1935.

2 Communal Award and the India Act of 1935

The Communal Award not only retained the principle of separate electorates for Muslims, but was extended to other minorities as well. Weightage for minorities was also maintained, which was given equally to the Muslims in Hindu majority provinces, and to Sikhs and Hindus in the Muslim majority provinces of Punjab and Bengal. Hence, the Muslim representation in Punjab and Bengal was less than their ratio in the population. In Punjab, where the proportion of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs was 57.10%, 27% and 13% of the total population respectively; they were given 49%, 27% and 18 per cent of the provincial seats in the Assembly. Similarly, in Bengal, where the percentage of Muslims and Hindus was 55 and 43 respectively, they were given 48 and 43 per cent of the total seats in the legislature.¹¹ The lowering of property qualification for voters increased their numbers, although it was still a far cry from universal suffrage. Sindh, following a long-standing demand, was separated from Bombay and constituted into a separate province. Non-Muslims in Sindh were given more seats than their number warranted. Similarly, in the constitutional reforms carried out in the NWFP, non-Muslims got heavier weightage, which meant that they could play a critical role in case of division among its Muslim members. The Communal Award, in an emphatic way, widened the gulf between the rural and urban Muslims in the Punjab, by offering more representation to the landlords.¹² This worked to the greater benefit of the Unionist Party, since it favoured the rural classes, as did its trans-communal composition.

The Communal Award was not popular with any of the communities. The Muslim League was displeased, because it did not meet the Muslim demands for 56 per cent representation in the Punjab Assembly,¹³ and nor did it provide them with a

majority in Bengal. The reaction of the Punjabi Hindus and Sikhs was also negative; and they declared that any system of government in Punjab and Bengal under the Communal Award, would amount to a British-imposed 'Muslim Raj' in these provinces. The Mahasabha dominated Hindu politics in the Punjab, and was more influential than the Congress. In fact, the Congress had little support among the Punjabi Hindus, who looked towards the Mahasabha for safeguarding their interests.¹⁴ The Punjab Mahasabha's aggressive advocacy of Hindu interests, embittered communal relations. Their relations sank to an all-time low on the issue of separate electorates. Sikh agitation against the Communal Award was equally hostile. They had demanded 24 per cent of total representation in the Punjab Assembly, whereas they were only provided 18 per cent seats in the provincial legislature. They opposed separate electorates, and the provision of a possible Muslim majority in the assembly;¹⁵ they organised demonstrations and set up a council of action to achieve their objectives.¹⁶ On 2 August 1932, the council reportedly gathered more than one hundred thousand Sikhs in Lahore, and demanded treatment similar to that of Muslim minorities in the Hindu majority provinces. Earlier, Hindus, Sikhs and Christians had organised a joint Minority Conference to oppose adult franchise. They demanded division of the Punjab province, in case their demands were not met; which was perceived by the Muslims as a plan to subvert Muslim majority in the province. The communal division of Punjab seemed pre-ordained.¹⁷

The MAI had tried to mobilise the Muslim masses in support of joint electorates at the time of the Nehru Report, but found it difficult. Their campaign for joint electorates convinced them of the growing demand for a "separate Muslim identity", and they gradually came to accept the importance of the system of separate electorates for Muslims. Their participation in the Congress-led civil disobedience movement and severance of their links with that party in 1931, brought home the realisation that Muslims constituted a 'political entity separate' from the Sikhs and Hindus.¹⁸ Secondly, the MAI was dissatisfied with the weightage provided for the minorities in the Communal Award,

which gave the Muslim community a thin majority in the Punjab legislature. They felt that the Award had not awarded to the Muslims their due share in the Punjab Assembly,¹⁹ and believed that a solution acceptable to all the communities could still be found. They proposed that Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims should sit together, and work out an agreed formula for the representation of various communities in the Punjab; an alternative to the Communal Award.²⁰ However, they warned that if any community attempted to solve the communal problem by force, Muslims would be justified in fighting back for the protection of their interests.²¹ They also criticised the Communal Award, because it was silent on the long-standing Muslim demand of 33 per cent Muslim share in the central legislature.²² The MAI was disappointed by the reaction from Hindus and Sikhs in the Punjab, and began to take an equally communal line. They took out processions and rallies in many towns of the province, in support of their position.²³ With the passage of time, they adopted a more oppositional attitude, not only towards the British, but also against the Hindus and Sikhs.²⁴ It was alleged that the Sikhs had enlisted 100,000 men to challenge the Muslims, and that the government was supporting the Sikhs, with the objective of precipitating a conflict between the two communities. The MAI called on the Muslims to carry swords to defend themselves, particularly in those districts where the Sikhs carried *kirpans*.

They set up an action committee in the Punjab, to counteract the activities of a similar body established by the Sikhs.²⁵ The MAI made Amritsar the centre of their activities over the issue of Communal Award, and from September to December 1932, it organised several public meetings in the Punjab.²⁶ At a Provincial Ahrar Conference held on 4-5 December 1932, the MAI formed a sub-committee to suggest a formula for the Communal Award. It was to be discussed at the Allahabad Conference, scheduled for March 1933.²⁷ But no agreed formula could be worked out at these sessions, and the MAI was thus left with no option but to accept the Communal Award. The All-India Muslim League Council, in a meeting in Delhi on 2 April 1934, accepted the Communal Award till a

better alternative was found. The Majlis also formally accepted the Communal Award at an All-India Communal Award Conference in Dacca, on 24 March 1935.²⁸ B. R. Ambedkar, the leader of the Scheduled Castes, was persuaded by Gandhi to renounce separate electorates for the 'Untouchables'.²⁹ The response of the three communities in the Punjab to the Communal Award strengthened communal identities, intensified competition among them, and thus proved the last proverbial straw.

The British Government issued a White Paper after the third Round Table Conference in March 1933. The Conference appointed a Joint Select Committee, which finalised its report in November 1934, and was subsequently debated in Parliament.³⁰ The Report consisted of recommendations for the future government of India. It also discussed the issue of communal representation, and provided a basis for the British government to introduce Communal Award. When the Indian Legislative Assembly debated this report in February 1935, the INC moved a resolution for the total rejection of the report, condemning it as one of the 'usual imperialist devices' "to deprive the Indian people of the power to assume charge of their affairs".³¹ M. A. Jinnah, then the leader of the Independent Party, disagreed with the INC, and moved an amendment that was finally accepted.³² The MAI supported Jinnah's position on the White Paper, and also the report of the Joint Select Committee.³³

The British Parliament passed the Government of India Act 1935 on 2 August 1935, which provided for a federal political system for the sub-continent.³⁴ Its important features were that it defined provinces as separate legal entities, and lowered property qualifications for voting, thus enlarging the provincial franchise. The Muslim elite had always been apprehensive of a centralised government dominated by the Hindu majority, and the danger of being turned into a 'permanent minority'. The MAI, like all other Muslim political parties, was concerned about the federal part of the constitution, though it preferred to wait and watch. However, this part did not come into operation, since the required number of states did not

accede to the federation. This similarity of views on constitutional issues was an important factor that brought the MAI closer to the All-India Muslim League (AIML). In 1936, the MAI allied itself with the Muslim League, and its leaders accepted membership of the Central Muslim League Parliamentary Board, although this alliance was also short-lived.

3 Electoral Politics

The MAI decided to participate in the electoral process in the 1930s, without modifying its ultimate objective of complete independence from the British colonial rule. There were several reasons behind this decision. The MAI wanted to influence the constitution-making and law-making processes;³⁵ and after the severance of its relations with the INC and the formulation of its own platform and programme, it wanted to prove its own separate and distinct existence. Its spectacular performance in the agitation against the rulers of the three princely states gave it confidence.³⁶ The MAI, which was primarily an urban political party, like other Muslim political parties, had supported the Communal Award. As the anti-Communal Award campaign of the Mahasabites and the Akali Sikhs intensified, the MAI felt that it could counter that pressure by participating in the elections, and asserting its Muslim credentials. They also harboured the dream of leading the Muslim urban lower and middle classes, through a sustained struggle. The increasing communalism in politics had spawned the creation of a number of political groups jostling to capture the leadership of urban Muslims in Punjab, and MAI was emerging as the most influential voice.

