



THE SIKH MINORITY AND THE PARTITION OF THE PUNJAB 1920-1947

Chhanda Chatterjee



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Guru Nanak had gifted the Sikhs with an ideology. Guru Angad had given them the Gurmukhi script. Guru Arjan Dev coalesced the hymns authored or collected by the Gurus and made them a people of the book. Guru Govind Rai created the *Khalsa* identity with its five symbols (*Panj Kakke*). Maharaja Ranjit Singh's conquests gave them the pride of race. British insistence on recruiting only *keshdhari* Sikhs encouraged the *Khalsa* to assert their distinct identity. The trend accelerated since the revolt of 1857, when John Lawrence reversed the initial successes of the rebels with the recovery of Delhi with forces from the Punjab. Sikhs were co-opted by the British with the clever broadcast of the Guru Tegh Bahadur myth that the Sikhs would be able to avenge the martyrdom of the Guru in Delhi with the help of a white race. Since then the Sikhs formed the backbone of the British Indian army and all their political influence flowed out of this military connection.

The unexpected Congress concession of weightage to the Muslims in the Lucknow Pact of 1916 awakened the Sikhs to the necessity of the defence of *Khalsa* interests. Their vociferations compelled the British to concede a 19 per cent weightage for the Sikhs in the Montagu-Chelmsford Act of 1919. Gandhi appreciated the indispensable nature of Sikh support for the success of the British military machine. His attempt to subsume the Akali movement under the umbrella of the Non-Cooperation movement in the 1920s against the British and again his attempt to win over the Sikhs for his Civil Disobedience movement during the Lahore Congress in 1929 reflected this shrewd political sense. Sikhs continued to wrench concessions both from the British and the Congress as long as the *Pax Britannica* had any chance of survival. But as the negotiations for decolonization quickened after the end of the Second World War, the magic of Sikh arms could no longer work miracles for their slender numbers. While British statesmen from Cripps to Attlee – all burnt gallons of midnight oil thinking of an acceptable settlement of the Hindu-Muslim impasse, no one paid much attention to the pathetic quest of Sikh leaders since 1940 to work out an acceptable formula for readjusting the borders of the Punjab to accommodate the birthplace of the Gurus or the canal colonies, worked through long years of Sikh toil.

Chhanda Chatterjee used to teach History and acted as the Director, Centre for Guru Nanak Dev Studies in Visva-Bharati, Shantiniketan. She was educated in Presidency College, Kolkata and Calcutta University. She was elected president of the Modern India section of the Punjab History Conference, Patiala in 2006. She is currently the President's nominee to the Central Universities of Manipur and Tripura.



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The Sikh Minority and the
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1920-1947

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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	9
<i>Introduction</i>	11
1. The Crystallization of a Distinct Sikh Identity in the Nineteenth Century	31
2. Sikh Struggle for Political Representation	50
3. The Sikhs and the Mainstream Indian Leadership, 1927-1937	72
4. Sikhs Come Out of the Orbit of the Congress	95
5. Sikh Quest for Security: From Azad Punjab to Khalistan	114
6. Groping in the Dark	139
7. The Punjab Elections of 1945-1946 and its Aftermath	158
8. The Failure to Secure Sikhistan	186
9. Conclusion	213
<i>Bibliography</i>	217
<i>Index</i>	227



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Preface

THIS WORK WAS started long ago when I visited Cambridge with a scholarship from the University of Cambridge in 1994. I came in touch with Dr. Lionel Carter in the Centre for South Asian Studies in Cambridge and he showed me some private papers of officers, who had served in the Punjab districts, which gave me some insight into the militancy of the Sikhs on the eve of the partition of Punjab. Later I went to work in the India Office Library with a Foreign Travel Grant from the ICHR and Mr. Bingley introduced me to the papers related to partition. The long drawn out work of data collection in the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, the National Archives of India, Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan all located in New Delhi took me a long time. The Vice-Chancellor's unassigned grant from Visva-Bharati made it possible to visit New Delhi every year from 1997 to 2002 and continue the work. But the secondary literature related to this work was also quite vast and I had to visit Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha Library in Patiala to get hold of some books. I continued to share my findings with experts on Punjab politics like Dr. Kirpal Singh, Dr. Mohinder Singh and Prof. K.L. Tuteja in the various sessions of the Indian History Congress. Professor Ian Talbot of Coventry University, UK very kindly sent me some of the chapters from one of his books even before the book was published. Discussions with Prof. Preetam Singh of Oxford Brookes University were also very fruitful. Sharing the memories of the partition with some refugee Sikh intellectuals like Sardar Saran Singh, editor, *Sikh Review* and Manohar Singh Batra, former Deputy Director General, All India Radio, also gave me an insight into the mood of the times. Prof. Indu Banga of Panjab University, Chandigarh helped me with some of her own findings and corrected me at every stage of my work. However, my greatest debt is to Late Prof. Parthasarathi Gupta, who virtually rescued me from the impossible goal of working on three provinces of Punjab, Awadh and the Central Provinces simultaneously. I can never forget Prof. Gupta's numerous labours of love for my understanding and progress. I wish I could present him with the fruit

of his affection for me, but now I can only cherish his memory in gratitude.

I must also thank Mrs. Jaya Ravindran and Mr. Prabir Roy of the National Archives of India, New Delhi, Mrs. Alka Bali of Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, New Delhi, Dr. Jyotsna Arora and Noor Aziz of ICHR Library, the numerous staff of the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, New Delhi, India International Centre Library, New Delhi, Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha Library, Punjabi University, Patiala, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata, West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata and Central Library, Visva-Bharati for their sincere help at every stage of my work. I had applied to the ICHR in 2006 for a Project Grant to complete my work. An inordinate delay in releasing the Grant till 2009 created some difficulties. My responsibilities in Visva-Bharati first as Head of the Department of History and then as Director, Centre for Guru Nanak Dev Studies came in the way of completing the manuscript. Prof. Y. Sudershan Rao, the present Chairman, ICHR, very kindly allowed me to complete the Project which was long overdue. Dr. Rajesh Kumar, Deputy Director (Research) in the ICHR was also very helpful at various stages of the work. My thanks are also due to Mr. Ramesh Jain of Manohar for accepting the manuscript for publication.

My family members, my daughter Anupurba Roy and my husband Arun Roy, were extremely cooperative and patient throughout the long period of presenting papers on the subject away from home in Punjab and Delhi. My daughter helped me with the final version of the manuscript even after she had left for her studies in the UK. My colleagues in Visva-Bharati had always been very kind and helpful. It will be sheer ingratitude if I forget to mention my husband's secretary, Mr. Sreedharan Nair, who helped me with the printing, binding and finalizing the manuscript. In spite of all their kindness my failings remain.

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Introduction

THE PARTITION OF India is such a traumatic experience in the history of the subcontinent that historians are never satisfied with the interpretation of the events leading to this calamity from various academic prisms. Its effects were even more heart-rending in the eastern and western parts, where the dividing lines fell across territories which had once constituted a single province. Bengal in the eastern part and Punjab on the western part of the subcontinent were the two accursed provinces, where the dividing lines of Partition ran across two territories inhabited by people originating from a common racial stock, speaking the same language and sharing a common culture.

However, the communal scene in the Punjab differed from other Indian provinces in the sense that this was a province which, apart from the Hindu Muslim binary, was marked by the presence of a third force – the Sikhs. The purpose of this work is to demonstrate how in the Punjab it was this third force which proved to be the catalyst for the partition of the province. The study of the Sikh initiative in the politics of this province thus gets intertwined with the larger question of how the Sikhs were gradually separating out from the Hindus in the province and how they were striving to create a distinct identity for themselves. The birth of such new identities was not something unique to the Sikhs. It was almost universal in the case of most ethnic entities taking their cue from nineteenth century reform movements and the consequent spread of a new consciousness laying stress on the re-fashioning of new identities based on an imagined past tailored to suit the needs and demands of the present. Such was the emergence of a new Jat identity between 1886 and 1930 around the new ideological influences of the Arya Samaj;¹ the jostling of two rival myths related to the origins of Kashmir, one spawned by Hindu Kashmiri Pandits and the other by the *tazkiras* of religious divines of the Sufi shrines and orders, who had taken an active part in naturalizing Islam in Kashmir;² the carving out of an aggressive Tamil identity (*Tamilttay*) around the Tamil language, taking it to be ‘a tangible, material possession of its speakers’ under

the spell of the 'patrimonial imagination' coming in the wake of colonial modernity;³ or say the forging of an unique Assamese identity based on a mythical past traced in the old chronicles or *Buranjis*.⁴ The instances are endless and daily emerging in new incarnations in different parts of the subcontinent.

A peculiar feature of these identity movements was that they were not born merely of an academic interest in the old tradition but often from the presentday compulsions of the people concerned. As Dipesh Chakravarty has pointed out in a recent essay⁵ 'presentism' was sometimes built into the rhetoric of experience and traditions were redefined to suit the political equations and social objectives of the people concerned. The Sikhs were also no exceptions in these respects. They too had started reinterpreting their past under Singh Sabha influences and suppressing their earlier closeness to Hindu beliefs and practices.⁶ They started outgrowing the influences of the Arya Samaj even as their aspirations began to clash with the Aryas.⁷ Until almost the height of the Gurdwara reform movement of the 1920s Sikh identity remained an object of controversy. The Sikh Gurus having been born as Hindus, there was always a debate whether the Sikhs were a militant sect of the Hindus or not. The Sikh Studies Chairs instituted by the dynamic and upcoming Sikh diaspora in Canada and North America had been contributing to this ongoing debate from many new perspectives. Several foreign scholars also got involved in these controversies and earned the wrath of the official custodians of the Sikh tradition (the SGPC).⁸ Although Sikhism had not felt the necessity to develop into a 'tidy cultural construct',⁹ yet Sikhism was different from Hinduism in both form and content. Just as Judaism, Christianity and Islam were all Semitic religions and even shared certain common anthologies and yet were distinct from each other, similarly Sikhism was also distinct from Hinduism. The Sikh struggles with the Mughal state stretched over several centuries and infused the Sikh psyche with a kind of martial ardour which was completely different in content from ancient Hinduism. While a Hindu child grew up on tales from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, a Sikh child always had some recent tale of sacrifice and heroism to initiate him to the ways of the world.¹⁰

British military recruitment policy gave a big boost to Khalsa Sikh identity by insisting on the recruitment of 'true Sikhs' by which they meant only *kesdhari* Sikhs. For the 'martial' Sikhs, whose very existence depended on fighting for the state, the disbandment of the

Khalsa army in 1849 had come as a big blow. The effects of this demobilization could only be alleviated by recruitment in large numbers in the East India Company's regiments and the prospective recruits from the countryside were only too anxious to conform to the Company's requirements to convince the recruiting agency of the genuineness of their calibre.¹¹ In a secret communication to C.R. Cleveland, the Director of Criminal Intelligence on 11 August 1911, David Petrie, the Assistant Director of Criminal Intelligence reported:

At the present time one of the principal agencies for the preservation of the Sikh religion has been the practice of military officers commanding Sikh regiments to send Sikh recruits to receive baptism according to the rites prescribed by Guru Govind Singh. Sikh soldiers, too, are required to adhere rigidly to Sikh customs and ceremonial and every endeavour has been made to preserve them from the contagion of idolatry. Sikhs in the Indian army have been studiously 'nationalised' or encouraged to regard themselves as a totally distinct and separate nation; their national pride has been fostered by every available means and the *Granth Sahib* or Sikh scriptures are saluted by British officers of Sikh regiments.¹²

The census strategies of the British in the Punjab also tried to prop up the Sikhs as a separate group distinct from the Hindus. The first census of 1855 had not differentiated between Sikhs and Hindus. But the next census of 1868 tried to separate the Hindus from the Sikhs. The need to define and patrol the boundaries was thus brought home to the Sikhs. Singh Sabhas were particularly concerned about this communitarian identity and tried to inculcate in members of the Khalsa Panth a consciousness of their identity and tried to enforce the external symbols of this identity with a renewed vigour. The Chief Khalsa Diwan was established in 1883 as a central controlling agency embracing some 36 or 37 Singh Sabhas.¹³

By 1911 the Sikhs accounted for 20 per cent of the total number of Indians in military service¹⁴ and had acquired an importance which was quite disproportionate with their numbers. Major John McLoughin Short who had an experience of the Sikh character in course of his service in the XIth Sikh Regiment was not wide off the mark when he remarked that the Sikhs rose to prominence in Indian national life chiefly through their contribution to the military service in the British Indian Army. 'We have put him in a commanding political position' he had written in a confidential note¹⁵ and this indeed was the reality. By linking political power with numbers, the electoral reforms since 1909 had revealed the weakness of the Sikh position.

Census figures for 1881 placed the Sikhs at only 8.22 per cent of Punjab's population as against 43.84 per cent Hindus and 47.56 per cent Muslims.¹⁶ The leading position occupied by the Sikhs in the armed forces of the British had undoubtedly helped them to achieve a dominance which was in marked contrast with their slender numbers.

The Sikhs did not get any berth in the Legislative Council of Punjab when the Morley–Minto reforms introduced the elective principle for the first time in the history of the province although separate electorates were introduced for the Muslims. The Chief Khalsa Diwan's representation was ignored. The Lieutenant Governor tried to intervene on their behalf but to no avail. Finally, Sikh presence on the Council had to be secured through Government nomination.¹⁷

The loyalist image of the Sikhs suffered serious reverses with the launching of the canal colonies agitation in 1907 in protest against the Government's sudden attempt to revise the terms and conditions of the settlement of canal colonies land. Congressmen like Lala Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh led the agitation of the colonists in Montgomery and Lyallpur. The Congress leader, G.K.Gokhale received a warm ovation in Khalsa College, Amritsar at this time shattering the myth of 'the loyal Khalsa'.¹⁸ Agrarian disturbances pushed up the number of migrants to Canada and America in search of better pastures. But opportunities in those lands too began to shrink by 1910 and the rebuffed Khalsa began to respond to an international conspiracy called the *Ghadar* (which meant 'revolution' in Urdu as well as Punjabi) for dislodging the British from India with help from big powers like Germany and occasional patronage from Turkey. By 1915, however, the plot was discovered and foiled.¹⁹

The bonhomie between the Sikhs and Congress did not, however, last for long. The Congress often worked out its own bargains with its all-India interests in mind and did not think how such understandings were going to affect the interests of the Sikhs. In 1916 the Indian National Congress tried to win over the Muslim League to its side for pressurizing the British for further reforms. They held a joint session with the Muslim League in Lucknow and agreed on weightage for Muslims in all provinces where they were in a minority. In Punjab they agreed on a 50 per cent weightage for the Muslims. The Sikhs were never consulted by them as the organ of the Sikhs, the Chief Khalsa Diwan, was considered to be a loyalist association.²⁰

The weightage conceded to the Muslims in a province where they were already in a majority scandalized the Sikhs. They woke up to

the apathy of the Congress for their interests and understood that they would have to fend for themselves. They, therefore, led a deputation to the Secretary of State, Montagu, in the winter of 1917 when he visited India personally to assess the political climate in India and to discuss plans for further devolution of powers. This was the time when the British could appreciate the worth of the Sikhs as brave recruits to the armed forces engaged in the various fronts all over the world at the peak of the First World War. The Montagu-Chelmsford reforms in 1919 therefore responded immediately to the deputation by conceding a 15 per cent reservation for the Sikhs. The Muslim leader Fazl-i-Husain insisted on a 50 per cent weightage for the Muslims in accordance with the terms of the Lucknow Pact. During the debate on the reforms in the Punjab Legislative Council, the Sikh member Gajjan Singh merely suggested an innocuous amendment 'subject to the just claims of the Sikhs'. But this could not be pushed through in the face of a united Hindu-Muslim opposition in the Council. Sikh representation was eventually pushed up to 19 per cent through Government nomination.²¹

The 1920s saw the Sikhs on warpath again for the control of the Gurdwaras, which was a symbol of their cultural and social life. The Khalsa needed the swelling Gurdwara revenues to relieve its persisting economic and agrarian problems. The reprehensible conduct of the *mahants* or custodians of these Gurdwaras was a blot on the entire community and required to be redressed. The Indian National Congress judged the moment opportune for linking up the non-cooperation movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920 with this movement of the Sikhs. It was resolved in the Nagpur Congress (1920), which decided to go for non-cooperation, that 'their (the Sikhs') interests will receive the same protection in any scheme of Swarajya in India as is provided for Mohammedans and other minorities in provinces other than Punjab'.²² It set off alarm bells to the British and recruitment of Sikhs to the army had to be cut down drastically. However, this honeymoon with the Congress did not last long. Gandhi's sudden withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation movement left them to go at it alone. The Gurdwara movement was also an occasion for a redefinition of Sikh identity and the Sikhs had to make a full-throated declaration that they were distinct from the Hindus. This was also the time for a decisive purging of the last vestiges of Hindu rituals from the Khalsa way of life.²³

The Sikhs were initially hesitant to join the Muslim-dominated

Unionist Government carved out by Fazl-i-Husain in 1923 with the help of the rural magnates sent up by the rural electorates created through the heavy rural bias of the Montagu–Chelmsford reforms. But once it became clear that this venture enjoyed the blessings of the Government for keeping this ‘martial’ province free from Congress influence, the loyalist Chief Khalsa Diwan promptly sent its representative to this patchwork quilt Government.²⁴ The Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1901 had not only helped peasants among Jats, Rajputs, Arains and Gujars in the eastern and central Punjab districts, it also favoured the Muslim religious elites – the Syeds, Shaikhs and Qureshis, tribal chiefs ruling over large holdings in the west of Punjab. The key to the pre-eminence of these tribal leaders lay in their close links with the *pirs* or *sajjada nashins*, commanding *baraka* (charisma) in rural society. These families were in the forefront of the Council elections. Some of them were winners in all the Council elections that took place in 1920, 1923, 1926 and 1930. The structure of this politics revolved ‘around the idiom of tribe, rather than of religious community’.²⁵