The Majlis might have contested the August 1930 elections, but boycotted them as a result of its decision to participate in the INC-sponsored civil disobedience movement. Their first electoral activity was in 1933, in the three bye-elections to the Punjab Legislative Assembly. Then in 1934, the MAI put up candidates in two constituencies, in the elections to the Central Legislative Assembly; and in 1937, it took part in the elections to the provincial assemblies under the Government of

India Act of 1935, and supported candidates for the provincial assemblies of the Punjab, Bihar and Bombay.

4 Bye-elections of 1933

The working committee of the MAI, in a meeting at Lahore on 12 June, 1933, took the decision to participate in the three bye-elections for the Punjab Assembly.³⁷ It selected three prominent MAI figures as its candidates to contest these polls. One of its candidates was the patron-in-chief of the MAI, Chaudhry Afzal Haq, who decided to contest the rural Muslim seat from the Hoshiarpur and Ludhiana districts of East Punjab. He was an experienced political figure of Muslim politics in the Punjab. He had been elected twice to the Punjab legislature; in the 1924-27 and the 1927-30 periods. The second candidate, Chaudhry Abdur Rahman Khan, was a prominent member of a Rajput family of Jallundhar, who had led the Ahrar agitation in Kapurthala. He was selected to contest the Muslim urban seat from the Sheikhpura, Ludhiana, Gurdaspur and Jallundhar's area.³⁸

The third candidate was also a senior Ahrar leader, Maulana Mazhar Ali Azhar, who contested the seat vacated by Sheikh Din Muhammad from Gujranwala.³⁹ He had also been a member of the Punjab Legislative Council from 1924 to 1930. One of his opponents in this urban Muslim constituency was the prominent lawyer from Lahore, Malik Barkat Ali.⁴⁰ The MAI participated in these bye-elections with a high profile, and aimed at building its image as a formidable political force. Other than demanding independence, its economic, social and political programme promised the welfare of the poor and underprivileged Muslim masses. Like its counterparts in the field, it championed their interests as if it was their only saviour.⁴¹ The MAI had established its credentials by fighting for the civil rights of the Muslim community in the princely states, and their anti-Qadiani stance, had established them as a sectarian party in Indian politics. With a strong anti-feudal stance, the MAI promised to reform the society in a way that would ensure an equitable social and economic environment for the poor

Muslim community of India. They advocated Muslim nationalist causes, but also supported secular anti-imperialism of the INC. The MAI believed in direct interaction with the masses, and used mosques for their election campaign, converting them into their main centres of publicity; but they also used corner meetings as a method of campaigning. They also organised rallies and public meetings, where their leaders spoke in support of the MAI programme and its candidates. While newspapers, according to Afzal Haq, 'are tools in the hands of the capitalists', the MAI was blessed with orators who were a "source of their propaganda."⁴² In addition, all the three candidates were notable and well-established Muslim figures of the Punjab. The result was a resounding Ahrar victory in all the three bye-elections; Afzal Haq secured 1800 votes,⁴³ Mazhar Ali Azhar obtained 2920 out of 6633 votes,⁴⁴ while the third candidate secured more than 1500 votes.

5 The MAI and the Elections of 1934

The next round of elections contested by the MAI was for the Indian Legislature, held in January-February 1934. These elections were due in 1933, but the Assembly's three-year term had been extended by another year. These elections were conducted under the Government of India Act of 1919 with a limited franchise. The MAI nominated or supported candidates on only two out of 127 seats in the general elections of 1934; one in the Punjab and the other in the UP. The Working Committee of the MAI decided to support Khalid Lateef Gauba in the Punjab, who was a recent convert to Islam.⁴⁵ Gauba had supported the MAI during their agitation in the Kapurthala state.⁴⁶ He contested the election from the Central Assembly (Muslim) constituency, which incorporated three districts of Ludhiana, Amritsar and Lahore.⁴⁷ The Unionists put up Haji Rahim Bukhsh, a retired Kashmiri civil servant and a judge, in order to tap the large number of Kashmiri voters who resided in Amritsar and Lahore. The MAI's other candidate was Qazi Muhammad Ahmad Kazmi, an advocate by profession, who was to contest the Muslim rural seat for Central Assembly from the Meerut Division in the United Provinces.⁴⁸ Kazmi had defended

those who were tried in the *Madh-e-Sahaba* cases in the UP; and this had earned him a great deal of political support. He had also been a dynamic figure in Muslim politics of Allahabad, but from the Congress platform.⁴⁹

Like other bye-elections, the MAI used mosques to launch K. L. Gauba, a relatively new entrant in politics. It also used this platform to collect funds for the election campaign, enlist new members for the party, and to organise corner meetings. It had meager funds for the election campaign, and depended mainly on its *muballighs*⁵⁰ rather than the print media, to gain public support. The Ahrar speakers, like Ataullah Shah Bukhari, Sheikh Hissamuddin and other religious leaders, campaigned vigorously in the main cities of the Punjab. Their impassioned oratory, for the expulsion of the *farangis*⁵¹ from India, and the Ahmadis from Islam, appealed to the Muslim masses. The uniformed volunteers of the Majlis, paraded the streets while carrying axes, which, like the spades of the Khaksars, was the Ahrar symbol of defiance and force. They tried to enlist voters by offering a vision of a liberated India, free of foreigners, feudals, and the Ahmadis. The MAI highlighted Gauba's conversion to Islam, and his authoring of a book on the life of Holy Prophet, as a sublime achievement. They appealed to the urban Muslims to vote for him, and assert their Islamic identity.⁵² They propagated that a Muslim convert should be supported, because it 'is the duty of a Muslim' to encourage a *nau-Muslim*⁵³. The MAI also used its *Shoba-e-Tabligh* for Gauba's election campaign.⁵⁴ Both the Ahrar candidates, Gauba and Kazmi, eventually won the elections; a big achievement for a new party.⁵⁵

6 The Elections of 1937

The next spate of elections that the MAI contested were those of the provincial assemblies under the Government of India Act of 1935. The MAI realised that it had to broaden its electoral platform in the Punjab, as it could not face the Unionist Party alone. It looked towards M. A. Jinnah and the Muslim League as its natural allies. It had supported Jinnah and his

Independent Party in the Central Legislative Assembly. The MAI leaders and the Punjab Leaguers, including, Allama Mohammad Iqbal, had jointly struggled for the welfare of the Kashmiri Muslims, and had similarity of views on the Ahmadis. Jinnah himself had been active in resolving the Shahidgunj dispute, and had visited Lahore several times for this purpose. Therefore, when the AIML, under Jinnah's leadership, decided to contest the elections, and Jinnah visited the Punjab in search of partners, he held talks with the Ahrar leaders. He knew that the MAI was a popular political force among the urban Muslims; and his abortive attempt to win over the Unionists led by Mian Fazl-i-Husain, had further strengthened his desire to woo the MAI.

The Ahrar leaders held several meetings with Jinnah, who, following the AIML's Bombay session in April 1936, had been authorised to constitute a Central Parliamentary Board on the eve of the 1937 provincial elections.⁵⁶ Jinnah convened a meeting of the Muslim leaders in Delhi on 26 April, to negotiate for a pre-election alliance; and two Ahrar leaders, Afzal Haq and Maulana Habib-ur-Rahman, were invited to attend the meeting. Jinnah asked the Ahrar leaders to participate in the provincial elections under the League umbrella. They were initially receptive to the idea, but hesitant in signing an agreement to the effect. They laid down two conditions for an alliance: firstly, the alliance should have 'complete independence' as its primary objective; and secondly, the League would expel all Qadianis from its ranks. Jinnah remarked that he could not support complete independence, since the AIML constitution only had provision for responsible government. As for expelling Qadianis, that would have to be decided by the General Council of the AIML.⁵⁷ They agreed to continue these parleys in Lahore. Jinnah visited Lahore in May 1936, to hold further talks with the political parties, but his negotiations with Mian Fazl-i-Husain did not succeed. The Unionist leader had declined to be part of the Central Muslim League Parliamentary Board; earlier, he had refused to accept Jinnah's request to preside over the all-India session of the AIML.⁵⁸ Jinnah's talks with the leaders of the MAI and Majlis-i-Ittehad-i-Millat were successful, and Iqbal

provided the requisite help in this context.⁵⁹ Jinnah focused on Muslim issues, and used the same arguments that he had used with their colleagues in the UP, in his effort to establish a cross-party alliance in India.⁶⁰

Jinnah visited the head office of the MAI, and then held an exclusive meeting with its leaders at Abdul Qavi Luqman's residence. They requested him to preside over a public meeting in Lahore. Subsequently, the MAI arranged the function, which its volunteers guarded with their symbolic axes.⁶¹ After the meeting, Jinnah left for Srinagar, where he met Kashmiri leaders, including Mirwaiz Muhammad Yusuf, who apprised him of the Ahrar contribution towards the cause of the Kashmiri Muslims.⁶² While in Srinagar, Jinnah announced the formation of the AIML Parliamentary Board; and four members of the MAI, Abdul Aziz Begowal, Afzal Haq, Sheikh Hissamuddin and Ghulam Hussain, were included in the Board. The MAI president accepted these nominations, and announced that they would participate in the proceedings of the Board.⁶³ Soon, the MAI incurred the displeasure of the Unionists, particularly of Mian Fazl-i-Husain, for associating themselves with Jinnah; as he was viewed as a political foe by the Unionist leader. The MAI had to face the Unionist animosity in the Punjab, though the motivating factor for their alliance with the AIML was Jinnah's sincerity and integrity, and his concern for the welfare of the Muslim community.⁶⁴

The MAI's association with the AIML did not last long; soon the conflict started over the selection of candidates for the Central Parliamentary Board. The Punjab Parliamentary Board required the applicants for the ticket to give 500 rupees as a non-refundable contribution, and an additional sum of 150 rupees for the ticket. This amount was more than the Ahrar candidates could pay,⁶⁵ and the Ahrar leaders argued that it was a pretext to keep their candidates out from the electoral contest.⁶⁶ The Ahrar dissociated themselves from the activities of the Muslim League Provincial Board in Punjab. The Unionist pressure played some role in making the MAI revise its alignment; but the Ahrar insistence that there should be a clause in the oath for the AIML

candidate, that he would struggle for the expulsion of Ahmadis from the Muslim community, was a major point of disagreement.⁶⁷ Interestingly, the Unionists were not willing to accept that as well, because they did not wish to lose the support of the British. Still another point of conflict was that in some cases, candidates of both the parties, wanted to contest the same constituencies in urban areas. When the MAI's conflict with the provincial Muslim League leadership heated up, they approached Jinnah for its resolution, but by then the conflict was too advanced. The pro-Unionist Muslim press in the Punjab played a significant role in aggravating the MAI-AIML differences.⁶⁸ Finally, the Majlis broke the alliance on 25 August 1936, putting the blame on the Punjab League leadership; and decided to contest the elections from its own platform.⁶⁹

The all-India working committee of the Majlis authorised provincial branches to select and field their own candidates. On 30 August, the Punjab MAI appointed a fifteen-member parliamentary board, which included its three Members of the Legislative Council.⁷⁰ The board invited applications by mid-September 1936, and considered the names of twenty-four candidates for the Punjab Legislative Assembly.⁷¹ After considerable consultations, it selected candidates for ten out of a total of eighty-six seats.⁷² The MAI also supported one independent candidate, Syed Mohammad Habib, in the Rawalpindi constituency.⁷³ Breaking from the tradition of earlier elections, the MAI put up one female candidate on a rural Muslim seat in the Punjab.⁷⁴ The nine male candidates were given tickets in constituencies spread all over the Punjab. They included Shaikh Hissamuddin (Amritsar), Chaudhry Afzal Haq (Hoshiarpur), Mazhar Ali Azhar (Sialkot), Chaudhry Abdur Rahman (Jullundur), Ghulam Husain (Jhang), Ghulam Haidar (Ferozpur), Ghulam Rasul (Daska), Sardar Mohammad Shafi (Qasur), Mazhar Nawaz Khan (Multan), and Khwaja Mohammad Yusuf (Ludhiana).⁷⁵ These candidates included the top leadership and activists, known as, 'dictators' and 'salars'. Besides Punjab, the MAI aimed at contesting elections in the UP, Bombay and Bihar. Initially, the MAI boycotted the polls in the UP, because of its civil disobedience movement in connection

with the Madh-e-Sahaba movement. Later on, when the movement was called off, the provincial MAI fielded its candidates for the elections. The Bombay Provincial MAI put up one female candidate, in addition to three male candidates. Similarly, its provincial organisation in Bihar also fielded candidates.

The MAI in the Punjab had not only to fight against the AIML and Majlis-i-Ittehad-i-Millat candidates, but also faced strong opposition from the Unionist candidates.⁷⁶ After the death of Mian Fazl-i-Husain in 1936, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan (1892-1942), his political successor, led the Unionists in the elections. While every Unionist candidate wielded influence in his constituency, the Unionist Party also enjoyed the tacit support of the provincial administration. The MAI organised a more systematic campaign in this election than it had in the elections of 1933 and 1934, and started a campaign to persuade prospective voters to register themselves for polls.⁷⁷ It issued a new election manifesto that reiterated a commitment to basic social and economic problems of the lower and middle classes, like the fixation of minimum wages. It also appealed to these classes by mobilizing their anti-elite emotions. They were against *lumbardars*, *Sahukars*, and *hawaldars*. It called for the exemption from land revenue of agricultural income up to 500 rupees per year; a minimum wage of 30 rupees per month for workers, to relieve them from the burden of inflation; reduction in salaries of highly paid government servants; abolition of *zamindari* and *jagirdari* systems; nationalisation of industries; a ban on interest or usury in accordance with Islamic values; protection of peasants and factory workers from the traditional moneylenders, and free elementary education for all. It also promised military training to improve the health of youth; expansion of industries to create opportunities for employment, to bridge the gulf between the rich and the poor; and equality before law. The Ahrar manifesto promised prohibition of prostitution and the abolition of discrimination on the basis of caste, creed and race. It also promised the establishment of Islamic courts, along with the commitment to enforce Islamic law of inheritance and protect the religious places.⁷⁸

The MAI leaders publicised their party's socio-economic programme, but when the Unionists put them on the defensive by highlighting their indifferent attitude over the Shahidganj Mosque issue, they began to aggressively focus on the Qadianis.⁷⁹ With insufficient funds and practically no press, the MAI candidates depended on the Ahrar firebrand speakers, who included Syed Ataullah Shah Bokhari, Shaikh Hissamuddin, Maulana Mazhar Ali Azhar, Sahibzada Faizul Hasan, Qazi Ahsan Ahmad Shujahabadi, Maulana Habib-ur-Rahman Ludhianwi and Maulana Daud Ghaznawi. The MAI often took out long processions characterised by uniformed 'jayush' and cavalry of the MAI volunteers carrying swords and hatchets. The provincial elections in the Punjab were held on 16-25 January 1937, and about one million polled during the closing four days. Fifty thousand Muslim women participated in the voting process, an unprecedented number.⁸⁰ Considering the limited resources of the MAI, the results were not discouraging, although some of its prominent figures lost the elections. Maulana Mazhar Ali Azhar, Chaudhry Abdul Rahman Khan and Khwaja Ghulam Husain won urban Muslim seats;⁸¹ while Mazhar Ali Azhar's victory was at the expense of Malik Lal Khan, the general secretary of Majlis-i-Ittehad-i-Millat.⁸² Three of its members were elected to the Bihar Legislative Council,⁸³ and two were elected to the UP Legislative Council.⁸⁴ The MAI president, one salaar, one Ahrar 'dictator' and one ex- Member Legislative Council lost to the Unionist candidates. Ghulam Jannat, the only female candidate who contested from the outer Lahore Muslim women's constituency, lost to Begum Shah Nawaz, who stood on the Unionist ticket.⁸⁵ A Unionist candidate, Rana Nasrullah, decisively defeated Afzal Haq, the MAI president, in the urban Muslim constituency of Ferozpur and Hoshiarpur districts. Later, he again suffered defeat in a bye-election for a Muslim urban seat of Amritsar, where the AIML candidate, Sheikh Sadiq Hasan, won with the 'support and approval of the Unionists'.⁸⁶ Two members of the Punjab Legislative Council, and one member in the Indian Legislative Assembly, stayed loyal to the party till the dissolution of the legislatures for the 1945-6 elections.⁸⁷