The Sikhs approached the Simon Commission deputed to review the working of the diarchy in 1927 with a request to grant them a weightage of 30 per cent by a corresponding reduction of the Hindu seats to 30 per cent and Muslims to 40 per cent of the total number of seats. The Congress had boycotted the Simon Commission as it had not included any Indian among its members. But Motilal Nehru took the initiative to form an all-parties committee to prepare a set of constitutional proposals for the perusal of the Government for the constitutional changes that it had been planning for the future. The Nehru Report repudiated weightage of any kind and proposed the introduction of general constituencies everywhere except in provinces where Muslims were in the minority. The report thus put a damper on Sikh demand for weightage and was an anathema to the Sikhs.²⁶

Sikh support was, however, indispensable to the Congress for the penetration of the rural areas of Punjab during the Civil Disobedience movement as Congress presence in the Punjab countryside was quite minimal. The 1929 Lahore Congress thus tried to assuage the injured feelings of the Sikhs by adopting the famous resolution that no future political settlement of India would be contemplated without first taking the Sikh interests into consideration.²⁷ Sikhs trusted Gandhi and suffered the maximum number of arrests, imprisonments and executions for the sake of the movement. Gandhi, however, in keeping

with his maverick character, ditched them half way and negotiated the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of 1931 and went to negotiate the future government of India in the Second Round Table Conference.²⁸

The blueprint for constitutional reforms chalked out by the Congress Working Committee (7-12 July 1931) before the departure of Gandhi for the Round Table Conference did not hold much hopes for the Sikhs. It proposed joint electorates with reservation for the Sikhs in the Federal and Provincial Legislatures on the basis of population with the right to contest additional seats. This would mean a climb down from the concessions which the Sikhs had already bagged under the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms. Master Tara Singh therefore confronted Gandhi with a list of 17 demands on behalf of the Sikhs before he started for the Round Table Conference. In 1930 the poet Iqbal had already mooted the proposal of a separate state for the Muslims on the north-west embracing Sindh, Baluchistan, Punjab and the North-West Frontier. Geoffrey Corbett, the Secretary to the Round Table Conference had lent him indirect support by proposing the detachment of the non-Muslim Ambala Division from the Punjab to constitute a predominantly Muslim area on the north-west. Among other demands the 17 demands of the Sikhs also included the readjustment of the boundaries of the Punjab through the transfer of the Muslim majority districts to the Frontier Province. When Ujjal Singh and Sampuran Singh, representing the Sikhs in the conference could not get the Sikh demand for a 30 per cent weightage accepted they started talking about Khalistan or a separate state for the Sikhs.²⁹

The statutory majority granted to the Muslims in the Communal Award of 1932 came as a major blow for the Sikhs. Henceforth they were seized by a fear of 'Muslim Raj'. The Congress did not seem to share their concern in this matter and maintained an ominous silence for fear of antagonizing their prospective Muslim voters and allies. Jawaharlal Nehru even reprimanded the Punjab Provincial Congress Committee leader Satyapal for having launched an agitation against the award on his own. The Sikhs had to carry on their lone struggle against the award and they formed a 17 member Council of Action on 26-7 September 1932 to organize a Shahidi Dal of 1,00,000 volunteers to continue to agitate for the repeal of the award.³⁰

Nor did the Congress come to the aid of the Sikhs during the Shahidganj Gurdwara agitation in Lahore. The Sikhs had been awarded the site claimed as a Gurdwara by a verdict of the Lahore

High Court. They tried to take possession of the site and begin some construction in the place. But the place had long been used as a mosque by the Muslims and Sikh attempts to take the place over provoked protests by Muslims like Maulana Zafar Ali of the Majlis Ittehad-e-Millat. The Sikhs had to fight this battle all by themselves and the Congress remained a passive spectator all the while.³¹

During the elections of 1937 there were some seat adjustments and electoral understanding among the Akalis and the Congress as they had understood that the battle against the Unionists was going to get tough. This was made possible by the revision of the Congress stand on the Communal Award and its call for a withdrawal of the Award.³²

On 27 August 1936, the loyalist Chief Khalsa Diwan and the moderate wing of the Central Akali Dal led by Giani Sher Singh united to form the Khalsa National Party to fight the forthcoming elections. Their results were better than the Shiromani Akali Dal. The Unionists emerged victorious during these elections and the Khalsa National Party joined the Government formed by Sikander Hayat Khan. The interests of the Jat landowners of Rohtak and Hissar, that of the Sikhs dispersed all over the Punjab and the interests of the Muslim landowners, mostly concentrated in the west of Punjab converged to give rise to this Government.³³

Urban parties like the Muslim League and the Congress fared badly in the 1937 elections in the Punjab. The Congress could not stomach this discomfiture as it had scored victories everywhere except in the Muslim majority provinces. Therefore, it tried to galvanize the rural wings of the party with utmost vigour for engaging in a Muslim mass contact campaign. The Muslim League did not take this challenge lying down. They too started strengthening their rural wings through an appeal to Islam. The Punjab countryside had so far been kept free of the communal virus and the Unionists had been keeping their house together by playing up the rural and landowning interests. Sikander Hayat Khan had entered into an alliance with the Muslim League leader Jinnah in October 1937 (the so-called Sikander-Jinnah Pact) but this was merely to appoint him the spokesman for the province at the Centre and keep the province entirely free for his own brand of politics. The Congress attempt to break the Unionist monopoly of power suddenly disturbed the familiar rhythm of the province and began a rapid politicization and communalization unprecedented in the history of Punjab.³⁴

The onset of the Second World War in 1939 started new complications. The Congress blamed the Viceroy for having embroiled the country in the War without consulting the elected ministries in office. They demanded immediate independence and the launching of a Constituent Assembly for preparing a constitution for the country. The Government's promise to consider Dominion Status after the War did not satisfy them. All the Congress ministries resigned at once and started a programme of Civil Disobedience to force the hands of the Government. The Viceroy, however, was not to be deterred. He declared on 18 October 1939 that the Government would not decide on any constitutional plans without the consent of the Muslims. This gave a great boost to Jinnah, who had been looking for an opportunity to stage a comeback since his miserable performance at the hustings. He persuaded his ally Fazlul Haque, the Premier of Bengal, to move the Lahore Resolution, sometimes called the 'Pakistan Resolution' during the Lahore session of the League on 23 March 1940 hosted by the Unionist Premier, Sikander Hayat Khan.³⁵

The Akalis took great alarm at this resolution and Master Tara Singh declared in the U.P. Sikh Conference at Lucknow on 15 April 1940 that for attaining Pakistan the Muslims would have to cross 'an ocean of Sikh blood'.³⁶ There was, however, no immediate reaction from the Congress and the Ramgarh Session of the Congress made no mention of the Resolution.

The Sikhs too announced their plans for a 'Khalistan' or land of the Khalsa in May 1940. Dr V.S. Bhatti of Ludhiana in a 40 pages brochure had mooted a scheme for the amalgamation of the Sikh States and the Simla Hill States with the British ruled districts of Jalandhar, Ambala, Ferozepur, Lahore, Amritsar, Lyallpur, Gujranwala, Sheikhpura, Montgomery, Hissar, Rohtak, Karnal, Multan and Delhi. It was also to access the Gulf of Cutch through a small corridor cutting across Sindh, Bahawalpur and Rajputana. However, this had nothing to do with the later day demand for Khalistan so deftly discussed by Dipankar Gupta in his treatise on Sikh ethnicity.³⁷

The Congress turned down the offer of the Viceroy (Linlithgow) in August 1940 (sometimes known as the August Offer) to expand his Executive Council to admit more members from important political parties and representatives from princely states to constitute a War Advisory Council for the supervision of war efforts on the plea that the members would not be answerable to the Legislature. Linlithgow had repudiated all attempts to form a government which

was not acceptable to 'large and powerful elements in India's national life'.³⁸ For the sake of consensus among all communities Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, a prominent Congressman, came up with a 'sporting offer' to have a national government with a Muslim head. This further incensed the Sikhs and the All India Sikh League called it an 'anti-national and anti-democratic' proposal.³⁹

Congress insensitivity to their problems gradually convinced the Sikhs that the Congress was trying to use them as a pawn in their political game and they decided to act independently. The Sikhs had become suspects in the eyes of the Government for their involvement with the Congress and military recruitment from among the Sikhs had declined. Major Short, who had been brought back from his retirement with the specific purpose of wooing the Sikhs and bring them on the right track, could finally persuade the Sikhs to come out of the orbit of the Congress. The deadlock was broken through the intervention of the Maharaja of Patiala in 1941 and the Khalsa Defence of India League was organized to begin a drive for the recruitment of Sikhs in the army in large numbers.⁴⁰

In the meanwhile Sir Stafford Cripps, Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons in Britain himself came down to India to confer with Indian politicians and seek their cooperation in the war efforts. This was the time when the Japanese were advancing rapidly towards India and it was imperative to close ranks against them. Gandhi, however, was adamant and he launched his Quit India movement, arguing that the presence of the British in India was making the country the target of attack for the Axis Powers and the good of the country required that the British should pack up and leave India. At this juncture, Cripps made his proposals pointing out that it was not possible for the British to leave the country to any one party when it was known that there were a substantial number of Muslims, anxious not to be dominated by the majority community. For them he devised the solution of secession from the main union if they so decided by a 60 per cent majority vote in the provincial legislature. This set the seal on the idea of Pakistan mooted by Jinnah.⁴¹

The Sikhs were also not slow to comprehend the significance of the Cripps Offer. Important Sikh leaders now wanted to take an independent stand regardless of what the Congress did. They met Cripps to make their disapproval clear. During this meeting they demanded that the trans-Jhelum districts of Jhang and Multan, which

were not part of the Sikh homeland but had been conquered by the Sikhs, be separated from Punjab and Sikhs be given a separate unit where nobody would dominate them.⁴²

The Government now understood the necessity of pacifying the Sikhs and keeping the flow of military recruitment from the province steady. They therefore advised Sikander Hayat Khan to bring the Akalis within the Unionist fold with the help of Major Short. The Lahore Resolution and the subsequent Islamization of politics had also begun to tell on the loyalty of Sikander's flock and more than 70 of his MLAs had tilted towards the Muslim League. Sikander resigned from the Working Committee of the League, began to organize harmony meetings to maintain communal amity in the province and appeared to be genuinely committed to the cause of provincial autonomy. This was possible only through an understanding with the other communities. The death of Sundar Singh Majithia provided an opportunity. A new United Sikh Party was launched in the Punjab Legislative Assembly in March 1942. Subsequently in March 1943 the Khalsa National Party merged with it in the Assembly. The new party was led by Baldev Singh, an Akali MLA and a wealthy Jat. He entered into a personal alliance with Sikander for various facilities which the Sikhs needed for maintaining their cultural autonomy and their economic position in the province, like adequate representation in central and provincial Government services, opportunities of teaching Gurmukhi in Government educational institutions, provisions for the sale of *jharka* meat and right to have a say in the Assembly in matters affecting Sikh interests. The Akalis also needed Sikander's help to defeat Jagjit Singh Bedi's bill to stop the use of SGPC funds for political purpose. The result was the Sikander-Baldev Pact of June 1942 by which Baldev was made a Cabinet Minister. In July 1942 Jogendra Singh was also moved to the Viceroy's Executive Council. But Baldev Singh could not make much headway regarding the realization of the promises made by Sikander after his sudden demise. Declining Unionist fortunes during the unpopular premiership of his successor Khizr Tiwana made it difficult to press the claims of the Sikhs.⁴³

Master Tara Singh now revived his demand for a separate Sikh unit, which he had first spoken of in the 17 demands presented to Mahatma Gandhi on the eve of his departure for the Second Round Table Conference and which the Sikh leaders had presented to Sir Stafford Cripps in the face of his insistence on the right of non-

accession by provinces. This was now called the Azad Punjab scheme, where the Muslim districts west of Ravi would be separated from Punjab and a new province would be formed, where no one community would be predominant. These impracticable propositions were attacked by the Sikhs themselves as it threatened to divide the community and leave out Rawalpindi and important Sikh religious sites.⁴⁴

The premature death of the Unionist Premier of Punjab, Sikander Hayat Khan in December 1942 further aggravated matters for the Sikhs. Jinnah now became desperate to bring Punjab under his control. He started pressing the new Premier Khizr Hayat Tiwana to drop the name 'Unionist' from the Coalition and call it Muslim League Coalition Party. The tribal Muslim leaders were not slow to appreciate the changes that were coming over. This was the beginning of the exodus of Unionist Muslim leaders to the Muslim League.⁴⁵

In the meanwhile Congress was trying to come to terms with the Muslim League. Gandhi sent proposals to open a dialogue with Jinnah on the basis of the C.R. Formula, which was a revival of the Cripps' offer to let unwilling provinces opt out of the Indian Union if they so desired by a 60 per cent vote in the provincial Legislative Assemblies. However, the Jinnah-Gandhi talks from 9 to 27 September 1944 failed since Jinnah wanted self-determination only for Muslims. He would not concede the right of self-determination to the non-Muslim minorities in the concerned provinces.⁴⁶

It was about the same time that Sir Bhulabhai Desai, the leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party in the Central Assembly tried to negotiate an agreement for parity (50 per cent of seats for the Muslim League) both in the Central and the Provincial Executive with Nawabzada Liaqat Ali Khan, the Deputy Leader of the League Parliamentary Party. All these moves to work out a settlement on an all-India level led to great apprehensions in the Sikh camp regarding their own fate and the attitude of the Congress vis-à-vis the Sikhs. A section of the Sikhs like the Central Akali Dal, who had been holding conferences with the Hindu Mahasabha insisting on *Akhand Bharat* (indivisible India) even considered overtures from the Mahasabha leader Syama Prasad Mookerjee for a tie up.⁴⁷

When nothing came of these conciliatory moves Gandhi encouraged the efforts of the non-party man Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, who had been a Law Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council from 1920 to 1923 and commanded great prestige in government circles to

consult all political parties and prepare a proposal for the future constitution of the country. This created great enthusiasm in Sikh circles and all the various Akali groups cooperated to prepare a Memorandum signed by 30 eminent men summarizing all their demands and expectations. It revived the well-known Sikh points regarding their superior contributions to the economic life of the province judging by landownership and contributions to agriculture, industry and army. They were paying the highest amount of revenue and canal rates. Punjab was their homeland, where they were the rulers immediately before the British conquest. Yet they were neglected in Government appointments, representation in U.P. and Sindh, where they were a strong minority, and also representation in provincial and federal legislature.⁴⁸

The War, in the meanwhile, had been drawing to a close and the Viceroy was anxious for a settlement of the Indian problem. He invited 15 members from the major political parties for a talk in Simla in June 1945 to deliberate on the formation of an interim government and a Constituent Assembly. But the talks proved abortive as Jinnah insisted on sole right to represent the Muslims. Since Congress was unwilling to give up its right to represent the entire country, the conference had to wrap up.

It was then decided to send the various parties to seek a popular mandate and elections were held in the winter of 1945-6. The Muslim League captured 78 seats and also commanded the support of Indian Christians and Scheduled Castes in a house of 175. The Unionists were washed out and were soon reduced to a rump of 9 by further desertions. But they secured the backing of 51 Congressmen and 23 Akalis and succeeded in forming the Government with Khizr Tiwana as the Premier.

The Cabinet Mission arrived in March 1946 to devise ways for the formation of a Constituent Assembly. They divided the provinces into three groups, (A) with Hindu-majority provinces, (B) with Muslim-majority provinces in north-western India and (C) with Muslim-majority provinces in eastern India. The Sikhs were outraged at the prospect of becoming submerged among the Muslims. Gandhi had initially expressed his satisfaction. Jinnah too saw a means of realizing his dream for autonomy in the suggestions. But once the Muslim League sent its acceptance, Congress dithered, saying that it understood that the provinces were to act individually and not on a group basis. As this would frustrate Jinnah's scheme since Punjab

and NWFP both had non-Muslim governments, Jinnah withdrew. But the British had already committed that it would form an interim government irrespective of the acceptance of the Mission proposals by any party. Thus, the interim government had to sit with only Congress members. Muslim League decided to come in. But Congress insistence to send Muslim representatives decided the issue. Sikhs had wanted an insertion that 'in matters of Sikh communal issues within Group B no decision should be arrived at without the support of a majority of Sikh representatives present and voting in the Group'. The Governor's insistence to take some action as the Sikhs were in a position to wreck the plan in the Punjab⁴⁹ elicited Wavell's perfunctory reply that a mistake has been made in not giving a communal safeguard to the Sikhs.⁵⁰ Safeguard to the Sikhs would mean reduction of Muslims to a minority in the Punjab, which could not be pushed through.⁵¹ The only course open to the Sikhs when all else failed was a 're-conquest of the Punjab', which they had started talking about seriously as was reported to the Viceroy by Smith, the Director of the Intelligence Branch.⁵²

The Muslim League had already declared in its Bombay session that it aimed to achieve Pakistan through 'Direct Action' if constitutional methods failed. They felt themselves deprived of their legitimate share of power in the interim government. They were also frustrated over their failure to seize power in the Punjab, where they were kept out even after emerging as the single largest party. On 16 August 1946 Calcutta had a foretaste of what form 'Direct Action' was going to assume. Noakhali and Tippera followed. British announcement on 20 February 1947 to pack off latest by June 1948 added a new urgency to the question of succession in their shoes.