A contemporary analysis of the election results gives a general picture of the political situation prevailing in the province. The MAI gives the impression of a party not interested in electoral politics, which is evident in its selection of a small number of candidates, despite the fact that a large number of voters had been enfranchised in the 1930s.⁸⁸ Propaganda in the press remained strongly in favour of the Unionists in Punjab, because they had political control over the provincial government funds, and were able to organise a favorable campaign. All the Urdu newspapers were owned by individuals and not by organizations. The *Inqilab* and *Zamindar* led a severe propaganda campaign against the MAI candidates, especially Afzal Haq. The Unionist Party being in power was able to influence the voters in an impressive way. Consequently, when the MAI won in urban constituencies like Amritsar, where it had held a big rally, their victory was considered 'a noble success'.⁸⁹

With the enlargement of franchise, political parties needed more funds than were available, and often candidates had to fend for themselves. Since the MAI candidates mostly came from the lower middle class, they found it difficult to pay for transport, food and other facilities.⁹⁰ It was further handicapped by the *biradri*-based electioneering,⁹¹ for instance, Afzal Haq being a Rajput, was opposed by non-Rajputs in his hometown.⁹² Since Jinnah failed to rally the Muslims of Punjab to a joint platform, a united front against the Unionist Party could not be established. It resulted in the disintegration of Muslim votes, and since the Unionists were organised and had official patronage, they managed to get 88 seats in a House of 176.⁹³ On the eve of these elections, the MAI was busy in rehabilitation work for the survivors of the Quetta earthquake, which had destroyed this garrison town in 1935. For the MAI, the social cause was more important than their political and electoral activism. Their focus on social service for the victims of the earthquake was to establish the MAI's reputation for being concerned with the plight of the poor and the deprived.

7 Performance in Assemblies

As the above account shows, the MAI had a very small representation in the legislatures, and being a new party, that was not surprising. It had three seats in the Punjab Assembly in the 1933-1937 period, as a result of the bye-elections. It won two seats in the Central Legislative Assembly in 1934, one from Punjab and a second from the UP. In the 1937 elections to the provincial assemblies, three MAI members were elected to the Punjab Assembly, two in the UP Assembly and three in the Bihar Assembly. Its presence in the provincial assemblies and the central assembly was so small, that it was not in a position to form its own parliamentary party in any of the assemblies, and usually sat with the opposition.

The strength of the MAI in the assemblies dwindled over a period of time. In the central assembly, one of its two members, K. L. Gauba, resigned from his seat to contest the provincial elections of 1937, and won it.⁹⁴ From 1934 to 1945, Muhammad Ahmad Kazmi remained an Ahrar member of the Indian Legislative Assembly. He had supported Jinnah's Independent Party within the Assembly, during the initial period of his Parliamentary career. A member in the Punjab Assembly, Ghulam Hussain from Multan, lost his seat to Zain ul Abidin Shah, because of an election petition against his eligibility. The remaining two members stayed with the Party till the very end. All five Ahrar members joined the Muslim League in the UP and Bihar Assemblies.⁹⁵ Muhammad Abdur Rehman played an active role in the Punjab Legislative Assembly for the MAI, in its anti-recruitment drive during the 2nd World War, while the other member was imprisoned for one and a half years for participating in that drive.⁹⁶ The MAI members made their presence felt in the assemblies on several economic, political and social issues in spite of their small numbers. They voiced their opinion through questions, sponsored bills and motions of adjournment, and participated in the budget debate.

K. L. Gauba, an Ahrar member from the Punjab, raised the issue of the Indo-UK trade agreement. The government was

not ready to reveal all the details of this agreement, and this attitude of the government was severely criticised by the MAI. K. L. Gauba introduced an adjournment motion that, 'this Assembly, after duly considering the agreement between His Majesty's Government in the UK and the Government of India, signed on 9 June 1935, is of the opinion that in as much the said agreement is unfair to India, the Government of India should terminate it forthwith.' His criticism was against the 'procedural secrecy', of the government.⁹⁷ The MAI supported the opposition stance that this agreement was a continuation of the fiscal policy of the past, and had nothing new in it. Gauba's motion, that the matter needed a discussion in the House, was adopted.⁹⁸

The MAI members in the Punjab Assembly usually criticised any increase in the salaries and allowances of the MLAs, on the plea of austerity.⁹⁹ Since 1937, the opposition had been criticising the suggested raise in the salaries of the Prime Minister and his ministers.¹⁰⁰ They also questioned the high rate of taxes and revenues on agriculture in the Punjab, the 'granary' of British India. However, they failed to influence the fiscal policy of the Punjab Government, although they actively participated in the budget sessions.¹⁰¹ For instance, in March 1933, Khwaja Ghulam Hussain congratulated the finance minister, yet demanded of him that the special development funds should be devoted to removing illiteracy. In contrast, the INC and a few Unionists members criticised the budget, for not containing proposals for improvement in any direction.¹⁰²

Two issues were the focus of MAI's criticism in the Punjab Assembly; one related to the political prisoners issue and the other, related to it, was about jail reforms.¹⁰³ Since joining the assemblies, the MAI members apprised the British Government and the Punjab administration of the pitiable conditions in jails, and the torture of political prisoners.¹⁰⁴ The MAI Patron Afzal Haq had made some contribution in bringing about jail reforms. The MAI's anti-colonial policies and agitational politics had often landed them in jails in large numbers, so they knew the conditions prevailing in them. They

were imprisoned so frequently, that they considered jails as their second homes.¹⁰⁵ During their movement in the state of Kashmir, more than forty thousand Ahrar leaders and workers were interned. The number was even larger during the civil disobedience movement of 1930-31 and 1939. Some of its leaders took special pride in going to jails.¹⁰⁶ They were often arrested without any warrants, or even before the completion of legal requirements.¹⁰⁷ Most of the time they were given 'C' class jails; where they had to perform unpaid physical labour, such as grinding jute manually, spinning, weaving, brewing, and like all other prisoners, were served unhygienic food.¹⁰⁸ Afzal Haq had been the unofficial member of the Committee for Jail Reforms in the Punjab Assembly during 1927-30, and had made recommendations for the jail manual.¹⁰⁹ He had resisted the mistreatment of prisoners by the jail officials, and mobilised other prisoners into nonviolent resistance.¹¹⁰

The MAI leaders were treated as opponents of the British as well as the Punjab government, so they were subjected to punishments like shackles, or kept hungry for long durations.¹¹¹ They were given unauthorised prolonged detention because of their anti-recruitment campaign, since the campaign discouraged Indians from joining the armed forces. They were never given 'A' class in jails, which was their right as political prisoners, except when they were arrested along with their INC colleagues. They were also refused contact with the outside world through correspondence and newspaper facilities. When the newspapers in Punjab and the UP published stories of torture and illegal detention of the MAI leaders during the anti-recruitment campaign, the ministers for jails in the assemblies denied that this was happening. The trumped-up cases against the Ahrar orators, such as Ataullah Shah and Hissamuddin, diminished the popularity of the Unionist government in the province.¹¹² The MAI claimed to have arranged hunger strikes, defied the jail administration, and held political meetings with the non-political prisoners whenever there was an opportunity.¹¹³ Their method of hunger strike always shook the administration, not only at the provincial level, but at the centre as well. Belonging to the lower strata of society, the MAI volunteers

could bear the hunger and torture longer than the others. The stories of their torture in jails were well covered in the Urdu dailies and weeklies, which helped mobilise support outside the jails.¹¹⁴ During the INC-led civil disobedience and anti-recruitment campaign, even some Hindu newspapers had publicized their case. Afzal Haq, Shorish Kashmiri and Janbaaz Mirza were some of the activists who had successfully mobilised the jail inmates. Their demands were for the basic rights of jail inmates; including 'A' class for political prisoners, better food, the right to meet and correspond with relatives, and perform religious rituals.¹¹⁵ After the 1920s, the jails were viewed as 'political schools', where politicians were trained in schemes to dislodge the British from India; and the British colonial administration tried to curb these 'training camps'.

The physical health of the MAI internees was affected; and Afzal Haq's suffering during incarceration resulted in his death in 1942. Ghulam Nabi Janbaaz lost his right shoulder because of police torture during the Maclagan College episode in Lahore.¹¹⁶ They have acquired fame in the annals of the freedom movement, for their forbearance and suffering. They did not meet with much success, but continued to struggle to raise awareness on the issues of torture, corruption and living conditions in jails. The MAI also advocated the repeal of the Criminal Law Amendment Bill, which had been imposed in the Punjab during elections, without the approval of legislators.¹¹⁷ Explaining the necessity for legislation, Nawab Muzzafar Khan, the Revenue Member and the mover of the bill said, that the offence of slandering one's political opponents during elections was becoming frequent, and the existing procedure for prosecution in such cases had been 'slow, cumbersome and uncertain.' He argued that it was desirable to make the procedure quicker and more effective, given that there was a wider franchise in the new Constitution. The MAI members resisted the bill at the provincial level as well as at the centre. Muhammad Ahmad Kazmi and Khwaja Ghulam Hussain took the lead in this, and moved a resolution to repeal the Punjab Criminal Law Amendment Bill, under which central and provincial governments had acquired infinite powers.¹¹⁸ They

argued that in the presence of the Government of India Act 1935, there was no need for such new draconian laws.¹¹⁹ The issue was not resolved until 1940.

During the Punjab Assembly sessions of 1939-42, the MAI's 'questions' about the deteriorating political situation following the anti-recruitment campaign, had been generally supported by the INC, but were disallowed for any discussion.¹²⁰ When the Anti-Recruitment Law was promulgated in 1941, Muhammad Ahmad Kazmi described it as the crushing of a 'moral revolt' and tried to highlight the British government's discrimination against Muslims in the Indian Legislative Assembly.¹²¹ The MAI member, Khwaja Ghulam Husain, tabled a no-confidence motion against the Sikandar Hayat Khan in the Punjab Assembly, and vigorously sought the right of Muslims to take possession of their holy places of worship. Shahidganj was an old mosque in Lahore, which had been occupied by the Sikhs since 1850s, and who tried to rebuild it as a gurdwara in July 1934. A committee had been formed under the leadership of Maulana Zafar Ali Khan to acquire the site, and restore the mosque. Initially, the MAI remained aloof from the dispute, but subsequently raised the issue both inside and outside the assemblies. They differed with the opinion and policy of Sikandar Hayat Khan, the Prime Minister of Punjab on the law and order situation in the province caused by the Shahidganj issue.¹²² The MAI also spoke on religious, educational and other issues of concerns to Muslims, including the Muslim Personal Law.¹²³ Several amendments to this law, issues relating to blasphemy¹²⁴, the Sahidganj Masjid dispute in Lahore, and the references to a proposed Shariat Bill, were some of their areas of concern.¹²⁵

The MAI's major contribution in the central legislature was its proposed amendments to the Shariat Bill. Muhammad Ahmad Kazmi, who had suggested several amendments in the text during 1939, supported the Bill till it became a law in 1941.¹²⁶ The Assembly took up the bill moved by Muhammad Kazmi, to consolidate and clarify the provision for the dissolution of marriage by women under Muslim Law. He

demanded that it should be mandatory that a Muslim Judge should be present in any hearing of Muslim divorce case.¹²⁷ The provision dealing with apostasy in the bill was one of the main concerns of the MAI. They raised the issue of the impending execution of Abdul Qaiyum in Karachi in 1934, who had murdered a Hindu because of his blasphemous remarks.¹²⁸ The House rejected it. The accused was sentenced to death. The police held his funeral in Karachi where the Muslim participants were mistreated. At that time Jinnah took serious note of measures taken by Henry Craig, the Home member for the maintenance of law and order in Karachi. He criticized at length the route plan and arrangements for a funeral procession, and the government decision to open fire on a peaceful gathering; as a result of which more than thirty Muslim participants were killed.¹²⁹

The Ahrar members pursued issues of general welfare in the Punjab assembly,¹³⁰ such as the health policy,¹³¹ and lobbied for more dispensaries and doctors for their respective constituencies. Their other social concern was the 'subordination of Muslims in educational services'.¹³² Mazhar Ali Azhar was the longest serving member of the Punjab Legislature, and had been there since 1924. He questioned matters that fell under the jurisdiction of the government; like the share of the Muslim in the civil services, and the granting of licenses to official contractors for public transport in Amritsar.¹³³ On a few occasions he put the Home Member on the defensive, by asking a number of questions relating to motorcar accidents in the province, and the role of police. He wanted to improve legislation on these issues.¹³⁴

The Ahrar members were more active in the central legislature in presenting bills and raising questions. K. L. Gauba's questions dealt mostly with the employment opportunities for Muslims in the Railways Department, or were about taxes, service criteria and the share of Muslims in foreign and political services.¹³⁵ The MAI members often voted with the AIML in the Central Assembly; while Gauba frequently raised the issue of police torture on Muslims, and the law and order

situation in Karachi after the communal riots. His speeches were never transformed into legislation, but he remained a vocal critic of the official policies.¹³⁶ Gauba made a useful contribution in the Assembly, and his departure in 1937, when he joined the Ittehad-i-Millat party in Punjab, was a blow to the MAI.

Conclusion

While examining the role of the MAI representatives in the assemblies, two features were prominent: they opposed imperial control; and concentrated on social issues and human rights. Despite having a low representation in the assemblies, they still managed to have a high profile. They attempted to stay aloof from the Shahidganj Masjid dispute, but were vigorously engaged in legislation pertaining to blasphemy, conditions in jails and other social issues. During 1933-4, the Party was quite visible in the assemblies, but after the setback of the 1937 elections, the MAI took its cause to the public at large. With the outbreak of the Second World War the Ahrar focus, like that of others, shifted to the campaign against recruitment for the military in the Punjab.

Notes and References

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- 1 The Statutory Commission, commonly known by the name of its Chairman, Sir John Simon, visited India twice, once in February-March 1928, and then in October 1928-April 1929.
 - 2 Afzal Haq, *Tarikh-i-Ahrar* (Lahore: Maktaba-i-Tabsra, 1968), p. 88.
 - 3 B. R. Verma and S. R. Bakshi (eds.), *Congress Mass Movement and Independence* (Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 2005) pp. 24-5.
 - 4 Fifty-seven delegates, and eleven state representatives participated in the first RTC.
 - 5 The MAI had unshaken trust in the Congress leadership at that time. They viewed the British invitation to Gandhi to participate in the RTC as 'an insult' to those people who believed in complete independence'. Mirza, *Karavan-i-Ahrar*, vol. 1(Lahore: Maktaba-i-Tabsra,1975-1986),p. 186.
 - 6 *Inqilab*, 14 July 1931.
 - 7 The Congress agreed to Gandhi's participation in the RTC on the condition that all political prisoners would be released, local products would not be taxed, and picketing and boycott of foreign products would not be abandoned.
 - 8 See letter of Habib-ur-Rahman to Jawaharlal Nehru, 2 February 1937, in Aziz ur Rahman, *Raeesul Ahrar Maulana Habib-ur-Rahman aur Hindustan ki Jang-i-Azadi* (Delhi: Taleemi-Samaji Markaz, 1961), p. 179.
 - 9 Mirza, *Karavan-i-Ahrar*, vol. 1, p. 186. Shorish Kashmiri (ed.), *Khutbat-i-Ahrar* (Lahore: Maktaba-i-Mujahidin, 1944), p. 8.
 - 10 Aziz-ur-Rahman, *Raees-ul- Ahrar*, pp. 207-214.
 - 11 I H Qureshi, *The Struggle for Pakistan* (Karachi: University of Karachi, 1984), p. 54.