Unionist attempts to check Muslim armed mobilization in the garb of the Muslim National Guard set the ball rolling. The Punjab Premier feared greater trouble and resigned on 2 March 1947. The Governor's attempt to take control of the province did not help. Provocative slogans in non-Muslim processions in Lahore triggered off violent incidents. The violence spread to the districts and two districts – Multan and Rawalpindi – were worst affected. The brutality of Rawalpindi swayed the Sikhs decisively against the Muslim League.⁵³

The Congress now came with a proposal to partition Punjab on 8 March 1947. 'If the Congress loses the support of the Sikh community,' Menon wrote to Abell, 'Hindus in the Punjab will by

themselves not be able to stand up to the Muslims, much less to a possible combination of Sikhs and Muslims.⁵⁴ The support of the Sikhs was of primary importance to the Congress.

The Sikhs did not trust the Hindus very much either. 'The Hindus will take away our land', Darling heard a youth saying in the Lyallpur colony. 'We all want freedom, but we don't want to exchange slavery to the English for slavery to the Hindu.'⁵⁵ They had been co-ordinating plans with the Sikh States for arms and finance from the Raja of Faridkot for wrenching the Chenab Frontier. In a desperate bid to have British help in retaining the Sikh settlements in the canal colonies, Baldev Singh approached Lord Mountbatten to have partition on the basis of property. But Mountbatten expressed his inability to accede to the request.⁵⁶ The Earl of Listowel was more explicit when he spelt out that 'in no single district of the Punjab do they constitute a majority of the population; it is out of the question to meet their claims by setting up a separate state'.⁵⁷

The Sikhs would not, however, be deterred by such statements. On 24 June 1947 the Akali High Command sent a secret circular to all Sikh organizations to make preparations for a long drawn out struggle to push the western boundary 'further westward enabling them to have the maximum area under Eastern Punjab'.⁵⁸ Through the months the Sikh leaders made futile appeals for exchange of population lacing the appeals with threats to vacate East Punjab land by massacre to make way for population from the West.⁵⁹

The story of the partition of the Punjab is a story of betrayal of Sikh aspirations by their chief mentors – the British and to some extent by the Indian National Congress with whom the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) often worked in unison. The failure of the Sikh leadership lay in their inability to appreciate that the times had changed and the British were no longer depending on their armed might to keep possession of their colony. They were on their way out and were not in a position to compel the main players, that is, the Congress and the Muslim League to make room for the Sikhs. With the abdication of British power the Sikhs no longer remained partners in the British Empire, which they had been in the halcyon days of the British Empire. Democratic norms had no respect for their extra-numerical abilities and would provide no weightage for them. In a ruthless numbers game they lagged behind the two major communities which no amount of excellence could recover.

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CHAPTER 1

The Crystallization of a Distinct Sikh Identity in the Nineteenth Century

THE SIKH FAITH had its origins in the ideas and preachings of Guru Nanak (1469-1539) but its main contours took some time to get defined. As Guru Nanak was born in a Hindu Khatri family the confusion persisted whether Sikhism was just a sect of Hinduism or it was an independent religion. *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* was equally respected by both Hindus and Sikhs. Many Hindus and Muslims respected Sikhism without leaving their original faith. There was a popular saying that Guru Nanak was 'the Guru of the Hindus and Pir for the Musalmans'.

*Nanak Shah Fakir, Hindooyon ke Guru
Mussalmanon ke Pir*

Guru Nanak must have been influenced by the contemporary trend of questioning the multiplicity of God and worshipping of images under the influence of the contact with monotheistic Islam. Such interrogations of the traditional faith had started with the long line of Nath Yogis of whom Gorakhnath had been the most important. The practice of Yoga with its emphasis on intense concentration of the senses as a means of achieving union with the creator of this world could be traced to Buddhist philosophic conventions. Defiance of the authority of the Brahmins had also started with the Buddhists. Ramanand and Kabir in Banaras, Chaitanya in Bengal and Ballavacharya in the south had also subscribed to the same trend. But Guru Nanak definitely charted out a completely new path by shunning the anthropomorphism of Kabir and Chaitanya. He also pointed to a new horizon when he showed the way to piety without giving up the duties of a householder (*raj me jog*) and condemned living on charity. Guru Nanak's launching of the *langar* or community kitchen, probably on the lines of the *Sufis* of Pak Pattan, frequented by him, certainly marked the first step towards the abolition of caste and social

hierarchy. Even the mighty Emperor Akbar had to sit and share his meals with all before he could have an audience with Guru Amar Das (1479-1574), the third Guru in the line of Nanak, in Goindwal. However, Guru Nanak never made a conscious effort to define a distinct set of civil institutions for the Sikhs or prepare a separate code of civil or criminal laws. He merely registered his lack of faith in the prevalent philosophic systems and invoked the Lord as the one, the sole, the timeless being.

Guru Nanak's successor Guru Angad had started the very important practice of committing all of Nanak's sayings into written form. Kabir had already started the practice of preaching in the vernacular dialect and set the trend for freeing religious teaching from the fetters of a language like Sanskrit or Arabic which were unintelligible to the common people. The monopoly of the Brahmin or the Maulavi of sacred knowledge was thus broken. Guru Angad used the script of western Punjab, the *lehndi* Punjabi for this. This script later began to be popularly called Gurmukhi, or the words coming from the mouth of the Guru. It later became the core of Sikh identity as Sikhs began to clinch the issue of writing Punjabi in the Gurmukhi script as distinct from Punjabi in the Devanagari script for the Hindus and Punjabi in the Urdu/Arabic script for the Muslims.

The number of the Guru's adherents swelled to such large proportions by the time of the fifth Guru Arjan that he had to suffer martyrdom in the hands of the Emperor Jehangir.

In Goindwal, which is on the river Beas, a Hindu named Arjan used to live in the garb of a spiritual master and mystic guide, under the influence of which he had induced a large number of simple-minded Hindus and even some ignorant and silly Muslims, to become attached to his ways and customs. He had the drum of his spiritual leadership and sainthood loudly beaten. They called him Guru. From all sides and directions ignorant ones and dervish-garbworshippers inclined towards him and reposed full faith in him. For three or four generations they (he and his precursors) had kept this business brisk. For a long time the thought kept coming to me of either putting an end to this shop of falsehood or to bring him into the fold of the people of Islam.¹

Shireen Moosvi has translated the relevant passages in the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* to show how Emperor Jahangir grew suspicious of the use of the word 'Sachcha Padshah' for Guru Arjan by his followers or 'sis'. The way he singled out the Guru's followers from other Hindus pointed out unmistakably that the Guru's adherents were beginning to acquire a new identity for themselves.

This sense of identity got a further boost when the Guru succeeded in compiling the *Adi Granth* out of the several versions or *birs* existing in Kartarpur, Goindwal and some other places. Gurinder Singh Mann has written convincingly about the growing of this sacred scripture.² This became another important milestone in the growing identity of the Sikhs as they now became ‘the people of the book’ which was very important in the Islamic atmosphere of north-west Punjab which attached so much importance to having the scripture in a written form (*ahl-i-kitab*).

Another important step in the evolution of Sikh identity was the investiture of the Sikhs by Guru Gobind Singh with a Khalsa identity during the Vaisakhi of 1699. Words had been sent to the Guru’s followers to come unshaven and with uncut hair to the annual gathering at the Guru’s residence at Anandpur Sahib. The Guru demanded the sacrifice of the head of five volunteers from this assembly and five men representing five castes – one Brahmin, one Khatri and three Shudras – followed each other. The Guru disappeared within a tent with them one by one and the sound of something heavy rolling on the ground could be heard five times in succession and streams of blood could be seen flowing out of the tent to the consternation of the large assembly. But when the curtain was lifted on the tent, the five volunteers were seen seated with the heads of five goats in front of them. These five who had been ready to give up their heads at the call of the Guru were called the *Panj Piyare*, the men who had endeared themselves to the Guru because of their courage. The names of these five – Daya Ram, Dharam Das, Mohkam Chand, Sahib Chand and Himmatt Rai – are repeated in the *ardas* at the end of every prayer. The Guru then stirred the water of a bowl with a double-edged sword and mixed up some sugar crystals brought by Mata Jito who accidentally came that way. The presence of Mata Jito was considered to be a good omen, which promised the proliferation of the numbers of the Guru’s followers.³ The potion was called *amrit* and the Guru sprinkled some of it on the *Panj Piyare* and made them drink some. They were made the *Guru ka Khalsa* or directly under the tutelage of the Guru. The corruption which had crept up in the *masand* system introduced by Guru Amar Das to collect the contributions of the expanding number of Sikhs spread over many places, was thereby brought to an end. The *masands* had started calling themselves the Guru and appropriated all the offerings of the Guru’s followers for themselves. Some of them had even started moneylending and trading operations from these funds and had been

exploiting the poor peasants in the name of the Guru.⁴ The baptismal ceremony or *khande ki pahul* initiating the baptised to the Khalsa implied that 'all those who were not directly linked with him were not Sikhs either'.⁵ This was also expected to put an end to the pretensions of all dissenters like the Dhirmalees, Minas and Ram Raiyas.⁶ The Guru declared that the entrants to the new order were henceforth to regard themselves as absolutely equal (*manas ki jat sab ek hi pahchanbo*). They were to have the common title 'Singh' indicating that they should be as brave as lions. The Guru required them to be *kritnash* and forget all their former professional affiliations, determining their place in the social hierarchy; to be *kul nash* or have no family ties; to be *dharm nash* or free of their former creeds; and to be *karm nash* or liberated from all rituals except those of their new faith.⁷ These five baptized persons were assumed to have acquired extraordinary holy powers. As the Guru is believed to have declared:

Panchon me nit bartat main hun

Panch milan so piran pir

(When the five meet they are the holiest of the holy)⁸

These holy five then administered *amrit* to the Guru himself, making Gobind Rai a 'Singh'. The Singhs were expected to abide by the *Khalsa Rahit Nama* or the rules of the Khalsa. This would require them to wear the *panj kakke* (five Ks) – *kesh* (unshorn hair), *kanghi* (a comb to keep it clean), *kachh* (knee length breeches denoting military preparedness), *karha* (a steel bracelet) and a *kirpan* or sword. They were to shun tobacco and meat if the animal's blood had been spilt before its death, and intimate contact with Muslim women.

The adoption of this sort of a military code has been interpreted by experts like McLeod as an intrusion of Jat military ideals in the social system of the Sikhs.⁹ The emphasis on physical fitness had not been new. Khushwant Singh has written about Guru Angad's exhortation to his followers to the Sikhs to take part in physical exercises.¹⁰ Irfan Habib has written about the influx of a large number of Jats among during the days of Guru Arjan chiefly as a means of social upliftment. Irfan Habib has established through his researches into the contemporary local literature that Jats started entering India in scores through the Sindh and Multan route between the seventh and the eleventh centuries in search of fodder for their cattle. They had initially been nomadic graziers. The rich soil of Punjab induced them to invest some of their capital acquired through the sale of

cattle products in creating facilities of irrigation and settle down as agriculturists.¹¹ However, they found it difficult to find a place of honour in the hierarchical social system of the Hindus. Guru Nanak's liberal ideals allowed them to penetrate the social system on a footing of equality. While the Gurus admitted them into the ranks of their 'sis' or disciples they too began to influence the congregation with their military values. Faced with the agrarian exactions of the Rajput potentates employed by the Mughals, they rallied around the Gurus even for their temporal concerns.¹² Guru Arjan's martyrdom in the hands of Mughal officials prompted Guru Hargobind to gird up his loins with two swords (*piri* and *miri*) and train up the Sikhs as a militant community. Yet another martyrdom in the family pushed the Sikhs even further into militancy. Guru Gobind's creation of the Khalsa was a culmination of this process going on for several centuries. P.H.M. van den Dungen has attributed the growth of the Sikh ideology to the egalitarian influence of Islam on the spiritual thinking of this border province. It was this influence which made it possible for the Jats 'to obliterate the traditional status claims of the Rajputs' in the central plains.¹³

But this was not accepted by all Sikhs and many continued as *sahajdharis* instead of embracing the *panj kakke* as enjoined upon by the tenth Guru. The abolition of caste had also not been to the liking of higher castes like the Brahmins and the Khatri and many of them continued with their old ways. Many called themselves Sikhs but when it came to interdining or intermarriage, they continued to cling to their earlier customs.¹⁴ Even *keshadharis* would not agree to let the *mazhabis* (dalit Sikhs) share food in a *langar*. There were also severe restrictions regarding entry into certain Gurdwaras. The Darbar Sahib of Amritsar was closed to them. There were many such instances of Mazhabi Sikhs being discriminated against.¹⁵ Nor was the Khalsa able to get rid of the superstitions and prejudices handed down to them by their Hindu ancestors like beliefs in astrologers, charms and amulets. The *Guru Granth Sahib* was worshipped by them with as much ceremony and ritualism as was the custom with the worshipping of Hindu gods and goddesses.¹⁶

Enthusiasm for the Khalsa symbols waxed with the splendour of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's reign. Even Hindus started wearing the symbols of the Sikhs in order to remain in the good books of the Khalsa which wielded a great influence on matters concerning the state. Such opportunists turned away from the observation of the Khalsa

discipline with the defeat of 1849 and there was a fear that Hinduism would engulf the Khalsa like a 'boa constrictor of Indian forests'.¹⁷ As late as 1881 the census reported:

The precepts which forbid the Sikh to venerate Brahmins or to associate himself with Hindu worship are entirely neglected, and in the matter of worship of local saints and deities and of the employment of and reverence for Brahmins there is little, while in current superstitions and superstitious practices there is no difference between the Sikh villager and his Hindu brother.¹⁸

The Khalsa, however, found a patron from an unexpected quarter with the outbreak of what was contemptuously called the *purbiah* rebellion¹⁹ by the people of Punjab in 1857. Although experienced military commanders like Sir Henry Lawrence had recommended the formation of a British regiment out of the fallen Khalsa army as early as 1846, his brother John Lawrence was nervous to raise large bodies of Sikhs. Even if Sikhs were recruited, he preferred to keep them mixed up with Mohammedans and hillmen.²⁰ Betrayed by their erstwhile recruits from the North-West Provinces and Awadh in the Bengal Army, the British thought of cashing on the Sikh distrust of the *purbiahs*. Max Arthur Macauliffe made clever use of the Guru Tegh Bahadur myth to turn the wrath of the Sikhs for the martyrdom of their Guru in the Chandni Chowk of Delhi through the machinations of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. The Guru in his dying statement had prophesied the plunder and destruction of the Mughal capital of Delhi in the hands of the Khalsa at some future date. The British persuaded the Sikhs that the appointed hour had come and could use the full blast of their wrath against the Mughals to retrieve their position against the sepoys of the Bengal Army in Delhi. The recovery of Delhi turned the tide of the struggle in favour of the British.²¹ Brigadier Hodson had raised his famous Hodson's Horse out of the disbanded *ghorcharahs* of the old Durbar army. Other irregular forces were soon to follow. Even Mazhabi Sikhs were organized into a band of Pioneers for construction and engineering works.²² Henceforth the British made the Sikhs the mainstay of their armed forces in India. They were also determined that the Khalsa should never merge its distinct identity with other northern Indian races. They wanted no commingling of the Khalsa with their Hindu counterparts to avoid all chances of their new recruits being wooed away from them. Hence the recruiting agencies for armed forces in the Punjab insisted on recruiting only those Sikhs who wore the symbols of the Khalsa. This

resulted in a renewed stress on the observance of Khalsa rites and the wearing of the Khalsa symbols.²³ As late as 1911 David Petrie, Assistant Director of Criminal Intelligence reported to his boss about the encouragement offered to the armed forces for remaining loyal to Khalsa discipline:

The policy pursued in the Indian Army has been directed, and rightly directed, to the maintenance of the Sikh faith in its pristine purity, for the reason that any falling off from orthodoxy not only detracts from the fighting value of the Sikh soldier, but inevitably tends at the same time to affect adversely his whole attitude to the British power. . . . At the present time one of the principal agencies for the preservation of the Sikh religion has been the practice of military officers commanding Sikh regiments to send Sikh recruits to receive baptism according to the rites prescribed by Guru Govind Singh. Sikh soldiers, too, are required to adhere rigidly to Sikh customs and ceremonial and every endeavour has been made to preserve them from the contagion of idolatry. Sikhs in the Indian Army have been studiously 'nationalised' or encouraged to regard themselves as a totally distinct and separate nation; their national pride has been fostered by every available means and the *Granth Sahib* or Sikh scriptures are saluted by British officers of Sikh regiments.²⁴

The advent of British rule in the Punjab, however, threatened Sikhism with danger from another quarter. This was from the establishment of Christian missions in the Punjab for their proselytising activities. The first Christian mission in the Punjab started working from Ludhiana as early as 1839. The victory of British arms in the first Anglo-Sikh war seemed to have emboldened them and missions were opened in Jalandhar. Annexation of the Punjab in 1849 saw the missionaries open branches in Lahore. The American Presbyterian mission was followed by the Church Missionary Society, the Salvation Army, the Methodists, the Episcopalians, the Church of Scotland and other Roman Catholic organizations. State patronage enabled them to advance by rapid strides. Khushwant Singh mentions a meeting in Lahore on 19 February 1852 where all prominent British officers like Henry and John Lawrence, Robert Montgomery, Donald McLeod, Herbert Edwardes, Reynell Taylor, Robert Cust, Arthur Roberts, William Martin and C.R. Saunders spoke of their commitment to the spread of Christianity in the newly annexed province.²⁵ The missionaries took a very prominent role in the spread of English education. English education was soon understood to be the key to the lower rungs of government jobs which had been thrown open

to the natives of the country. It also allowed the educated a passport to high administrative and official circles and soon became a symbol of high status in society. However, as Rajiv Kapur had remarked, it carried with it 'the danger of conversion'.²⁶ The *zenana* missions directly targeted the homes of the Punjabis. Missionaries had their special appeal for the low castes who looked to conversion to the religion of the ruling class as a means of social elevation. But sometimes young members of aristocratic families too were impressed by their preachings. The conversion of the boy Dulip Singh, the scion of Maharajah Ranjit Singh's line in 1853, was one such glaring instance; that of Kanwar Harnam Singh, the heir apparent to the Sikh Princely State of Kapurthala was another.²⁷

Yet another source of worry were the attacks from militant neo-Hindus like the Brahmos and the Aryas. During the early days of British rule in the Punjab English literates from the province were few. The lower rungs of the bureaucracy were therefore filled up by civil servants from the lower provinces. This saw the influx of a large number of Bengalis to this province. The Brahmoism preached by Raja Rammohun Roy in Bengal came to Punjab in their train. The Brahmos soon earned a reputation for their liberalism and progressive religious views. 'To belong to the Brahmo Samaj or to rank among its sympathisers,' as Bhagat Lakshman Singh remarked, 'was to belong to the intellectual aristocracy of Lahore.'²⁸ Its President Babu Navin Chandra Rai was able to attract many bright young men of Lahore to its campaign against superstitions and idolatrous practices. However, the tolerant attitude of Brahmos towards Christianity could not satisfy the Punjabi quest for a reformist Hindu ideology which would be able to stem the advancing tide of Christianity in the Punjab.

The Arya Samaj movement which had its origins in Rajkot, Gujarat reached Punjab when Swami Dayanand Saraswati came to Lahore on 19 April 1877. Dayanand preached a purified and revived form of traditional Hinduism in the same aggressive manner which the Christian missionaries had adopted. The Arya Samajists resorted to street corner meetings exactly as the missionaries had been doing. The *Shuddhi* (purification) movement started by them was found by the reformist and educated Hindus to be the appropriate answer to the erosion of converts to proselytising religions like Islam and Christianity from the ranks of the Hindus. On the intellectual front the Sikhs initially found many things in common with the Arya Samajists. Kenneth Jones pointed out the common ground shared

by the Arya Samajists and the Sikhs regarding their opposition to idolatry, caste and the evils of priestly dominance.²⁹ They ignored Dayanand's denunciation of Guru Nanak's want of knowledge in the Vedas in his book *Satyarth Prakash*. Those who wanted to cooperate with Dayanand's Anglo-Vedic College movement for the spread of modern scientific education, termed the 'College Party', among Sikhs attributed Dayanand's criticisms of the Gurus to his lack of familiarity with Gurmukhi and tried to gloss them over.³⁰ Bhai Jawahir Singh and Ditt Singh Gyani cooperated with the Arya Samajists in the spread of education and purification of low castes and claiming back of converts from Islam and Christianity. Bhai Jawahir Singh accompanied Swami Dayanand during his tour of the Punjab. He also served as Vice-President of the Paropkarini Sabha from 1878 to 1883. He also lent his services as Secretary of the Lahore Arya Samaj from its inception and was Secretary of the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic College Fund Collection Committee. Bhai Ditt Singh Gyani, Bhai Maya Singh and Bhagat Lakshman Singh had also worked with the Arya Samaj. In 1885 the Rawalpindi Arya Samaj received public assistance from the local Singh Sabha in an attempt to purify a Muslim convert. During 1893-4 the Singh Sabha of Gujranwala joined with the local Arya Samaj to sponsor *shuddhis*.³¹

By 1885 the Aryas began to criticize contemporary Sikhism for the same evils for which they had earlier assailed Hinduism. Sikhs were criticized for worshipping the *Granth* in the same manner that the Hindus worshipped their idols. Pandit Guru Dutt chose the eleventh anniversary of the foundation of the Lahore Samaj (1888) to attack the Sikhs. In 1889 was published Radha Kishen's *Granthophobia* containing a highly critical view of Sikhism. Progressive Sikhs like Bhai Jawahir Singh, Bhai Ditt Singh Gyani and Bhagat Lakshman Singh were quite disillusioned with the Arya Samaj movement and they broke with the Aryas for good.³²

Competition developed between the Sikhs and the Arya Samajists when the latter decided to elevate the status of two hundred Sikh outcastes through *shuddhi* in 1896. In 1900 the Rahtias, a lowly group of Sikh weavers, sought purification and upliftment through *shuddhi*. Leading figures among these Rahtias like Nagina Singh had acquired literacy and secured government employment. Nagina Singh was working as an accountant. They claimed equal rights to dine with other Sikhs and marry into their families. They also sought the right of admission into the Darbar Sahib of the Golden Temple from

which they were debarred. As Bhagat Lakshman Singh has recounted the incident in his autobiography – ‘If we could assure them that the Sikhs would intermarry and interdine with them they would not even dream of going out of the Sikh fold. The demand was only in keeping with the promise made at the time of *pahul* (baptismal) ceremony which was honoured more by its breach than by its observance.’

Eminent Sikhs persuaded the Rahitias that their grievances would be addressed gradually with the progress of reform in conservative Sikh practices. Access to the Darbar Sahib, which they demanded was not controlled by reformist Sikhs as access to the temple of Banaras could not be guaranteed by the Arya Samajists.³³ The Rahitias were, however, adamant. They participated in a public shaving of their hair in the Wachhowali Arya Samaj at Lahore on 3 June 1900 in front of a large gathering. This completed the break of the Sikhs and the Aryas.³⁴

By the 1870s the Sikhs had realized the necessity of having their own associations for the promotion of learning and literature in their community. As Principal Teja Singh put it succinctly, the most important task that lay in front of Sikh reformers was that of ‘deHinduising them’.³⁵ They were to go back to the original Sikh traditions, revive and resuscitate them and then preach them to the masses. This initiative came from the aristocrat Sikhs. Sardar Bikram Singh of Kapurthala raj family and Bikram Singh, the ruler of Faridkot contacted quite a few learned and public spirited men and held meetings in Amritsar and Lahore. These sporadic meetings led to the birth of the Amritsar Singh Sabha in 1873. It counted only the aristocracy mentioned by Sir Lepel Griffin in his Punjab chiefs among its members. Thakur Singh Sandhanwalia, an agnate kin of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, was President and Gyani Gyan Singh was the Secretary. They persuaded the Lieutenant Governor Sir Charles Aitchison to found the Aitchison College, Lahore for educating the chiefs. The vehemently loyalist tone of their farewell message during Lord Ripon’s departure from India left no doubt about their pro-British leanings.³⁶

Ordinary middle class men like Prof. Gurumukh Singh, who had started his career in the kitchen of the Maharaja of Kapurthala and qualified for teaching in a college with a stipend from the Maharaja, founded their own Singh Sabha in Lahore in 1879. Bhai Gurumukh Singh had used his influence to start the teaching of Punjabi in Oriental College, Lahore. Their aims were to spread literacy among the Sikhs, to promote the publication of Sikh literature, to promote

the study of modern knowledge through the medium of Punjabi and to create awareness among the Sikh regiments. The Sikh troops who derived moral support from the Singh Sabhas and a boost for their discipline and martial spirit, generously compensated the Singh Sabhas financially in their turn. Ideologically too, they had tied themselves up with the respective sabhas of their own locality.³⁷ Bhai Gurumukh Singh received Bhai Ditt Singh, a Mazhabi, or Bhai Jawahir Singh, a railway clerk, with open arms when they broke up with the Aryas in November 1888.

The loyalist nature of the Lahore Sabha was unmistakable from the very beginning. The Lahore Branch was committed to secure the cooperation of highly placed Englishmen and associate themselves with the educational programme of the Sikhs.³⁸ Persons hostile to the government were excluded from its membership. The patronage of the government behind the fostering of the distinct identity of the Sikhs was acknowledged in glowing terms in the pages of the Singh Sabha organ *Khalsa Akhbar* in 1899:

The Sikhs were subjected to severe trials and tortures under the Mughals. Even during the Sikh rule, no special attention was paid to the upliftment of the *Panth*. Maharaja Ranjit Singh made no special distinction between the Hindus, the Muslims and the Sikhs, while granting favours. In fact the Muslims and the Hindus were more benefitted by his rule. The Guru (Teg Bahadur) truly predicted the advent of British rule, which has showered innumerable blessings on us and has recognised the worth of the Khalsa.³⁹

It is remarkable that it is with the help of the Lahore Sabha that census could be conducted in 1881.⁴⁰ In the same year the Lahore Sabha too, invited the Lt. Governor, Sir Robert Egerton, to be their patron. Even the Viceroy, Lord Lansdowne, was persuaded by the Lt. Governor to lend them his support.⁴¹

There was an attempt to merge the two Sabhas in 1883. But the Lahore group was unable to tolerate the domination of Baba Khem Singh Bedi of the Amritsar group. Baba Khem Singh Bedi's use of a cushion in front of the *Guru Granth Sahib* in the Golden Temple, by virtue of his descent from the caste to which Guru Nanak belonged, was resented by the 'Young Turks' as an act of disrespect to the *Granth*. Yet more serious was their patronage of Avtar Singh Vahiri's pro-Hindu propaganda literature *Khalsa Sudhar Taru* and the larger work *Khalsa Dharam Shastar*, *Gur Darshan Shastar* and Bhai Gurumukh Singh had a difficult time countering this literary propaganda.⁴² They clashed over the question of admission of Mazhabi

Sikhs to Gurdwaras. Many of the Mazhabi Sikhs had no right to enter the Darbar Sahib. The Amritsar group would admit them only during some specified hours. This was unacceptable to the Lahore group and a clash ensued.⁴²

The death of old stalwarts like Bhai Gurumukh Singh (24 November 1898), and Bhai Ditt Singh (17 June 1901) brought a cease-fire among the Lahore and Amritsar groups and cleared the deck for the foundation of a central controlling agency to coordinate the actions of the Singh Sabhas located in various places all over the country. This was the Chief Khalsa Diwan, founded at Amritsar in 1902 and of which the first Secretary was Sardar Sundar Singh Majithia and the first President Bhai Arjan Singh of Bhagrian, Ludhiana. The Diwan was to work for the promotion of education and reform in the Sikh community. For that it set up an *upadeshak vidyalaya* or school for preparing competent preachers, which was to impart instructions to a large body of itinerant preachers. Through these *upadeshaks* the Chief Khalsa Diwan wielded an extraordinary influence in the Sikh community. The Sikh regiments in the army were regularly visited by these *upadeshaks* to ensure their support for the British. Their most important function was to keep the Sikhs separate from the Hindus and to 'keep their religion pure from the thralldom and grossness of Hinduism and its priesthood'.⁴⁴

Young Sikhs like Bhagat Lakshman Singh, Jawahir Singh and Ditt Singh had since long been arguing for a distinctly Sikh institution where the Sikh mind could be nurtured in the Sikh way. They wanted an educational institution which should project only Sikh aspirations and contribute to the carving out of a new Sikh identity. Just as the Muslims had their Aligarh Muslim College and the Arya Samaj had its DAV Colleges, the Sikhs wanted a central college to oversee the Khalsa schools in the outlying districts. Both the Amritsar and the Lahore groups cooperated in persuading Sikhs to contribute one-tenth of their incomes (*dasvandh*) and a *bukmnama* was issued from the Golden Temple to that effect. Rs. 5.5 lakh were collected to begin with, of which Rs. 4.5 lakh came from the chiefs and the people of the Sikh States. There were some differences as to where the institution should be located. The D.P.I. Sir William Bell and the Lieutenant Governor Sir Mackworth Young were persuaded by radicals like Bhagat Lakshman Singh to have it in Lahore. But many Sikhs probably feared interference from the authorities if the college was located close to the seat of Government. Thus ultimately the Amritsar

members won their way.⁴⁵ These were the days when the Sikhs could count the British among their patrons. The Viceroy, Lord Lansdowne during his visit to Patiala on 23 October 1890, had spoken wholeheartedly in favour of the Sikh educational movement. While laying down the foundation of the college in Amritsar on 5 March 1892, the Lieutenant Governor, Sir James Lyall acknowledged the British Government's debt of gratitude to the Sikhs 'for their large share of the credit for victories won by Punjabi Regiments in Hindustan and in China, and afterwards in Abyssinia, Egypt and Afghanistan'.⁴⁶

Bhai Khem Singh Bedi helped the foundation of many Khalsa schools in the north-west of Punjab. Bhagat Lakshman Singh's efforts towards establishing a network of Khalsa schools and Singh Sabhas in Rawalpindi also deserve mention. Sikh schools were also established in Amritsar, Lahore, Ferozepore and some villages like Gharjakh, Chuhr Chak and Bhasaur. The Khalsa schools were an effective means, much more effective than even Singh Sabhas, of imparting consciousness among the Sikhs about their distinct identity, distinct rights and distinct institutions. The Kanya Mahavidyalaya movement was launched in Ferozepur by Bhai Takht Singh.⁴⁷ Women's magazines like *Punjabi Bhain*, the monthly journal of the Kanya Mahavidyalaya, began circulation. This was the second women's journal which followed after the *Istri Satsang* from Amritsar.⁴⁸

There also started a movement for the publication of books, magazines, tracts and newspapers. The Anjuman-i-Punjab was founded in 1865 for translating English books in Punjabi. The Amritsar Singh Sabha took the initiative in founding a Gurmat Granth Pracharak Sabha under the leadership of Dr. Charan Singh, father of Bhai Vir Singh. They brought out Gyani Gyan Singh's *Panth Prakash* and *Gur Twarikh Gur Khalsa*, Pandit Tara Singh's *Gur Granth Kosh* and *Tirath Sangrah*. In 1877 Punjabi was introduced as a subject in Oriental College, Lahore. In 1882 the Singh Sabha organized a Punjabi Pracharini Sabha to popularize the use of Punjabi. In 1894 the Khalsa Tract Society was organized under Bhai Kaur Singh and under Bhai Vir Singh.⁴⁹ They were assisted by the Sikh Book Club of Peshawar who brought out short cheap volumes on theology and social topics and published 192 items. More than half a million copies of these were distributed. The Panch Khalsa Agency printed 125 items on religious and social topics. In 1908 was established the Khalsa Handbill Society which distributed as many as 20,000 free

copies of publication in rural areas relatively inaccessible to the influence of Singh Sabha newspapers. For the military recruits in the British regiments, Sikh sermons and tales from scriptures were published in a journal *Sikh Sepoy* from the Ferozepur Sikh Recruiting Committee.⁵⁰ The purpose of all these publications was to instil a faith in the Sikh community about their distinct ideals and traditions and bring about a clear demarcation of boundaries through the elimination of non-Sikh elements from the faith.

The annexation of the Punjab by the British had opened up opportunities of employment of Indians in the lower rungs of the British bureaucracy and civil administration. The education system introduced by the British in India aimed at training people for such kind of employment. Some of the government jobs were open for persons with the requisite qualifications. As in other provinces, in Punjab also, the classes who already commanded literacy for business and administrative purpose were better able to take advantage of the new opportunities thrown open by the new dispensation. The trading castes of Hindu Aroras, Khatri and Banias, who were already literate to some extent, were better able to dominate the professions of law and medicine and almost all branches of the civil administration. As the police and the military were always subjected to the civil branches of the administration, the dominant position of the Sikhs and Muslims in the army was not reflected in their influence in the province.⁵¹ As the number of English literates began to rise among the Sikhs they became aware of the favouritism practised by the Hindus who had already occupied the lower rungs of the civil administration. N.G. Barrier has written how five district offices were dominated by the Chopra sub-caste of the Khatri.⁵² Complaints against Hindu domination and discrimination against other communities had also reached the government. In 1886 the government appointed the Aitchison Commission to gather information about public services. In 1887 Punjab government invited the opinion of district officers on such communal discriminations. The reports so alarmed the Lieutenant Governor, Sir James Lyall, that he sent a secret circular instructing officers to give preference to non-Hindus till the communal balance was restored in the administration. Although the administration was chiefly concerned with the Muslims, the Sikhs too began to benefit from this new tilt in the administrative policy.⁵³ The close of the nineteenth century also brought competition among educated

Sikhs and Hindus over admission to professional courses like law and medicine. The Sikhs caught up with the Hindus in literacy only in 1911 when the percentage of literates among Sikhs reached 10.6 per cent. Over 15 per cent of them were in government employment, although the percentage of their representation in civil service was less than 8 per cent.⁵⁴

Competition also developed over elections to municipal committees when the elective principle began to be enlarged after 1883. Initially members came from among officials, who were nominated by the government and presided over by a civil servant. In large towns like Amritsar and Lahore one-third of the members were allowed to be elected. But franchise was confined only to a few wealthy aristocrats and traders, who paid a very high property tax. But since the local self-government reforms of Lord Ripon, the new committees began to have elected majorities. The new committees commanded much greater power and patronage as local improvements, hiring of employees and the establishment of local educational institutions had been brought under their jurisdiction. The first elections took place in 1883-4. As most villages were dominated by single castes they elected their own headmen. Zaildars were similarly elected from Zail constituencies. These committees were used by the dominant community as 'potential tools for advancing the interests of their own communities'.⁵⁵

In the urban areas, elections were used as testing grounds for the trial of the strength of the different communities. Election days were virtually reduced to 'days of combat'. There were instances of candidates trying to force the hands of voters and buying votes through the influence of moneylenders on their debtors. Opponents were falsely implicated in cases of adoption of unlawful means by sending representatives from door to door to collect signatures in false allegations. Cases of hiring of criminals to guard booths to prevent opponents from casting their votes were not unheard of. Ballots were often forged and registration papers tampered with. The high property qualifications necessary to secure franchise ensured the victory of Hindus in the central and eastern towns. Of the total of 96 members who got elected 72 were Hindus along with one lone Sikh. They later used their majority to exclude Muslims from use of wells in certain localities by raising walls in an illegal manner or imposing ban on beef to inconvenience non-Hindu consumers. The

elective principle was found unworkable after some time and the government once again decided to introduce nomination after 1886.⁵⁶

In spite of all these frictions Sikhs and Hindus remained close and indistinguishable from each other and even at the close of the century a report in *The Tribune* (27 August 1892) wrote of their shared beliefs and customs:

English writers, even Anglo-Indian editors, who might know better always make a grave mistake when speaking of the Sikhs. They seem to think that Sikhs are a people totally different from the Hindus, with whom they have little in common. While the fact is that practically what differentiates a Sikh from a Hindu is his long hair and unclipped beard. In many families one brother may be a Hindu and the other Sikh. As to religious belief, there is very little difference between the average Hindu and the Sikh in Punjab, the Guru and the Granth being held in equal reverence by both.⁵⁷

Matters reached an interesting twist in 1897 when Dyal Singh Majithia died in September leaving his wealth to the Dyal Singh Trust. His wife appealed against it insisting that such a Trust could not be formed as Dyal Singh was a Sikh and not a Hindu. The declaration by the Punjab High Court that Sikhs were Hindus set off a great debate. Letters appeared in the *Lahore Tribune* addressing the question 'Are Sikhs Hindus?' Bhai Jagat Singh, a Sikh member of the Arya Samaj, in his tract *Risala Sat Prakash* tried to prove that Sikhism was merely an earlier version of the Arya Samaj. Lala Thakar Das published a tract from Hoshiarpur (Khatri Press) in 1899 with the title *Sikh Hindu Hain*. Bawa Narain Singh echoed him from Amritsar answering again *Sikh Hindu Hain*. Then came the retort of Sardar Kahan Singh, the Chief Minister of Nabha, *Hum Hindu Nahin* (Amritsar Khalsa Press, 1899).⁵⁸

Such debates and self-definitions continued well into the twentieth century until the importance of enumeration into groups and their commensurate influence on the political status of a community began to be grasped by the people of the province. As the Sikhs began to be aware of the game that numbers could play they became more anxious to raise boundaries across their 'over-lapping identities' and establish themselves as a distinct religious entity. The ugly reality of being a minority in the country and even in the province which they had once dominated raised its head with all its painful implications. Much of the subsequent political behaviour of the Sikhs can be explained in terms of this insecurity.