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- 12 For a detailed discussion, see David Page, *Prelude to Partition: The Indian Muslims and the Imperial System of Control 1920-1932* (Karachi: OUP, 1987), pp. 245-258.
- 13 Lal Din Qaiser was the founder of this campaign. It was called '56 per cent Committee'. Allama Muhammad Iqbal had presided over its two sessions in Lahore in December 1931.
- 14 The Hindu Mahasabha (Grand Assembly of the Hindus), founded in 1919, aimed at the protection of the political and religious interests of the Hindus.
- 15 At a political conference in Lahore on 25 March 1932, Sikhs demanded 30 per cent representation in the government services and in the Punjab Assembly, 5 per cent in the future central legislative assembly, and 33 per cent in the Punjab cabinet.
- 16 They openly displayed *kirpans* in the Punjab, and challenged the Muslim community everywhere. *Inqilab*, 28 July 1932.
- 17 *Zamindar*, (Lahore), 10 July 1931.
- 18 Statement of Chaudhry Afzal Haq on his resignation from the Punjab Congress in June 1931. Mirza, *Karavan-i-Ahrar*, vol. 1, p. 128.
- 19 Presidential address in a special session of the MAI on 27 August 1932.
- 20 *Secret Punjab Police Abstract of Intelligence (hereafter SPPAI)*, p. 458.
- 21 *Inqilab*, 28 August 1932.
- 22 Resolution No. 1 of the All-India Majlis-i-Ahrar Conference held at Amritsar on 9-10 September 1932. They resolved to fight for the due share of Muslims in constitutional reforms. *Indian Annual Register*, vol. 1, p. 267.
- 23 Abdul Ghaffar Ghaznavi, Tajuddin Ludhianavi, Shaikh Sadiq Hasan and Ihsan Ahmad Shujahabadi were the prominent Ahrar leaders to set a communal tone in their speeches. Mirza, *Karavan-i-Ahrar*, vol. 1, p. 302.
- 24 *Intelligence Report The Ahrar Movement in the Punjab 1931-1938*, (Islamabad: NDC, 1938), p. 26.

- 25 *SPPAI*, 15 August 1932, vol. iv, p. 468.
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 Chaudhry Khaliqzaman, Mufti Kifayatullah, Maulana Ahmad Saeed, Hussain Ahmad Madni and Maulana Shaukat Ali participated in it. Mirza, *Karavan-i-Ahrar*, vol. 1, p. 401
- 28 Mirza, *Karavan-i-Ahrar*, vol. 2, p. 160. Nawab Ahmad Saeed Chhatari, Maulana Shaukat Ali, Sir Muhammad Yaqub, Sir Ghulam Husain Hidayatullah, Raja Ghazanfar Ali Khan, Haji Abdullah Haroon, Maulana Shafi Daudi, A. K. Fazlul Haq and Khalid Latif Gauba were among the participants.
- 29 Initially, B. R. Ambedkar, the leader of scheduled castes, welcomed separate electorates after the announcement of the Communal Award. Gandhi vowed that he would fast unto death if the Hindus were split in that manner. B. R. Ambedkar came under so much pressure, that he had to revise his opinion, and declared that the Untouchables would be part of the Hindu community and renounced separate electorates. The Poona Pact, which safeguarded the principle of Hindu majority, was signed between Gandhi and B. R. Ambedkar on 25 September 1932. Stanley Wolpert, *Gandhi's Passion: The Life and Legacy of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York: OUP, 2001), pp. 166-8.
- 30 The 16-member JSC was presided over by Lord Linlithgow. It submitted its report to the Parliament on 22 November 1934, which was approved by the House of Commons on 12 December 1934, and the House of Lords on 18 December.
- 31 See K B Sayeed, *Pakistan: The Formative Phase 1857-1947* (Karachi: OUP, 1998), pp. 78-80.
- 32 *Ibid.* The amendment consisted of three resolutions; the first accepted the Communal Award until the Indians, by mutual agreement, could produce a substitute. The second resolution was critical of only the details of the provincial autonomy scheme, but conceded that it represented a real advance in the sense that dyarchy was replaced by provincial autonomy. Jinnah's third resolution dealt with the plan of All-India Federation.
- 33 *Ibid.*, pp. 2-22. Khalid Bin Sayeed, *Pakistan: the Formative Phase 1857-1948*, p. 80; and Jamil-ud Din Ahmad (ed.),

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- Speeches and Writings of Mr. Jinnah*, vol. 1 (Lahore: United Publishers, 1968), p. 9. See also Jinnah's speech on the Report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Indian Constitutional Reforms in the Legislative Assembly on 7 February 1935.
- 34 The *Daily Telegraph* (London) on 3 August 1935, declared that the passage of the Act was the "most important job of the Parliament".
- 35 Press statement by Shaikh Sadiq Hasan, the President of the special session of the MAI, on 27 August 1932.
- 36 There is consensus on the point that despite enormous pressure, the Majlis reluctantly took part in the Shahidgunj movement against the Unionist government. The Ahrar considered it a political trick by Fazl-i-Husain-led Unionists to keep the Ahrar out of electoral politics. They avoided joining the movement because they were planning to participate in the elections of 1937, and did not want to get involved in controversial communal agitational politics at this stage. See Iftikhar H. Malik, *Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan: A Political Biography*, (Islamabad: NIHCR, 1985), p. 123n.
- 37 Mirza, *Karavan-i-Ahrar*, vol. 1, p. 95.
- 38 *Indian Annual Register*, January-June, 1933, vol. 1, p. 217.
- 39 Shaikh Din Muhammad, a lawyer from Gujranwala, was appointed a Judge of the Lahore High Court. After his appointment, he had to vacate his seat in the Punjab Legislature.
- 40 *Inqilab*, 23 January 1933.
- 41 Mirza, *Karavan-i-Ahrar*, vol. 1, p. 358.
- 42 Shorish Kashmiri, *Khutbaat-i-Ahrar*, p. 74.
- 43 The election was held on 14 August 1933. *Indian Annual Register*, January-June, 1935, vol. 1, p. 250. Also, see Mirza, *Karavan-i-Ahrar*, vol. 1, p. 358.
- 44 *Indian Annual Register*, July-December 1934, vol. 2, p. 28.
- 45 Kanahya Lal embraced Islam in the 1920s, and adopted the name Khalid Lateef; his wife was given the name of Husan Ara. He wrote a biography of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH),

- entitled *The Prophet of the Desert*, which was published in 1934.
- 46 When during the trial of Abdul Aziz Begowal, Mazhar Ali Azhar was denied entry into Kapurthala, Gauba replaced him to plead the case. Mirza, *Karavan-i-Ahrar*, vol. 1, p. 473.
- 47 As a new entrant into the fold of Islam, he was supported by a large number of Muslim voters in the Punjab.
- 48 See the *Indian Legislative Assembly Debates* (hereafter *ILAD*), January-February 1934, IOR\V\9\116.
- 49 Later on, in the 1937 provincial elections, he forged a broader electoral alliance of the AIML, JUH and INC.
- 50 Preachers.
- 51 Term used for English rulers.
- 52 For instance, it was commonly stated by the people that, "Gauba must win the elections because his defeat will mean the defeat of Islam." Waheed Ahmad (ed.), *Diary and Notes of Mian Fazl-i-Hussain* (Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, 1977), p. 242.
- 53 Newly converted.
- 54 Afzal Haq, in a letter to the secretary of the *Shoba-e-Tabligh* on 25 August 1934, requested him to start a propaganda campaign for Gauba's election. Mirza, *Karavan-i-Ahrar*, vol. 2, p. 59.
- 55 The strength of just one member, in a house of 127, was negligible. The position of the other parties was the following: Congress 44, Congress Nationalists (mainly members of the Hindu Mahasabha) 11, Independents 22, Europeans 11, Officials 26, and nominated Members 13. R. Coupland, *Report on the Constitutional Problem of India*, pt. 2, *Indian Politics 1936-1942* (London: HMG, 1943), p. 2.
- 56 Sayeed, *Pakistan: The Formative Phase*, p. 82.
- 57 *Aljamiat* (Delhi), 13 May 1936.
- 58 Azim Hussain, *Fazl-i-Husain: A Political Biography*, p. 310.
- 59 Mirza, *Karavan-i-Ahrar*, vol. 2, p. 359. Also see a pamphlet by Tajuddin Ludhianwi, *Akabar-i-Ahrar aur Quaid-i-Pakistan*