Notes

1. J.S. Grewal and Irfan Habib (eds.), *Sikh History from Persian Sources: Translations of Major Texts* (Tulika, New Delhi, 2001), pp. 56-7.
2. Gurinder Singh Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture* (Oxford University Press, New York), 2001.
3. Joseph Davey Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs: From the Origin of the Nation to the Battles of the Sutlej* (Rupa, New Delhi, 2002; 1st pub. 1849), p. 69.
4. Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, vol. 1: 1469-1839 (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999; 1st pub. 1963), p. 79.
5. J.S.Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab* (Cambridge University Press in association with Orient Longman, Bombay, 1990), p. 77.
6. Guru Ram Das's son Prithichand did not approve of the succession of Guru Arjan and led a rival group of believers who were disparagingly called 'minas'. Similarly, Rama Rai, who had been sent to the court of Aurangzeb to attend his summons by Guru Har Rai and who distorted some *slokas* of the *Adi Granth* to avoid the wrath of the Emperor was excluded from succession in favour of the boy Guru Harkishen. Rama Rai complained to the Emperor and formed his own dissident group which could never secure the allegiance of the mainstream Sikhs.
7. Cunningham, op. cit., p. 69.
8. Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, vol. I, op. cit., p. 80.
9. W.H. McLeod, *The Evolution of the Sikh Community* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1975).
10. Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, vol. I, op. cit., p. 49.
11. Irfan Habib in the *Proceedings of the Punjab History Conference 1971* (Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1972), pp. 49-54.
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CHAPTER 2

Sikh Struggle for Political Representation

PUNJAB, WHICH WAS later to be 'the cornerstone' in Jinnah's scheme of Pakistan, was marked by its isolation from mainstream Muslim politics till almost the eve of the Partition. The British had a special interest in maintaining tranquillity in the province since it had served as a major recruiting centre for its army since 1857. Having vanquished the Sikh army in 1849 with the connivance of the militiamen of Awadh and the North-West Provinces, the imperial rulers could successfully direct the wrath of the Sikhs against the *purbias* (easterners) during their revolt against the British in 1857.¹ Punjab thereafter became the main pillar in the defence of the British Empire in India and even abroad during the two world wars and a long line of paternalist administrators in the Punjab province beginning with the Lawrence brothers and ending with Sir Evan Jenkins who tried to maintain stability and unity of the province till communal politics pulled it apart.

The Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1901

It was mainly with a view to maintaining rural stability that Lord Curzon decided to see through the Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1901, which made the ownership and lease of agricultural land the exclusive preserve of certain 'agriculturist tribes' mentioned in a schedule appended to the Act. The Act was aimed against the intrusion of moneylenders and trades people into landowning in the countryside and the resulting dislocation in the rural agrarian structure.² The Act had no overt intention to favour any particular religious community but its chief beneficiaries were the Muslim landlords, ruling chiefs and agriculturist tribes of West Punjab, 75 per cent of whom had mortgaged their land to the Hindu moneylenders and were facing expropriation once the mortgages were foreclosed.³ Nonetheless, the

Hindu and Sikh peasant proprietors of central and south-east Punjab were also immensely helped by this piece of legislation.

The immediate effect of the Land Alienation Act was to underwrite the growing chasm between the rural and urban areas in the Punjab. This rural-urban divide had been a distinct phenomenon in the history of the province since the 1870s, when the urban based educated people in all the important religious communities launched their own associations⁴ and started organizing the members of their own communities around these associations. The approach of all these associations was reformist and aggressive as they tried to purge their faith of all syncretist practices which stood in the way of a distinct assertion of their identities.

Impact of Census Operations

This communitarian approach gained in momentum as the bargaining advantages of a group or caste or community basis were driven home to the urban educated by the thrust of the government census in the 1870s. 'Census created a concept of a religious community' wrote Kenneth Jones, 'more detailed and more exact than any existing prior to the creation of the Census'.⁵ The British bureaucrats tried to control their subjects in India through enumeration. Through their enumerative strategies they tried to reduce people and resources as countable abstractions. Such enumeration often involved quantification on the basis of some previously determined classification. By using difference in religious practice as the basis of enumeration, British census operations created a new sense of 'category identity' in India. Religious communities were mapped for the first time along with their geographical distribution and their majority or minority status. This was something novel and unheard of both in India and in the country of the rulers themselves. Thus as Arjun Appadurai could perceive, indigenous ideas of difference were transformed into 'a deadly politics of community'.⁶ It created new strategies for mobility, status politics and electoral struggle in India. Contact with the techniques of the modern nation state, especially those having to do with numbers, helped ignite communitarian and nationalist identities. It gave rise to a new 'cultural and historical tinder'⁷ which burned with a new intensity as it got linked up with the game of numbers.

The first Sikh Guru was born a Hindu and until the closing years of the nineteenth century, Sikhism had not felt the necessity to develop

into a 'tidy cultural construct'.⁸ 1699 marked a turning point in the history of Sikhism when Guru Gobind Singh organized his followers into the Dal Khalsa and enjoined upon his followers to adopt the *panj kakke* of the Jats as the symbols of a true Sikh – *kangī, karha, kachha, kirpan* and *kesh*.⁹ However, even long after this date, these symbols were not strictly observed by all. In spite of the observance of the *khande ki pahul* and *langar* (eating together in a common kitchen and drinking water stirred by a sword), Sikhism could not absolutely do away with casteism and many of the followers of the Khalsa could not give up the traditional faith in idols. Some had developed a reverence for the belief system of Guru Nanak but continued to follow Hindu customs and rituals and were known as the *sahajdharis*. These *sahajdharis* were often indistinguishable from ordinary Hindus.¹⁰ Just as Buddhism and Jainism were regarded as two anti-ritualistic, protestant cults of Hinduism, Sikhism had also evolved as a reformist cult, which had come into being for the protection of hapless peasants against the predatory onslaughts of Mughal rule. The execution of two of the Sikh Gurus – that of Guru Arjan Dev in 1606 and of Guru Tegh Bahadur in 1675 added substance to this belief. Sikhism as a heroic offshoot of Hinduism had its other in the Mughal central state.¹¹ Hinduism through its curious powers of accommodation and domination¹² had over centuries engulfed Buddhism and Jainism back in its huge fold, according Buddha and Mahavira the place of two great and revered incarnations in its long list of godheads.¹³ For Sikhism its recent origins and the intervention of the British rulers acted as a badge of protection.

During the first Punjab census of 1855 the Sikhs had not been isolated from the Hindus. But in the second Punjab census of 1868 Sikhs were placed into a separate category. This was the beginning of an official recognition of Sikhism as a distinct religion.¹⁴ The need to define and patrol the boundaries of their communities was thus brought home to both the communities. Benedict Anderson has demonstrated how external objects like a map or a museum can create a feeling of 'community' among people hitherto unaware of such close links binding them together and also marking them out from the others.¹⁵ The decennial census figures for 1881 placed the Sikhs at only 8.22 per cent of Punjab's population as against 43.84 per cent Hindus and 47.56 per cent Muslims. Publicization of the relative strength of communities gave rise to a realization by the Sikhs that

they were a minority community in danger.¹⁶ Singh Sabhas were particularly concerned about this communitarian identity and tried to inculcate in members of the Khalsa Panth a consciousness of their identity and enforce the external symbols of that identity with a renewed vigour. All reformers acted in the name of 'tradition', 'but in reality' as Talbot recognized, 'they blended it with modernity in their invention of the past'.¹⁷ Brian Caton has also pointed to the indirect encouragement of the British Government to the Singh Sabha's attempt to enforce the use of the symbols of the Khalsa Panth among the Sikhs. While the British government had crushed the Nirankaris and the Namdharis, in the case of the Singh Sabha movement their attitude was much more positive and even patronizing.¹⁸

The Tat Khalsa

Conflicts on the religious plane merely served to conceal the competition that had been going on between the young and educated sections of the two communities for a greater share of government employment. The Lahore College had turned out its first graduate in 1870. Punjab was given a university of its own in 1882. The monopoly of power over the Sikhs by the loyalist, landed gentry dominated the Chief Khalsa Diwan (founded in 1902) and was challenged by the newly emerging class of professional and educated men calling themselves the Tat Khalsa (true Khalsa). These people wanted the realization of the ideals of a casteless society which had been conceived by the tenth Guru but which had so far eluded the Sikhs in practice. They wanted to swell the number of Sikhs by an indiscriminate admission of low caste Ramdasias and Mazhabis. The close connection between numbers and political power as revealed in the Reform schemes made them much more protective about their religious boundaries. Through the Chief Khalsa Diwan they voiced their demand for a greater share in Government service, but they were careful to base their demands on the loyal service rendered by the Sikhs to the British since 1849 and not on their numbers.

Initially the more radical section of the Sikhs made an attempt to use the Khalsa College Amritsar (founded in 1892) as a rallying point for the rising aspirations of the middle class Sikhs, whom David Petrie, the Assistant Director of Criminal Intelligence, referred to as the Tat Khalsa or the Neo-Sikhs in his secret and confidential report. Bhai Gurumukh Singh, a Professor in the Oriental College at Lahore, and

Bhai Ditt Singh of the North-Western Railway Manager's office had taken an initiative in the foundation of this college. The chiefs and people of the various Sikh States had contributed generously for its foundation. The college was intended to nurture young Sikh minds in a typical Sikh way. But after the death of Gurmukh Singh, the control of the college passed to Sardar Sundar Singh Majithia of the Amritsar Singh Sabha, which grew into the Chief Khalsa Diwan. In 1904 the college received Rs. 13 or 14 lakh more as donations from the Sikh States and 50,000 from the government to tide over the financial crisis that had gripped it. The government was worried over the way the students went into raptures receiving the Congress politician Gokhale during the Canal Colonies Agitation in 1907. It therefore set up a new council under rigid government control, consisting mostly of government officials like the Commissioner of the Lahore Division, Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar, the Director of Public Instruction, Punjab, the Political Agent, Phulkian States and the Principal of the Khalsa College. The property of the college was vested in a Managing Committee composed of 15 members of whom six were elected by the States, six by British districts and three were government nominees. Of the last three the Lahore Commissioner and the Amritsar Deputy Commissioner were the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman respectively. This provoked a strong reaction among the educated or the neo-Sikhs and the publication of a pamphlet *Ki Khalsa Kalaj Sikhian da hai?* in 1909 authored by Master Sundar Singh of the Khalsa School, Lyallpur, alleging that the Government was trying to undermine the national character of the Khalsa College.¹⁹

The Tat Khalsa tried to circumvent this kind of control by the foundation of the Sikh Educational Conference (launched in Gujranwala in 1908) and a Sikh National Educational Fund to be kept in the custody of the Punjab and Sindh Bank under the management of the Arora Khatri Trilochan Singh, who had formerly been a pleader. The ostensible purpose of these strategies was to attract people under its banner, who would otherwise have steered clear of all associations connected with religion or politics. The inspiration for the foundation of the Educational Conference came from the Bengali and Marathi leaders, who happened to meet Tikka Sahib of Nabha in the Viceroy's Council, where they were all members. Professor Jodh Singh of the Khalsa College argued in favour of opening Gurmukhi schools for imparting instruction on national lines during the Amritsar meeting of the Conference in 1910. The

pamphlet *Sikh Vidya ute Lekh* circulated in the Conference spoke in favour of instruction on Sikh values.²⁰ With the succession of Tikka Sahib in the Viceroy's Council by Sardar Sundar Singh Majithia in 1909, Tikka Sahib tried to launch a rival outfit of his own in Bhagrian in Ludhiana. This was the Central Khalsa Diwan, which had Bhai Arjan Singh as its President. Its office was later shifted to Patiala.²¹

The Tat Khalsa also wanted to assume control of the Golden Temple, Amritsar, which had become an instrument in the hands of the government for trying to influence the Sikh mind in favour of all decisions emanating from the Government. Immediately after the annexation of the province in 1849, the British Government appointed a judicial officer to deal with all cases related to the temple. In 1859 a committee of the local Sikh gentry was appointed to deal with disputes regarding the salary of attendants. However, the management of the Golden Temple with its five associated shrines was ultimately vested in the hands of a manager responsible to the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar. Since the eighteenth century all Gurdwara management had been vested with *mahants* and *granthis* of the Udasi sect popularized by Guru Nanak's son Srichand. The Udasis were known for their ascetic temperament and the system worked well for a long time. During Sikh rule they received large land grants and were permitted to name their successors. These lands became very productive through the system of canal irrigation introduced by the British and yielded a rich surplus to the custodians of the Gurdwaras. Some of the *mahants* became corrupt and debauched under the spell of this unexpected prosperity. In 1895 the local gentry of the Lahore district tried ineffectually to bring the Gurdwaras under their control. Reformist newspapers such as the *Khalsa Advocate*, the *Khalsa Samachar* and the *Khalsa Sewak* ardently took up the cause of purging the Gurdwaras of such abuses. Legal procedure was expensive and had little hope of success as the British land settlement records had made the *mahant* the owner of the Gurdwara property. The presence of Hindu idols in the precincts of the Gurdwaras and the continued worship of those idols according to Hindu rituals also came under the criticism of Tat Khalsa reformers. These men indulged in symbolic acts like forcing Arur Singh, the *sarbrah* of the Golden Temple to throw away all Hindu idols from its precincts in 1905 to demonstrate their disapproval of idolatry. Restrictions on the admission of low caste Sikh converts to the Gurdwaras also came under attack from reformers like Bhai Ditt Singh. They founded the *Khalsa Biradri* with

a view to removing caste discrimination. This was imperative as the Arya Samajists had been making rapid strides with their *shuddhi* and *sangathan*. In 1906 under pressure of the radical elements, the Chief Khalsa Diwan passed a resolution recommending the transfer of the management of the Golden Temple to a representative committee. In 1907 the reformers led a deputation of Sikh priests to the Raja of Nabha questioning the conduct of Mahant Arur Singh, the *sarbrah* of the Golden Temple. However, the Government could not afford to dispense with the services of the *mahant*, through whom they exercised their sway on the hearts of the entire community of Sikhs. Through their control of the Gurdwaras, the Government could exercise control on the religious emotions of the Sikhs, which held the key to all political developments in the Sikh community.²²

Agrarian Disturbances of 1907

1907 was also the year of prolonged agrarian disturbances in the Punjab. To cope with the density of population in the central Punjab districts in the province (845 per square mile in Jullunder and 860 in Hoshiarpur according to the Census of 1901) the paternal bureaucrats of Punjab had launched an ambitious programme of canal construction to ease out the congestion since the 1880s.²³ Sikh, Hindu and Muslim zamindars of proven loyalty were chosen from the crowded districts of Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Jullunder, Sialkot and Hoshiarpur. Eighty per cent of the land grants in the Lower Chenab Colony were for small holders practising petty commodity production. These grants averaged from about half to one square (one square being 27 acres). Retired soldiers from UP and Punjab were also provided with grants of one to three squares. However, subsequently the government found selling canal lands to capitalist grantees much more profitable and shares of canal colony lands for small holders began to decline.²⁴

While the construction of the canal system had made it possible to colonize the arid land of the Punjab, the subsequent changes in government policies regarding allotment of canal land and the introduction of the canal water rates had driven the Punjab peasant on the path of war. While in the Lower Chenab Canal Colony the beneficiaries had been given freehold titles by the government, in the colonies which came up later like the lower Jhelum Colony or the Lower Bari Doab Colonies, the government became wiser and

allowed only occupancy rights to the small holders. The Amendment to the Punjab Colonisation of Land Act of 1893 forbade free transfer of land and laid down primogeniture as the only condition of inheritance. All executive decisions in colony lands were placed beyond the jurisdiction of the Courts. The aim of this innovative amendment was a paternalist attempt to arrest the fragmentation of holdings, but to the Punjab cultivator it came in the guise of an intrusion into the prevalent customs related to the holdings of land.²⁵

In November 1906 the government introduced a charge on the use of canal water in the Bari Doab canal area. In 1903 the Irrigation Commission had questioned the meagre water rates in the Sikh districts of Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Lahore (hitherto kept low to ensure the loyalty of the Sikh recruits to the army who came in large numbers from these districts). Lord Curzon, in his zeal for efficiency, decided on an enhancement of 25 per cent. On cash crops like cotton and sugar cane and on vegetable farms bordering on the urban areas the enhancement ran as high as 50 per cent. Since 1902 the Irrigation Department had exhausted all good canal land. The new lands were inferior far in quality from the canal branches. The Chief Engineer tried a programme of redistribution of canal water since 1905. But this programme was vitiated by rampant bribery and corruption.²⁶

Things were made even worse by the rise in labour costs in the wake of scarcity of hands due to the rising incidence of plague. Between 1901 and 1911 bubonic plague alone accounted for one death in four.²⁷ At least 60,000 Punjabis were dying every year from this disease. It coincided with a series of poor harvests and the destruction of the cotton crop, the main cash crop of the canal colonies, by boll worms in 1905-6. The drastic increase in land revenue which coincided with these hardships drove the peasants into the hands of the agitators.²⁸ In 1907 there was a prolonged agitation by Ajit Singh and Lala Lajpat Rai over this issue. The British government resorted to strong arm tactics and deported the leaders to the Andamans. But finally the Bill had to be revoked by Viceroy Minto fearing disloyalty among military personnel.²⁹

Migration Abroad and its Hurdles

Unable to make much headway in their own country, some of the Sikh peasants from the overcrowded central Punjab districts tried to seek their fortunes further afield in the distant pastures of America

and Canada. Initially they were received well because of their hard working habits and readiness to work at lower wages than their white counterparts. But as the inaccessible prairie wastes started blooming through the efforts of these migrant workers, the white labourers woke up to the competition created in the labour market from the presence of these overseas labourers. They pressurized their governments to find out ways and means to exclude these migrants. The government of Canada's insistence from 1910 on a 'continuous passage' for entering the country tried to stop the steady stream of migrants and culminated in the massacre of a large number of migrants at Budge Budge near Calcutta. These migrants had tried to avoid the 'continuous passage' clause by hiring a Japanese ship *Komagata Maru* and sailing straight from Hong Kong. But they had been refused admission in Vancouver and sailed back to Calcutta on the eve of the First World War. The local police and CID suspected them of links with the Ghadarites, who had been trying to organize revolutionaries of all shades and all faiths with German money and arms and were trying to orchestrate a rebellion in the ranks of the military personnel, the students and the labourers in 1914-15. The plans leaked out and the venture collapsed. But the myth of the 'loyal Sikh' was henceforth exploded.³⁰

Self-Government and Representation

Punjab had no experience of self-government till 1897, when a council was constituted for the first time with nine members. All these members were the nominees of the Lieutenant Governor. Thus unlike in other provinces, where municipal elections (which were often a stepping stone to provincial politics) introduced contestations on communal planks, Punjab was not immediately affected by the virus of communalism. Punjab was similarly represented in the Viceroy's Legislative Council by nominated members. The Lieutenant Governor did not have any Executive Council till 1920.³¹

The Morley-Minto reforms of 1909 brought about an increase in the representative element in the Legislative Councils and an extension of their powers elsewhere in the provinces of India. In Punjab it merely raised the number of members of the Lieutenant Governor's Council to thirty of which only one-fifth were to be elected. The Muslims were granted separate electorate in 1909 under the Morley-Minto reforms and all the three elected seats were bagged

by Muslims. Sikh representation in the Council was secured through government nomination.³²

The introduction of communal electorates, however, had added to the worry of the Sikhs and from 1911 the demand for separate electorates for the Sikhs figured prominently among the demands of the Chief Khalsa Diwan. They argued that like the Muslims in other provinces, they too constituted a minority in the Punjab and if the Muslims could have separate electorates, where they were a minority, the Sikhs too were entitled to the same privileges. They also demanded a 30 per cent weightage in the Punjab Council although they constituted a mere 13 per cent of the total population. But this could be granted only at the expense of Hindus and Muslims. Although the Muslims were in the majority in Punjab yet most of them could not meet the property and educational qualifications to get enfranchised. That was how they justified their demand for weightage.³³

Weightage for the Sikhs became more urgent as the Muslims were conceded a jump to a 50 per cent weightage in the Punjab by their main opponents, the Indian National Congress, during a joint session of the All India Muslim League and the Congress in Lucknow presided over by the liberal Muslim League leader, the Raja of Mahmudabad. The Congress had come to appreciate the importance of the Muslims as an influential minority (constituting 21 per cent of the population of the country) since the Morley–Minto reforms admitted separate electorates for them and wanted their support to press for self-government from the British. The Muslim League in its turn was disappointed with the British for various reasons, the most important among which was Italy's invasion of Tripoli and Persia and the attack on Turkey by Christian nations during the Balkan wars. Educated Muslims like Hakim Ajmal Khan, M.A. Ansari, Mazharul Haque, the Brothers Mohammed and Shaukat Ali, Abul Kalam Azad, A. Rasul and Fazlul Haque were all very mortified over the Secretary of State's veto on the upgradation of the Aligarh College to a University. Minor incidents like the demolition of a wash place attached to a mosque at Kanpur by the United Provinces Government merely added fuel to the fire. The Muslim League therefore inclined to the Congress feelers and agreed to have a joint session with the Congress to pressurize the British government into making further progress towards self-government.³⁴

Lala Harkishen Lal and Lala Dhanpat Rai, representing the Punjab in this session protested vehemently and urged the question of

weightage for the Sikhs but were outvoted by others. The Sikhs were totally neglected in the preparatory negotiations leading to the Lucknow Pact as they were neither very active in the Congress at this time nor did they have any political organ of their own.³⁵ The Chief Khalsa Diwan was considered by the Congress to be a subsidiary of the British government and was not invited for consultation.³⁶

League-Congress understanding embodied in the Lucknow Pact came as a surprise to the Sikhs. Sikh newspapers like the *Khalsa Advocate* rightly interpreted it as an outcome of Sikh aloofness from nationalist politics. They felt betrayed that the Morley–Minto reforms had forgotten them. In January 1917 Sardar Sundar Singh Majithia, the Secretary of the Chief Khalsa Diwan addressed a Memorandum to the government of Punjab stressing the loyalty of the Sikhs and their contribution to the British War effort and demanded adequate safeguards for their position and status. The Memorandum demanded separate electorate for the Sikhs in any future scheme of constitutional reform that may be contemplated but this representation should not be based on their numbers but ‘proportionate to the importance, position and services to the community, with due regard to their status before the annexation of the Punjab, their present stake in the country and their past and present services to the Empire’.³⁷ The Punjab Congress leaders called this demand ‘communal’ as it threatened to reduce their own representation. They reiterated the traditional claim of the Hindus in this context that the Sikhs were part of the Hindu community.³⁸

On 20 August 1917 came the historic announcement from Prime Minister Lloyd George and his powerful War Cabinet consisting of such influential figures as Lord Curzon, Lord Milner and Mr. Balfour and was communicated to the House of Commons by the Secretary of State Mr. Montagu that the British government desired ‘the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual devolution of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire’.³⁹ When the Secretary of State Mr. Edwin Montagu visited India during the winter of 1917-18 to ascertain the reactions of Indian politicians, the Punjab Zamindar Central Association, known as the Jat Sikh Association made representations to him. This association represented the rural military interests of the province. About one-third of its members consisted of retired soldiers of long standing. Many of them had actively assisted the government during war time recruitment. They wanted that

instead of facilitating the interests of city-bred politicians, the proposed reforms should benefit the zamindars and peasant proprietors, who had provided a steady stream of combatants to the army. Rural interests also figured importantly in terms of revenue contributions from Punjab. For the British government Punjab counted most for both Punjab revenue and military recruits from Punjab. They thus decided to frame the new reforms with these basic considerations in mind. Thus the stage was set for the coming reforms which ensured the 'overwhelming domination of the landed and military vote in the Punjab electorate'.⁴⁰

The Montagu–Chelmsford reforms which finally came as the Government of India Act of 1919 tilted the balance of power towards the rural areas by assigning more seats in the provincial Legislative Council for the rural areas and much lesser seats to the urban. Altogether 64 members of the Council were to be elected from territorial constituencies and 7 more from special constituencies. The 64 general seats were divided into 20 non-Muslim (7 urban and 13 rural) and 32 Muslim (5 urban and 27 rural) and 12 Sikh (1 urban and 11 rural). The seven special constituencies included four landholders (one for each community plus a separate seat for the Baluch *tumandars*), one for university graduates and two to represent commercial and industrial groups. The Franchise Committee report recommended that rural franchise be lowered to include those who paid Rs. 25 land revenue and the second to include those possessing immovable property to the value of Rs. 4,000. Only 3.4 per cent of the population became eligible to vote. Landholdings were perhaps larger in the rural areas reducing the number of eligible voters.⁴¹ Of the 61 elected seats (among a total of 85) the Sikhs were allotted 8 and 1 seat was to be exclusively reserved for the Sikhs out of the 4 to be elected by a special constituency of landholders. They were thus allowed 15 per cent of the elected seats, a little in excess of the percentage of them in the total population of the province.⁴² Three more Sikhs were nominated to the Council by the Lieutenant Governor in 1920. A Joint Parliamentary Committee further increased Sikh membership of provincial legislative council by two.⁴³

A Representative Political Organization of the Sikhs

However, this fell far short of the expectation of the Sikhs and they made a lot of soul-searching to find out the cause of this setback. Sikh papers like the *Loyal Gazette* and the *Punjab Darpan* began to

suggest that the Sikhs were lagging behind the Hindus and Muslims in the matter of political representation as they had no organized political party of their own to represent their case comparable to the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League.⁴⁴ The necessity to fend for themselves was understood by the Sikhs quite early in the days of the anti-colonial struggle. The Sikhs had mainly been a rural community, the bulk of their income deriving from land. The Punjab provincial branch of the Indian National Congress had become a vehicle of Hindu commercial and industrial interests in which the Sikhs had little concern.⁴⁵ Congress criticism of the Punjab Land Alienation Bill of 1900, which had proposed to stop the entry of non-agricultural interests into land ownership and prevent the transfer of agricultural land to moneylenders and urban investors, did not go down well with the Sikhs. Although the Act was intended to benefit the thriftless martial tribes of north-west Punjab who formed the backbone of the British Indian Army, yet it also protected the Sikh small holder of central Punjab who had some financial transactions with the village *sabukars* with vertical links with some urban based financiers. Congress protest against this pro-agriculturist bill in the Lahore session of the Congress in 1909 by combining with the Arya Samajists therefore ran counter to the prevailing mood among the Sikh rank and file.⁴⁶

What went more against the grain of the Sikhs was the attempt of some Congressmen like Ram Bhaj Dutt Chaudhury to synchronize Congress programmes with those of the Hindu Sabhas coming into being since 1906 in the wake of the anti-partition of Bengal agitation. By the summer of 1908, every district had set up a Hindu Sabha which got affiliated to the Punjab Hindu Sabha founded in 1909 in Lahore to take up the cause of the Punjabi Hindus. In the Lahore session of the AICC in 1909, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya recognized the Sabha as a Congress forum and for quite some time, Hindu Sabhas continued to be held alongside Congress sessions every year with overlapping membership.⁴⁷ Lajpat Rai, who believed himself to be 'first a Hindu and then an Indian'⁴⁸ announced the full programme of the Sabha at the Calcutta session of the Congress (1925). The programme was a 'manifesto of Hindu communalism'⁴⁹ rousing the suspicion of non-Hindus and alienating Sikh sympathy from both the Sabha and its close ally – the Indian National Congress.

In March 1919 a meeting of the Sikh intelligentsia was convened at Lahore and presided over by Sardar Gajjan Singh, a prominent

lawyer from Ludhiana. It was decided that a new political outfit with the name 'Sikh League' would be launched and a sub-committee was formed to prepare a draft constitution for the League and submit it in a general meeting. The Central Sikh League was inaugurated in Amritsar in December 1919 and pressed for Sikh representation both in the provincial and in the Viceroy's Councils. This was followed by the foundation of the Shiromani Akali Dal in December 1920 in Amritsar to give voice to Sikh peasant grievances in the Punjab countryside, which had so far not been addressed by any other party.⁵⁰

Gurdwara Reform Movement

The immediate programme of the Central Sikh League was to reform the Gurdwaras or places of Sikh worship and free them of government control. Government control of the Gurdwaras had made them useful vehicles for getting government actions commended and rendered acceptable to the general populace through the exhortations of their religious mentors. The most brazen example of subservience to the government by temple functionaries regardless of the sentiments of the Sikh community was the public honouring of General Dyer by the *mahant* of the Golden Temple of Amritsar after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919. It touched off the smouldering grievances against the *mahants* into a public outburst. The Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee was the organ of the Central Sikh League for looking after the Sikh places of worship. It was founded with 175 members elected out of a general assembly of the Sikhs in Amritsar in November 1920. Local bands of volunteers (Akali *jathas*) were being prepared by the Shiromani Akali Dal for the final struggle.⁵¹

Sikh militancy from the 1920s can also be explained in terms of an economic crisis gripping the central Punjab Sikhs since the cash crops from the canal colonies started taking off. Canal water saved a lot of time and resources for the producer of wheat and cotton in Montgomery and Lyallpur forcing down their prices to a level which the producer from the central Punjab districts could never afford to offer. Thus they had no options but to lose hopelessly to the competition in the export market. They therefore switched to production for the domestic market which ate considerably into their profit margin and sometimes forced them out of the market. They therefore turned to the army, the police, migration to the newly opened up canal colonies and even abroad for alternative means of

living. However, the stringency of immigration laws were gradually narrowing the scope of employment abroad, the worst instance of the fate of illegal immigrants repulsed abroad and massacred at home being the *Komagata Maru* incident of 1914. Ill-treatment of immigrants by foreign authorities had given rise to militant movements like the *Ghadar*. Opportunities of switching over to the newly opened up canal colonies were also drying up as the government gradually decreased its quota for the central Punjab cultivators and while 80 per cent of the land in the Lower Chenab Project opened in 1890 and 95 per cent of that of the Lower Jhelum Project opened up in 1901 were reserved for the small peasants from the central districts, the percentage started dwindling to 59 per cent in the Lower Bari Doab Project opened in 1913 and still less in the Nili Bar Project opened in 1926. No more fortunate were those who had joined the army during the First World War since the end of the War saw a large scale demobilization and consequent relapse into unemployment. This accumulated frustration went into the swelling of the ranks of the Akali *jathas* in the 1920s.⁵²

Initially the Gurdwara movement received encouragement from the Congress leadership and Mahatma Gandhi tried to link it up with his Non-Cooperation movement. In the Nagpur session (1920) the Indian National Congress resolved for the protection of the interests of the Sikhs 'in any scheme of swarajya in India as is provided for Mohammedans and other minorities in provinces other than Punjab'.⁵³ The Akalis too took a leaf out of the Gandhian book of Satyagraha.⁵⁴ But Gandhi's sudden withdrawal from the Non-Cooperation movement left the Sikhs to fight it out alone with the British.

One indirect result of the Gurdwara movement was to create new tensions in Sikh-Hindu relationship as the attempt to interfere with Hindu rituals in Gurdwaras by the reformers and overthrow the *mahants* were taken as an affront by the Hindus. During a debate in the Punjab Legislative Council on the first Gurdwara Bill in 1921, Mehtab Singh stated very clearly that 'the Sikhs do not wish to remain in the fold of Hinduism'. The Sikh reformers were thus involved in a headlong conflict with the British government as well as their Hindu cohorts in the province. Debates in the Punjab Legislative Council later on 7 May 1925 revealed that nearly 30,000 persons were arrested during various encounters at Tarn Taran, Nankana Sahib, Guru-ka-Bagh, Bhai Pheru and Jaito, 400 were killed, 2,000 were wounded and Rs. 15 lakh of fine inflicted (this included forfeiture of pensions

of retired soldiers). The recruitment of Sikhs in the army over the years was also cut down from 20 per cent in 1914 to 13 per cent in 1930. Finally in March 1924 General Birdwood opened negotiations with Akali leaders. These were followed up by the Lieutenant Governor Sir Malcolm Hailey with a new Bill which was passed into the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925. Hailey succeeded in splitting up the Akalis by winning over Mehtab Singh and his group. Mehtab Singh was given to understand that he could control the SGPC if he would cooperate with the government. But other Akalis like Master Tara Singh and Baba Kharak Singh took great umbrage when he was released and subsequently ousted Mehtab Singh from the SGPC.⁵⁵

The Gurdwaras Act 8 of 1925 enacted in the Punjab Legislature transferred the control of the Gurdwaras to the entire Sikh community, symbolized in the institution of adult franchise for the election of the members of the SGPC. This was something unique, considering the fact that franchise for elections to the provincial legislature was still restricted. Henceforth it was the SGPC which was to act as the custodian of all the Gurdwaras. Franchise was to be the preserve of only the pure Khalsa and the Udasis, Nirmalas, the Sewa Panthis, the Sahajdharis, the Namdharis and the Nirankaris were to be relegated to the role of passive worshippers. Thus the Khalsa had called upon the state to define the authority of the 'church' through a writ of the legislature. Some thought it odd that 'a purely religious arrangement should depend for legitimacy on an act of the state'.⁵⁶

The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) was devised as a vehicle for the organization of elections on such a wide scale and channeling the religious nationalism of the Khalsa on the right track. At the apex of the SAD was a General Committee. Representatives to this committee were chosen by all members of the SAD. The total membership of the SAD was about 80,000. These members were organized in *jathas* or bands of volunteers for district, tahsils and thanas. For every hundred members there was to be one representative in the General Committee. The actual work of the SAD was to be conducted by an executive body, consisting of a President, the office holders and 15 other persons.⁵⁷

In 1926 the SAD broke up into two groups: the moderates were led by Baba Kharak Singh, Gyani Sher Singh; the radicals, on the other hand were led by Master Tara Singh. The split represented sharp divisions within the SGPC over the management of Gurdwaras and the execution of the Gurdwara Act of 1925. In 1933 the Central