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- Janab Mohammad Ali Jinnah* (Urdu) (Lahore: Maktaba-i-Majlis-i-Ahrar-i-Islam Pakistan (hereafter MMAP), 1969; and Ashiq Husain Batalvi, *Iqbal key akhri Do Saal* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2000), p. 290-95.
- 60 His reply to Maulana Habib-ul-Rahman was, the “people leading ahead would easily guide others heading towards the same destination.” The issue was, as to how the League would deal with those Muslim nationalists who believed in ‘complete independence’. Aziz-ur-Rahman, *Raees-ul-Ahrar*, p. 184.
- 61 See the pamphlet by Tajuddin, *Majlis-i-Ahrar Aur Tarikhi Tehreef ki Yalghar* (Multan: MMAIP, 1968).
- 62 *Inqilab*, 13 May 1936.
- 63 *Inqilab*, 21 May 1936.
- 64 Afzal Haq, *Tarikh-i-Ahrar*, p. 211.
- 65 Ashiq Hussain Batalvi, *Iqbal key akhri Do Saal*, pp. 327-28.
- 66 Tajuddin, *Akabar-i-Ahrar*, pp. 13-14.
- 67 Ashiq Husain Batalvi, *Iqbal key akhri Do Sal*, p. 326.
- 68 These newspapers were given subsidies on a monthly basis to malign Jinnah. According to one source, Fazl-i-Husain was the architect of this propaganda campaign against Jinnah and the Central Muslim League Parliamentary Board. Khalid Shamsul Hasan, *Punjab Muslim League and the Unionists* (New Delhi: Ushba Publications, 2006), pp. 75-79.
- 69 They always remained doubtful of the Punjab Unionist leadership, and mobilised people against their pro-establishment role in politics. During their meetings with Jinnah, they stressed the point of view that he should not trust his colleagues as they were ‘British agents’, and were not sincere to his cause. Mirza, *Karavan-i-Ahrar*, vol. 2, p. 367.
- 70 *Ibid.*, pp. 426-8.
- 71 *Inqilab*, 23 November 1936.
- 72 Mirza, *Karavan-i-Ahrar*, vol. 2, p. 473; see *Inqilab*, 8 January 1937.
- 73 Here the polling was held on 6 February 1937, and Dr Muhammad Alam of the Majlis-i-Ittehad-i-Millat was elected.

- 74 See *Civil & Military Guzzett(Lahore)*, 10 February 1937; also see Mirza, *Karavan-i-Ahrar*, vol. 2, p. 495. The Ahrar put up another female candidate in Bombay.
- 75 *Ibid.*, p. 473.
- 76 In this constituency, Sheikh Hissamuddin had to face two independent candidates, Dr Saifuddin Kitchlew and Shaikh Sadiq Hasan. As a result of an election petition, Dr Kitchlew was unseated, and then a Unionist candidate was elected on this seat. Afzal Haq could not win his seat. See Governor's Report, Punjab, Chief Secretary to Governor, ac no. 155, IOR\L\P&J\5\239.
- 77 See Mazhar Ali Azhar's appeal to the Muslims to register their names as voters within the specific time. Mirza, *Karavan-i-Ahrar*, vol. 2, p. 208.
- 78 See full text of the Ahrar manifesto in Mirza, *Karavan-i-Ahrar*, vol. 2, pp. 444-54.
- 79 One of their public meetings in Jallundhar was disturbed when a hostile group in the audience questioned their non-participation in the Shahidgunj Mosque movement. Because of the ensuing chaos, the entry of Ataullah Shah Bokhari and Maulana Mazhar Ali Azhar into Jallundhar was banned. *C&MG*, 27 January 1937, p. 5.
- 80 *C&MG*, 29 January 1937, p. 5.
- 81 *Indian Annual Register*, vol. I-5, 12 April, 1937, p. 154
- 82 Tauqir Ahmad, *Life and Times of Malik Lal Khan*, unpublished M. Phil. Thesis, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, 1998, p. 33.
- 83 *C&MG*, 7 February 1937. Later on, they joined the Muslim League, and the Majlis working committee expelled them from the party. *Inqilab*, 29 October 1938.
- 84 *Inqilab*, 3 November 1937. The two members were Aziz Ahmad Khan and Maulana Zahiruddin. When they joined the Muslim League, the MAI also expelled them from the party.
- 85 She got 201 votes against 2062 secured by her opponent. *C&MG*, 10 February 1937.

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- 86 Chief Secretary to Governor Punjab, no. 155, IOR\L\P&J\5\239.
- 87 Khwaja Ghulam Hussain had to vacate his seat on an election petition filed by Zainul Abidin Shah, who then became the member from Multan.
- 88 “Punjab Election Experience”, C&MG, 4 February 1937, p. 2.
- 89 IOR\L\P&J\5\239.
- 90 The MAI working committee met in Ludhiana on 11 March 1937. They deemed three reasons for the defeat of Majlis in the Punjab elections; insufficient resources, Unionist Government’s intervention in MAI public meetings, and the absence of MAI’s own newspaper.
- 91 Afzal Haq accused the Unionists of circulating fake letters against him and Maulana Mazhar Ali Azhar. He also blamed the government of increasing the expenses allowed for the elections, which led to a setback for the MAI. He asserted that many contestants were elected with the assistance of the MAI in Ludhiana, Lyallpur, and Jallundhar, but the MAI’s role was not acknowledged. Afzal Haq, *Tarikh-i-Ahrar*, pp. 216-7.
- 92 *Ibid.*
- 93 See *Indian Annual Register*, January-June 1937, vol. 1, pp. 250-51.
- 94 He contested for the provincial legislature on the Ittehad-i-Millat ticket. Later on, the seat he had vacated in the Central Legislature, was contested and won by Maulana Zafar Ali Khan.
- 95 Three MAI members of Bihar Legislative Assembly left the party to join the Muslim League. Later on, they resigned from the membership of the AIML, on the issue that the Muslim Endowment property must be exempted from tax. *Inqilab*, 5 August 1938.
- 96 Mazhar Ali Azhar was arrested under the Defence of India Act, for his alleged ‘seditious speeches against Government’ in 1939.
- 97 The motion was accepted, *ILAD*, 29 June 1935, vol. 2, p. 157.

- 98 *ILAD* (official report) IOR\V\9\130 no. 2362, also see *Indian Annual Register*, January-June 1935, vol. 1, pp. 243-44.
- 99 Muhammad Abdul Rahman Khan criticised the pay and allowances of ministers in the Punjab Assembly. He raised questions on these issues throughout his parliamentary career in the Punjab legislature. The *Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates (PLAD)*, October-December, 1939, vol. 10, p. 875.
- 100 In April 1937, a keen debate took place on the Ministers' Salaries and Allowances Bill that fixed the Chief Minister's salary at Rs. 48,000 per year and Rs. 38,000 for Ministers. The opposition parties strongly condemned the raise, and demanded that it be amended by fixing Rs. 6,000 per year for all. Voting on the issue defeated the amendment motion. *Indian Annual Register*, 8 April, Lahore, vol. 1, p. 157.
- 101 Muhammad Ahmad Kazmi moved an amendment to 'limit the rate of interest' in the revenue policy of the Government of India, which was not accepted. "Budget Session", *ILAD*, 14 February 1942, vol. I, p. 171.
- 102 *PLAD*, 16 March 1933, vol. 1, p. 243.
- 103 Afzal Haq introduced the bill in the Punjab Legislative Council, which resulted in the formation of a Jail Reforms Committee. He himself remained a non-official member of the committee. *PLAD*, January-June 1930, IOR\V\9\6202.
- 104 Muhammad Ahmad Kazmi in the Central Legislative Assembly, and Muhammad Abdul Rahman Khan in the Punjab Legislative Assembly, raised these issues vigorously. *PLAD*, October-December, 1939, vol. 10, pp. 981, 876.
- 105 During the first ever anti-Maharaja campaign, more than forty thousand Ahrar supporters filled the Punjab jails on a voluntary basis. Later on, in the civil disobedience campaign of 1930 and 1939, they also went to jails in great numbers. They took great pride in being jailed by the authorities. Their famous slogan was '*Jail main ya rail main*'. Many Ahrar leaders were tortured in jails, and suffered chronic health problems. Shorish Kashmiri and Janbaaz Mirza wrote their personal accounts of imprisonment.
- 106 G. N. J. Mirza, *Barhta Hey Zoq-i-Jurm: Jail Khanon Ki Kahanin* (Lahore: Maktaba-i-Tabsra, 1975).