Akali Dal separated from the SAD and declared itself an independent party. But since it could not work out a separate programme of its own it could not create much impact on the Khalsa.⁵⁸

Cultural Unity of Punjab and the Formation of the Unionist Government

Regardless of the happenings on the political surface, in the rural areas the various communities continued to cherish their 'shared cultural values'.⁵⁹ At the local level the people continued to participate in one another's belief systems. The common local forms of veneration or worship, like that of Sufi *pirs* and their *mazars* or holy graves, visit to Muslim shrines (*khanqas*) or *pirkhanas* and participation in Hindu and Sikh festivals continued to exercise their syncretic influence on the minds of the local populace. Faith in the effectiveness of a village deity for the protection of the boundary from evils and marauders was common even to the following of a monotheistic cult. Neither a Muslim nor a Sikh village showed any marked difference from its Hindu counterpart in respect of village leadership, village hierarchy or the traditional division of labour among village artisans.⁶⁰ Tribal identities often overshadowed religious identities and men from a single tribe often spread over a large area and added to the number of converts to all the prevailing religious systems of the area – Hinduism, Sikhism and Islam. The Tiwana tribe itself is a case in point – some settling in and about Jind district (present day Haryana) and professing Hinduism; some settling in the region near Patiala, founding many villages in Ludhiana, Jullunder and Bathinda districts and seeking conversion to Sikhism; and some settling in Pakpattan near the Khanqa of Baba Farid and getting assimilated in the ritual life around the shrine.⁶¹ The Gills, Manns and other Jats too had converts in different faiths. In all such cases the tribal identity always had the better of religious identities and continued to exercise their influence through marriages and kinship networks.⁶² When the British annexed these areas, they found it difficult to administer these tribes according to Hindu laws or the *Shariat*, as in the case of other territories. Instead, they had to ask district officers to record the tribal and local customs of their respective areas and administer the localities according to such customary laws.⁶³

The emphasis of the Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1901 on the tribal identity added a fresh impetus to political rivalries along tribal rather than communal lines. Agriculturist tribes from all the com-

munities, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh, derived great advantages from it. While in the western part of Punjab the beneficiaries of this Act were mainly Muslim landlords, chiefs and their *hamsayas* (dependents), in the east and south-east the Act freed the vast multitude of Hindu and Sikh Jat peasant proprietors from the clutches of the Arora and Khatri moneylenders. Thus agricultural Punjab, whether in the Mohammedan west or in the Jat east, developed an affinity of interest against the city-based moneylenders and investors seeking a lien on agricultural land.⁶⁴

The British had also contributed to this urban-rural rift in a conscious way, by allowing more representation to the rural areas than to the urban, in consonance with its policy to ally with the rural elite against nationalist urban politicians. Of the 34 Muslim seats 29 were given to the rural areas. Of these 23 were in West Punjab.⁶⁵ The elections of 1920 returned 27 Muslim members from the rural constituencies. Mian Fazl-i-Husain, a Lahore lawyer, who had left the Congress and became a favourite of the government because of his opposition to Non-Cooperation, assumed the leadership of this rural bloc. As Minister for Education and Local Self-Government, he worked for the opening of more educational institutions in rural areas, much against urban opposition, and the granting of autonomy to panchayats and municipal and district boards through relaxation of official control. These measures benefited the less advanced sections of society irrespective of their religion and brought him close to Chaudhuri Lal Chand, a Jat leader and later Chaudhary Chhotu Ram, another Hindu Jat leader from Rohtak, who too had become a government favourite through his role in the recruitment of Hindu and Sikh Jats during the war.⁶⁶ As Minister of Agriculture, Chhotu Ram allowed considerable reduction in land revenue and water rates, thus favouring rural interests and made up the deficit through urban taxation.⁶⁷ In 1923, Mian Fazl-i-Husain and Chaudhary Chhotu Ram formally brought their followers together in the Punjab National Unionist Party and it is with the backing of this group that the former could introduce a 40 per cent quota for the Muslims in educational institutions and government services, and see through the Municipal Amendment Act of 1923, facilitating Muslim control of municipalities. The rural Sikh members, while retaining a separate organization, also gave support to the rural bloc. Thus the competition of urban interests with rural became the keyword in the electoral politics of Punjab rather than competition on communal lines.

The formation of the Unionist Party reflected the awareness among

Punjabi politicians that this province could not be dominated by a single community. The smooth administration of the province required the cooperation of the various communities. The communal politics of the Muslim League was going to tear the political fabric of the province. Therefore, as a member of the Viceroy's Council, Fazl-i-Husain tried his utmost to secure provincial autonomy from the Centre in the proposed constitutional amendment in 1935 so that Punjab could be kept isolated from the League-Congress battle for power.

Notes

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The Sikhs and the Mainstream Indian Leadership, 1927-1937

AT EVERY STAGE in the struggle against colonialism, the Sikhs wanted a distinct status for themselves, commensurate with their importance in the country. They did not want to be an adjunct of the majority community, playing second fiddle to them in every matter. Numerically they might have been lagging behind the other communities. But in terms of their economic and military contribution they believed themselves to be equal, if not superior to the other two major communities of India – Hindu and Muslim. That is why they intended to approach the Simon Commission in 1927 for separate representation and extra weightage to their community.¹

The Simon Commission

The Simon Commission was appointed by the British Parliament to look into the question of the working of the dyarchy established by the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms of 1919. In spite of the Viceroy's petition to the British Parliament to reconsider the appointment of this 'all White' commission, the British Parliament persisted in its decision. The exclusion of Indians from the commission was interpreted as an affirmation of the right of the British Parliament to shape the political future of India. Such an assumption was utterly reprehensible to Indian politicians of all shades. The course of political events in the 1920s had made the Indians increasingly confident of their ability to determine their own destiny. The absence of Indian representation in the Commission smacked of a contempt for the Indian character which might have been suffered under Cornwallis, Dalhousie or Curzon. But the post-war world political climate was utterly unsuited for such a high-handed step. The Madras session of the Indian National Congress (1927) decided to boycott the Commission and all its proceedings. The Sikhs too had little option

but to veer round their earlier decision to approach the Commission. An All-Parties Sikh Conference at Amritsar on 30 June 1928 decided to go for a boycott.²

The Madras Congress of 1927 had declared independence to be the goal of Indian development. While accepting the Muslim demand for joint electorates with seats in proportion to their population it had also assured the Sikhs of adequate weightage in the Punjab.³ Initially Hindu opinion was opposed to Sikh demand for weightage as the Hindus were unwilling to accept Sikhs as different from themselves. But since the introduction of the statutory majority of the Muslims in the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms Hindu opinion had changed. They viewed the proposed weightage for the Sikhs as a ploy to whittle down the Muslim majority in the Punjab Legislative Council. They therefore agreed to accept the Sikhs as a separate community and stood firmly by their demand for adequate weightage in representation.⁴

The Nehru Report

It was in the Madras session that an all-parties committee was entrusted with the preparation of a draft plan for the future constitutional development of India. This was the time when the mantle of leadership had fallen on Motilal Nehru since C.R. Das had died in 1925. The report produced by the all-parties committee, therefore, went under the name of Motilal Nehru. It was presented before an all-parties conference at Lucknow on 28-31 August 1928. As the session remained inconclusive, it met once again in Calcutta. The report proposed to give separate representation to Muslims and non-Muslims in proportion to their population with the right to contest additional seats in all provinces except in Punjab and Bengal. In the last two Muslim majority provinces the communal electorates were to be withdrawn.

The failure to make provision for special weightage for the Sikhs did not go at all well with the Sikh community. Such an abolition of separate electorates would spell Muslim domination of the Punjab legislature as Muslims were in a majority in the province. Being only 13 per cent of the total population they were faced with the prospect of being submerged by the Muslim majority of 55 per cent in their own homeland. Motilal Nehru was not unaware of the fears of the Sikhs. But he could not concede them special weightage as Hindus

were also in a minority in the Punjab. 'Reservation of seats for one minority with the right to contest additional seats,' Motilal wrote to Sardar Harnam Singh, Secretary of the Central Sikh League on 7 January 1929, 'would mean either cutting down the other minority or converting the majority into a minority or perhaps both'.⁵ The Indian National Congress always professed to be a non-communal organization encompassing the lives and interests of the entire nation irrespective of caste, creed or religion. It attempted to unite each and all under its banner – Hindu, Mohammedan and Sikh. The effort to knit together discordant aspirations in a common agenda resulted in a patchwork quilt – 'a threadbare piece of shoddy under a covering of tinsel'.⁶

The impartial stand taken by the committee was not appreciated by the Sikhs and the publication of the Nehru Report brought a wave of anti-Congress reaction in Sikh circles. Mangal Singh, the Sikh representative in the committee was accused of a sell out. The decision to have representation in provincial legislatures purely on the basis of population merely with the right for minorities to contest additional seats was strongly condemned by Mehtab Singh, Giani Sher Singh and Sardar Kharak Singh. The Report's decision to maintain reserved constituencies for Muslims in the Punjab, where they were not in a minority particularly peeved the Sikhs. The Shiromani Akali Dal sent a telegram to the Congress that they were prepared to forego weightage if there was no reservation for any communal majority in the Punjab legislature. The Akali organ *Akali te Pardesi* suggested that universal adult suffrage in the Punjab without any reservation was going to serve as a vehicle for Muslim domination. The report was compared to the Lucknow Pact as it had tried to humour the Muslims at the expense of the Sikhs.⁷ This was the beginning of the rift between Sardar Kharak Singh and Master Tara Singh. But in spite of all his leanings towards the Congress, even Master Tara Singh could not fail to observe that it was very unfair not to make any reservation for the Sikhs when special representation was being granted to other minorities in various provinces. The pressure of public opinion also forced Mangal Singh to resign from the General Secretaryship of the Central Sikh League and from the editorship of the Urdu *Akali*.⁸

The reaction to the Nehru Report in Sikh circles went very far indeed. There were meetings in several districts where the report was condemned in unequivocal terms.⁹ A Sikh *diwan* in Amritsar also

talked about launching an offensive against Congress activity in rural areas by sending out deputation to spread propaganda against the Nehru Report.¹⁰ As late as November 1929 Sikhs continued to talk about an effective and striking demonstration at Lahore during the Christmas week to make it clear to the Congress that the Sikh community cannot be ignored. There were talks even of direct action and of picketing against the Congress camp if the demands of the Sikhs were not admitted.¹¹

Gandhi, with his usual farsightedness probably saw a grave threat to the launching of the Civil Disobedience programme of the Congress in the Punjab in this smouldering discontent among the Sikhs. He, therefore, expressed his sympathy for the Sikhs by his clever comment 'personally I think we have not done full justice to the Sikhs'¹² which aroused fresh hopes in the Sikhs without achieving anything new for them. It allowed Master Tara Singh to articulate his opposition to total boycott of all Congress programmes by the Akalis, which he feared would push the Akalis to the 'back lines' in the fight for freedom.¹³ He was probably voicing the general anxiety in Akali circles not to be reduced to absolute insignificance in a province, where Mian Fazl-i-Husain had already succeeded in combining the landed magnates of all political hues under one banner irrespective of their religious affiliations. Master Tara Singh's eagerness to reach out to the Congress reflected this general anxiety among the Akalis to escape isolation in the face of the strong Unionist combination.¹⁴

The Lahore Resolution

The Lahore Congress of December 1929 met with the explicit purpose of drawing close to the Sikhs and involving them more intimately with the Civil Disobedience programme of the Congress. Important Congress leaders like Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Dr. Ansari had been touring the district to rally the youth of Punjab behind the Congress programme.¹⁵ Local leaders like Pandit Om Prakash and Chamba Ram were also touring the districts. But it was very clear that it was impossible to make an appreciable impact on the rural areas without the cooperation of the Akalis. Gandhi, Nehru and Ansari took the initiative in visiting the Akali leaders to patch up a compromise. The Nehru Report was quietly dropped on the plea that it had advocated 'Dominion Status' while the Lahore session of

the Congress took up 'full independence' as its battle cry.¹⁶ Master Tara Singh attended the Lahore session and in his presence it was resolved that 'This Congress assure the Sikhs, the Muslims and other minorities that no solution thereof in any future constitution will be acceptable to the Congress that does not give full satisfaction to the parties concerned'.¹⁷

Sikhs and Civil Disobedience

Congress assurances, however, did not immediately carry conviction with the entire Sikh community. Baba Kharak Singh presided over a Shiromani Akali Dal session parallel to the Congress session, which reiterated the Sikh resolve to have 30 per cent representation if representation on the basis of communities was kept up anywhere. Successive meetings with Gandhi, Motilal Nehru and M.A. Ansari could not change this stand taken by the Akalis. An All Parties Sikh Congress on 12 January organized by a few left wing Akalis, however, recorded their appreciation of Mahatma Gandhi's efforts.¹⁸ Wide publicity was given to the signing of the Congress membership form by Baba Kharak Singh and his agreement to lead the 'independence day' celebrations on 30 January in Sialkot. Master Tara Singh now threw an open invitation to all loyalist Sikh members of the Punjab Legislative Council to resign their seats.¹⁹

Although Congress workers tried to secure some help from the Nau Jawan Bharat Sabha and the *Kirti Kisan*, the initiative in the rural campaign had passed to the Akalis. The world trade depression had lowered crop prices in the Punjab to an abysmal level and agriculturists in the province had been driven to desperation by falling prices and unemployment. Nearly one-third of the revenue payable in June 1930 or July was left unrealized. Wheat was selling at Rs. 1.5 per maund. Under the circumstances it appeared that the agriculturists would find it difficult to pay the December-January instalment. A demand for the remission of land revenue and the threat of non-payment of taxes were, therefore, amongst the most popular programme of the masses.²⁰

There were celebrations all over Punjab to mark the beginning of Gandhi's march to Dandi to defy the manufacture of the salt law and to manufacture salt on 12 March. There was a large public meeting at Lahore. The Shiromani Akali Dal made an offer of 5,000 volunteers. A satyagraha conference was to be held at Gujranwala on 6 and

7 April 1930 and several *jathas* started from various places to march towards Gujranwala on foot.²¹ Fazl-i-Hussain, the Muslim member in the Viceroy's Executive Council wrote in a letter to the Governor that Gujranwala town had developed into a centre of Civil Disobedience.²² However, given Punjab's ecological situation away from the sea there was no scope of conducting the manufacture of salt on an impressive scale and the movement in the province was 'in the nature of a gesture'.²³ Lateran agitation against the import and sale of foreign cloth and liquor by means of picketing of those shops was started in Lahore, Sheikhpura, Hoshiarpur and Amritsar with the help of Akali contingents.²⁴ They were marked by a widespread participation by students and particularly women. Mian Fazl-i-Husain wrote a letter to the Governor of Punjab on 1 June 1930 how prostitutes and goondas were engaged by the Unionist government to harass the women and break up their *jathas* or processions.²⁵ There were also cases of bomb explosions in Lahore, Amritsar and Sialkot. Rawalpindi was the scene of *hartals* and demonstrations in the neighbourhood of the court where political cases were being tried.²⁶

Sikh Colour in the National Flag

Sardar Kharak Singh, however, was still unconvinced of the sincerity of the Congress towards the cause of the Sikhs. He, therefore, raised the issue of the inclusion of the Sikh colour in the Congress flag. Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee had itself recommended the inclusion of the Sikh colour in the national flag in a letter to the All India Congress Committee on 20 September. Sardar Kharak Singh turned down Pandit M.M. Malaviya's request for a meeting and discussion and refused to trust verbal promises. Malaviya suggested that if the AICC found it impossible to agree to the inclusion of the Sikh colour in the 'National Flag', Akali colours would certainly be included in the Punjab Congress flag. In their desperation to secure Akali support, Punjab Pradesh Congressmen prepared one yellow flag in Jhelum and one black flag in Amritsar.²⁷ By the end of October, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's letter to Pandit Santhanam of the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee communicating the inability of the Flag Committee to include the Sikh colour in the 'National Flag' was made public. While a deputation of four Sikhs from the SGPC was proceeding to Lucknow to negotiate the matter, Jawaharlal Nehru was suddenly arrested.²⁸ Mahatma Gandhi requested the Sikhs in his

speech in the Sisganj Gurdwara to allow him to place the matter before the AICC and seek a satisfactory solution. This was a time when the entire Working Committee was in prison. 'To raise this controversy at this time,' as Gandhi put the matter, 'a time when the Congress is fighting for its very existence, would be, to say the least, an unseemly act.'²⁹

The Akalis were drawn wholeheartedly into the thick of the Civil Disobedience with the police firing on the Sisganj Gurdwara to disperse some Congress rowdies preaching Civil Disobedience from the precincts of the Gurdwara. It revealed the sinister face of colonialism to the Sikhs as never before. The nation and community from this time now became one for them.³⁰

The firing on the Sisganj Gurdwara also coincided with the publication of the Simon Commission report in May 1930. The statutory majority of the Muslims had not been disturbed by this report. The government of India reserved 49 per cent of the seats for the Muslims and 18 per cent for the Sikhs. This was not found to be satisfactory by the Sikhs who would not be satisfied by anything less than 20 per cent. Sisganj and Simon – these twin issues brought home to the Sikhs that they had nothing to expect from the government and they turned the full blast of their opposition on the government. The SGPC held widespread *divans* with highly seditious prayers.³¹

Master Tara Singh who had become 'dictator' of the provincial war council following Kitchlew's arrest, led a *jatha* to Peshawar in sympathy with the Pathans killed by the British bullets when they were demonstrating peacefully over the arrest of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Syed Lal Badshah on 23 April 1930. In the presence of a large gathering in Jallianwala Bagh, Master Tara Singh started off on foot with 100 Akalis wearing black turbans and kirpans. They were lathicharged and arrested just beyond the Jhelum on 17 May. The news immensely added to Master Tara Singh's popularity and he was elected President of the SGPC when he was in prison in Gujarat.³²

During the imprisonment of Master Tara Singh, Sardar Kharak Singh came to provide leadership to the Akalis. The Executive Council of the SGPC under Kharak Singh's leadership took a moderate stand and agreed to forward a communication to the Viceroy, setting forth the Committee's demands. The Maharaja of Patiala was to send a deputation to the Viceroy to negotiate on the subject.³³ However the pro-Congress party in the SGPC was planning to send a strong

jatha of 100 to Delhi. There was now a vertical split in the Sikh movement. Sardar Kharak Singh accused the Shiromani Akali Dal of a 'surrender to the Congress' and dissociated himself from the proceedings of the Shiromani Akali Dal. In a meeting of 31 August organized by the followers of Kharak Singh, the speakers demanded a strong campaign on the Sisganj Gurdwara issue instead of trailing the Congress programme. A compromise formula was later worked out, which decided that Sikh volunteers could carry on picketing only under the Khalsa flag.³⁴

The government now adopted a repressive posture and clamped down the Criminal Law Amendment Act on the Civil Disobedience campaign. Front line Congress leaders like Sapru and Jayakar now started negotiating with the government for peace with amnesty. The Sikhs were still pressing their case for a 30 per cent representation in the reformed councils. Giani Sher Singh emphasized that the Sisganj Gurdwara agitation was being suspended only because the Sikhs wanted to concentrate on the representation question which was being discussed in the First Round Table Conference (12 November 1930-19 January 1931).³⁵

Gandhi-Irwin Pact

To confirm the worst fears of the Sikh leadership, the British government suddenly decided to release the Congress Working Committee along with Mahatma Gandhi from prison. Gandhi and Lord Irwin sat in camera from 17 February to 4 March to discuss the arrangements preliminary to the participation of the Congress in the Second Round Table Conference. The Gandhi-Irwin Pact was to signed on 5 March 1931. All political prisoners were now released and Mahatma Gandhi accepted the British offer to join the Second Round Table Conference. This sudden rapprochement of the Congress leadership with the British government without consulting the Sikhs (when at least 3,000 of them were still in jails) going under the name of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact created a groundswell of distrust of Congress intentions amongst the Sikh community. The conclusion was irresistible that this had been done only to consolidate 'Hindu predominance in the future constitution' and to keep up the decisive Congress initiative in all discussions of future constitutional arrangements.