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- 107 Afzal Haq, *Mera Afsana (Urdu Biography)*, (Lahore: Al Faisal, 1993), p. 69.
- 108 All the personal accounts written by the Ahrar leaders and volunteers are full of stories of torture and severe punishment in the Indian as well as the Punjab Jails. They were provided stale vegetables, ate wheat bread only twice in a week, and were given low-quality water. They were beaten severely with batons if found guilty of breaking any jail rules, and were allowed to write one letter a month, and one monthly meeting with their families.
- 109 Afzal Haq had been an unofficial member of the Jail Reforms Committee during his tenure in the Punjab Assembly. He described imprisonment during the British period as ‘Hell on Earth’ (*Dozakh ka naqsha*), where political prisoners had to suffer fear, loneliness, harassment and abusive language by jail officials. Afzal Haq, *Mera Afsana*, p. 101.
- 110 He started mobilising prisoners during his internment in Ambala Jail and the Lahore Borstal Jail; where he forced the jail officials through hunger strike, to lessen torture on political prisoners and give them a better class. He taught others to resist peacefully, by insisting on being provided the right of better treatment. He not only apprised them of their legal rights in jails, but taught them to take a stand against the illegal practices of the jail officials. Afzal Haq, *Mera Afsana*, pp. 82-100.
- 111 Afzal Haq lost his right hand because of handcuffs, and suffered shackles on his feet for long periods. Ghulam Nabi lost his right shoulder and a leg. The health of many Ahrar volunteers was broken during their incarceration. For such individual details, see Mirza, *Karavan-i-Ahrar*, vol. 1, p. 28.
- 112 All the MAI leaders were arrested under the India Penal Code clauses 107, 108 and 109. The allegation against them was that they had tried to disturb the law and order. Atallah Shah Bukhari was tried in several cases. Many of these cases were fictitious, falsely filed by the complainants and officials. Sometimes, the volunteers were arrested and tried on other charges.
- 113 A prominent case was of the detention of 18 people, in a small cell of 6x6, during the month of June, in the Lyallpur Jail. A

- twelve-day hunger strike forced the jail officials to provide them a wider barrack. In the Multan jail, when the prisoners took up the issue of the right of prisoners to celebrate the Independence Day on 26 January, all the hunger strikers were beaten severely, and dumped in their barracks without any first aid. After a longer hunger strike, all the jail officials were transferred to other places. Mirza, *Karavan-i-Ahrar*, vol. 2, pp. 34-37.
- 114 Letter to editor, Khwaja Abdul Rahman, *Bande Matram*, 26 June, 1931, see Afzal Haq, *Mera Afsana*, p. 91.
- 115 An Ahrar member in the assembly raised the issue of the appointment of jail superintendents in Jallundhur, Mianwali, Ludhiana, Lyallpur, Gujranwala and Jhelum. Khwaja Abdul Rahman urged that superintendents should be employed in accordance with the rules forwarded by the Jail Reforms Committee. He also demanded the provisions of more facilities for Muslim prisoners during the month of Ramadan. Manohar Lal, the minister for jails, was asked to reply. *PLAD*, vol. 3, 1940, p. 16.
- 116 See Chapter 1, p. 72.
- 117 Most of the Ahrar leaders were arrested and imprisoned under the Punjab Criminal Law Amendment Act during their anti-recruitment campaign.
- 118 *Indian Annual Register*, 25 February 1936, vol. 1, p. 202.
- 119 *PLAD*, 21 April 1937, vol. 2, IOR\V\9\6203.
- 120 *PLAD*, 23 May 1940, vol. 11, pp. 511-13.
- 121 See the discussions on Reforms in Balochistan in *ILAD*, 7 March 1941, vol. 1, pp. 183-186.
- 122 Khwaja Ghulam Hussain's name was included in the committee constituted for the Shahidgunj issue within the Punjab Assembly. *PLAD*, January-June, 1938, vol. I, p. 213.
- 123 In 1937, a Muslim member, Haji Muhammad Abdullah, initiated the Shariat Bill (Muslim Personal Law) in the Central Legislative Assembly. By 1941 Muhammad Ahmad Kazmi put up several amendments in the Muslim Personal Law. It was passed by the Central Legislative Assembly on 10

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- November *ILAD*, July-September 1937, vol. 2, pp. 94-99, *ILAD*, November-December, 1941, vol. 2, pp. 122-123.
- 124 Muslims all over the world believe in the finality of Prophethood, and it is part of their belief system. If a Muslim refuses to accept the belief in the Prophet as the last Messenger of God, it is considered 'blasphemy'. In British India, many murders were committed as a response to blasphemy, and were used for political mobilisation. Ghazi Ilm Din and Abdul Qaiyum committed such murders in 1920s and 1930s, and were seen as saviours of Islam by the Muslim community.
- 125 As reported by the Select Committee in the Central Legislative Assembly, the objective of the Bill was to secure for female heirs a due share of property, which was theirs according to the Muslim Personal law, but of which they had been deprived by customary law. *Indian Annual Register*, July-December 1937, vol. 2, p. 94.
- 126 Muhammad Ahmad Kazmi moved an amendment to repeal this inconsistency in the bill, His amendment was accepted, and the amended bill was then passed. *Indian Annual Register*, July-December 1937, vol. 2, p. 99.
- 127 *Indian Annual Register*, 14 February 1939, volume. 1, p.112.
- 128 Abdul Qaiyum murdered a Hindu, Nathu Ram, for allegedly writing a book against Islam and Prophet Muhammad. In November 1934, he confessed before the court to the murder, because Nathu Ram had committed blasphemy. Later on, when Abdul Qaiyum was given death penalty and hanged in March 1935, the Muslim community agitated during his funeral, and as a result of police shooting, more than thirty Muslims were killed. It worsened the situation, as Muslims thought that it was an attack on their religion and the government had been hedging the blasphemy issue. The MAI held that Abdul Qaiyum was a *ghazi* and the MAI held public meetings on his trial. K. L. Gauba, raised the issue in the Central Assembly. *Inqilab*, 18 November 1934.
- 129 K. L. Gauba's adjournment motion was allowed under rule 22(2), on the grounds that the motion could be moved without being detrimental to the public interest. *ILAD*, 5 March 1935, vol. 1, p. 1669-70.

- 130 See the Index in *PLAD*, Questions asked by the Muhammad Abdul Rahman Khan, included arrangements for supply of drinking water, grant for bad harvests in his constituency, and provision for more employment of the Muslim population. *PLAD*, March-April 1939, vol. 9, p. 489.
- 131 *PLAD*, March-April 1939, vol. 9, p. 127.
- 132 *PLAD*, March-April 1939, vol. 9, p. 489.
- 133 He questioned the illegal possession of a lorry-stand by private interests on municipal land in Amritsar. *PLAD*, January-June 1938, IOR\V\9\6204.
- 134 *Ibid.* Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia replied to his questions pertaining to accidents, which had happened in the last quarter of March 1937.
- 135 He asked what the criteria was for choosing the staff for the Government services. Aubrey Metcalf, the British member, explained the merit and criteria. It was at this juncture that Gauba inquired about the absence of Muslims from the foreign and judicial department of the British government. *ILAD*, 14 February 1936, IOR\V\9\124.
- 136 The Speaker ruled out his adjournment motion. *ILAD*, 5 March 1935, vol. I, pp. 1669-70.