Seventeen Demands of the Sikhs

The Gandhi–Irwin Pact revealed the divisions in Sikh ranks and the bankruptcy of Sikh politics as never before. Master Tara Singh, recently released by the British, now stood isolated in the Shiromani Akali Dal. Sardar Kharak Singh stood vindicated for having correctly assessed the ways of the Congress leadership and having suggested an independent line for the Sikhs free of all Congress influences. It was now Master Tara Singh's turn to resort to desperate measures to retrieve his prestige in his own party. During the 29th session of the All India Muslim League at Allahabad on 30 December 1930 Muhammad Iqbal had put forward a proposal that Punjab, North West Provinces, Sindh and Baluchistan should be amalgamated in a single state. Sir Geoffrey Corbett, Secretary of the Round Table Conference, had already suggested separation of the Ambala Division from the Punjab to make Muslims overwhelmingly predominant in the Punjab. Master Tara Singh led a deputation of Sikh leaders on the eve of Mahatma Gandhi's departure for the Second Round Table Conference and presented him with a memorandum of 17 demands on behalf of the Sikhs. It included the setting up of a national government with at least one Sikh member in the central cabinet; one-third share for the Sikhs in the Punjab Cabinet; 5 per cent share for the Sikhs in the upper and lower houses; recruitment through a public service commission and adoption of Punjabi as the official language. Here, for the first time in the history of the Sikhs, Master Tara Singh mooted the proposal of a readjustment of the boundaries of Punjab by transferring the Muslim majority areas to the frontier province to produce a communal balance. The Sikhs would prefer joint electorates with reservation of seats after these readjustments had been effected.³⁶ Gandhi found these demands to be smacking of communalism. But Master Tara Singh would argue that the only way to fight communalism was to confront it with 'counter demands of the same nature'.³⁷

The Congress Working Committee which met from 7 to 12 July 1931 in Bombay resolved to tackle the communal question 'on strictly national lines'. All communities were assured of the protection of their cultures, languages, scripts, education, profession and practice of religion and religious endowments through the incorporation in the constitution of an article relating to fundamental rights. Specific provisions were to be made in the constitution regarding the

protection of personal laws. Political and other rights of minority communities should be protected. Recruitments to all government offices were to be through a public service commission. Universal adult franchise was to be the norm. Representation on the basis of joint electorates was desired. But exceptions were made for Hindus in Sindh, Muslims in Assam, Sikhs in the Punjab and the North-West Frontier Province and for Hindus and Muslims where they formed less than 25 per cent of the population. For these people seats were to be reserved in the Federal and Provincial Legislatures on the basis of population with the right to contest additional seats.³⁸ Armed with this CWC resolution, Mahatma Gandhi attended the Second Round Table Conference in London from 7 September to 1 December 1931.

Joint electorate with representation in proportion to population would reduce even the weightage of 19.1 per cent conceded by the Montagu–Chelmsford reforms and the Congress formula, therefore, held no appeal for the Sikhs. Ujjal Singh, the Sikh representative to the Conference, therefore, reiterated what Master Tara Singh had already told Gandhi in his 17 demands, that the Sikhs would not need communal weightage or separate constituencies if the existing boundaries could be redrawn and Muslim dominated western districts could be detached. In the reconstituted province Sikhs could have a greater say.³⁹

Gandhi was ready to meet all Muslim demands like one-third of the seats in the Central Legislature, 51 per cent seats in Punjab and Bengal, vesting residuary powers in the provinces and referendum among Muslim electors on the question of joint versus separate electorate. But for this he demanded Muslim support for (i) non-extension of the principle of special representation to minorities other than Muslims and Sikhs, (ii) complete control of army and finance (iii) adult franchise (iv) substance of independence including right to secede (v) scrutiny of India's public debt.⁴⁰ However, the Muslims would not agree to such conditions. The letters of Fazl-i Husain, the Muslim member from the Punjab in the Viceroy's Council, reveal that the Muslims feared the impact of the elimination of the official bloc in the Muslim minority provinces in case Gandhi's demands were accepted. The Muslims were maintaining their position with weightage combined with official protection in these places. Fazl-i-Husain also refused to view the Sikhs separately from the Hindus: 'The whole trouble is that as a matter of fact Hindus and Sikhs constitute only one community and it is only a political dodge for

them to claim to be separate political entities the object in view being to reduce the quantity of representation of the Muslims.⁴¹

The Communal Award

Failing agreement among the representatives from India, the Labour government of Ramsay MacDonald decided to give its verdict on 16 August 1932. This is also known as the Communal Award. It retained the separate electorates in the Punjab and granted 51.42 per cent of seats to the Muslims, 27.42 per cent to the Hindus and 18.85 per cent to the Sikhs. The Award was denounced violently by the Akalis for having relegated them to the position of a statutory minority. At Mukatsar during the Maghi Mela to commemorate the martyrdom of the Forty Blessed Sardar Kharak Singh, Giani Sher Singh, Sardar Jaswant Singh Jhabbal, Sardar Harbans Singh Sitani and leaders of the Central Akali Dal declared the Joint Parliamentary Committee report based on the Communal Award as totally unacceptable: 'The Award is calculated to divide the country into permanent communal compartments and to place the political power in every province in the hands of a communal majority. It is against that vicious, anti-national and anti-freedom principle that the demonstration is directed.'⁴²

They decided to celebrate 27 January as the anti-communal day throughout the Panth. They had the support of the Hindu Mahasabha for their grievances.⁴³

Personally, Jawaharlal Nehru was of the same opinion. In a private letter to Maulana Habibur Rahman, President of the Majlis-e-Ahrar, Lahore, on 25 November 1936 he almost echoed the views of the Sikhs:

The Communal Award is bad from the point of view of the unity of India and our struggle for freedom. This had little to do with the weightage of any special community or group. I am not much concerned with this. But I do view with apprehension the splitting up of India into separate communal groups and thus preventing the consideration of economic problems which affect all of us. I do not think that the Communal Award is compatible with independence. It injures the Muslim masses as much as others. The only persons it really touches are a few upper class people. I think, therefore, that inevitably it will have to go if we are to consider the wider economic issues affecting the masses.⁴⁴

But in its public stand the Congress was not prepared to do any-

thing unilaterally. Jawaharlal reprimanded the PPCC leader Satyapal for having arranged an anti-Communal Award conference. 'I am clearly of opinion that it was an unfortunate move, likely to do some harm,' he wrote to Satyapal on 11 August 1936, 'We should avoid, as far as possible to be controversial on this issue.'⁴⁵ His earlier communication to Habibur Rahman also had shown the same cautious attitude: 'I am equally sure that it should only go by an agreed settlement between Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs. Therefore, any one-sided agitation against it is wrong and injurious. When an opportunity offers itself, an attempt should be made for this agreed settlement. I think as economic issues are becoming more important, this agreed settlement will not be difficult.'⁴⁶

Shahidgunge Gurdwara Agitation

Congress was similarly cautious in expressing much enthusiasm for the aggressive stand of the Sikhs towards the recovery of the site of Shahidgunge in Lahore and the attempt to build a Gurdwara in that place. The Sikhs claimed that it had once been a Muslim Qazi's court, where many Sikhs had been executed for their refusal to accept conversion to Islam. The discovery of a large number of human skeletons from the site pointed to the correctness of their claims. In 1750 Mir Mannu had constructed a mosque-like structure in that place. During Sikh rule the place was renamed 'Shahidgunge' or the abode of martyrs. But when the Sikhs lost Punjab to the British in the 1850s the Muslims had once again taken possession of the place. A piece of *waqf* land was also attached to it for the upkeep of the place by the *mutwalli* (trustee). But with the progress of times the *mutwalli* began to divert the endowments for his personal use and neglected the proper maintenance of the mosque. The mosque thus fell into disrepair. The Gurdwara Act of 1925 which came into force in the Punjab, declared Shahidgunge to be a notified Gurdwara. When Harnam Singh, the *mahant* of the Gurdwara petitioned the Gurdwara Tribunal, it was handed over to the Gurdwara Committee of Lahore. The High Court gave the SGPC the entire site to the Sikhs in a ruling of October 1934. Thereafter the Sikhs took possession of the site and demolished the old structure to build the Gurdwara anew.⁴⁷

The Muslims took this as an affront to their religious sentiments and the Majlis-i Ahrar-i-Islam and Zafar Ali's newly founded Ittehad-

i-Millat started an agitation against the Sikh action from 29 June 1935. The Hindu Mahasabha leaders like Gokul Chand Narang and Raja Narendra Nath sympathized with the Sikhs.⁴⁸ The police had to fire several rounds to disperse the riotous mob. Firoz Khan Noon reported that 23 shots had to be fired, killing nine and injuring many.⁴⁹ Ulemas were to meet in the Nawab of Mamdot's house to issue a *fatwa* against the senseless destruction of lives.⁵⁰ Fazl-i-Husain rightly understood that the impatience of the Sikhs was an indirect outburst of their despair with the Communal Award. They were probably trying to pressurize the administration into bargaining with them for a relaxation of the heavy pro-Muslim tilt in the Award.⁵¹ Fazl-i-Husain rightly understood that any indiscreet step at a crucial juncture when the province was on the eve of securing the substance of autonomy under the Act of 1935 would ruin the chances of his Unionist Party in the approaching elections. He, therefore, decided to lie low and allow the Sikhs a walk over for the time being.⁵²

The non-committal attitude of the Indian National Congress towards the Communal Award and the Sikh stand on the Shahidgunge Gurdwara dispute had alienated the Sikhs from the Congress. While the Communal Award had everywhere allowed weightage to minorities, the Sikhs alone were left in the lurch in the Punjab. Both the Congress and the British seemed to ignore the claims of the Sikhs as an important minority and were engrossed with negotiating the claims of the Muslims in an all-India perspective. To them the Sikh problem appeared to be only a peripheral one fit to be pushed under the carpet in view of the larger question of Hindu-Muslim relations confronting them all over the country.

The Communal Award found the Congress to be a house divided against itself. Madan Mohan Malaviya founded the Congress National Party to protest against the neutrality of the Congress. Sir Joginder Singh of Chief Khalsa Diwan and Gokul Chand Narang demanded joint electorates reflecting population. Fazl-i-Husain would not object if the actual percentage of Muslim population in the province, that is, 56 per cent was actually reflected in the franchise. However, it is the Sikhs who demurred at the possibility of abolition of weightage. As Fazl-i-Husain wrote in a letter to Iqbal: 'Muslims are in population in a majority, in voting a minority, and because of being a minority in the voting strength, they are entitled to separate electorates. As soon as this minority feature disappears, don't you think separate electorate disappears with it. This sounds logical and common sense.'

. . . Moreover, it is likely, at all events, in the Punjab, that Sikhs will soon cry off the joint electorates.⁵³

Sikh Council of Action

The Sikhs, too, met in an All Parties Sikh Conference at Lahore on 28 July 1932 and constituted a 17-member Council of Action on 26-7 September 1932. Important names like that of Master Tara Singh, Sardar Kharak Singh, Giani Sher Singh, Ujjal Singh, Sampuran Singh, Amar Singh of Sher-e-Punjab, Buta Singh, Deputy President of Punjab Legislative Council and Sundar Singh Majithia figured in this Council of Action. A new party, the Khalsa Darbar was also founded with 250 members, 50 among whom represented Sikhs outside of Punjab. Since they would have to go it alone without any sympathy or support from the Congress, they decided to collect 1,00,000 volunteers for a Shahidi Dal and try to seek a revision of the Communal Award.⁵⁴

Change in Congress Stand on Communal Award and Akali-Congress Electoral Alliance

In the meanwhile Congress had changed its attitude towards the Communal Award and the All-India Parliamentary Board Manifesto read:

This decision is wholly unacceptable as being inconsistent with Independence and the principles of Democracy. It encourages fissiparous and disruptive tendencies and hinders normal growth and the consideration of economic and social questions is a barrier to national progress and strikes at the root of Indian unity. The attitude of the Congress (towards the Decision) is, therefore, not one of indifference or neutrality. It disapproves strongly of the decision and likes to end it.⁵⁵

The change in the attitude of the Congress left no difficulty in the way of an electoral understanding between the Shiromani Akali Dal and the Indian National Congress. With the help of the Gopi Chand Bhargava group in the Congress they started penetrating the ranks of the Congress in large numbers and filled up the local Congress committees with their own supporters. Many members of the provincial and central assemblies, municipal committees and district boards complained to the Congress President Dr. Rajendra Prasad

at the way the Akalis were returned in large numbers to the Pradesh Congress Committee as a result of bogus membership they could acquire with the enormous Gurdwara funds at their disposal.⁵⁶ The diehard leader Satyapal too complained to Dr. Rajendra Prasad about Master Tara Singh's communalism and his having shared the dais with Mahasabha leaders in Calcutta and getting garlanded. 'These Akalis,' as Satyapal would insist, 'numerically second in the Punjab politics of the recent years have got the field to their advantage by drawn swords and hooliganism from time to time at the polling booths.'⁵⁷ The President of the city Congress committee of Nankana Sahib reported how the SGPC forcibly captured the Congress committee of the Janamasthan. Some Congress members were alarmed at the possibility of the Congress losing its secular image by identifying with purely Akali issues of insisting on *jhatka* meat and playing music before mosques during *azan*.⁵⁸

Unionist Victory in Punjab

Elections were held from July to October 1937 in accordance with the provisions of the India Bill which received Royal Assent on 4 August 1935 and became the Act of 1935. It had provided for provincial legislatures autonomous in certain important subjects affecting local lives. Fazl-i-Husain did not survive to see the outcome of these elections. But the Punjab National Unionist Party which he had cobbled together through years of tireless effort and good gestures to the landed magnates of the province, irrespective of their religious affiliations, secured a solid majority of 95 in a 175-member Legislative Assembly. This had been made possible by means of a predominance of rural seats (143 out of 175) and voting qualifications based on land and property ownership, payment of land revenue or income resulting from land, official appointments and titles.⁵⁹ This non-Muslim combination could score a majority because of the support of the Hindu Jat zamindars of Rohtak and Hissar led by Chaudhuri Chhotu Ram. The Khalsa National Party (created from the loyalist Chief Khalsa Diwan) led by Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia, with their strength of 14 too, joined the government. They could successfully take the wind out of the sails of the Muslim League which could not secure more than two seats in the legislature. And of these two Raja Ghaznafar Ali Khan crossed over to the Unionist side soon after. The Akalis and the Congress too fared equally badly getting 10 and 18 seats each.

The Muslim Mass Contact Programme of the Congress

The year 1937 saw the Indian National Congress at its pinnacle of glory and its membership had reached three million, 'the biggest individual membership that any organization has all over the world'.⁶⁰ However, its rate of success in the Muslim constituencies was not at all satisfactory. This led to a lot of soul searching among Congressmen and they decided to launch a Muslim mass contact programme in the summer of 1937. In the course of their election tours in various provinces, the Congress leaders had discovered that there was a lot of enthusiasm for the Congress demand for *swaraj* among the ordinary Muslim people and they were often being misled by self-seeking communal leaders because there had been no sincere effort on the part of the Congress leaders to approach the Muslim masses or to carry the message of the Congress anti-imperialist struggle to these people. As Dr. K.M. Ashraf, Secretary of the Political and Economic Information Department of the All-India Congress Committee, confessed in a meeting in Lahore, 'very little has been done to educate his co-religionists in political matters,' and according to his assessment, 'the Muslim political idealists had singularly failed to understand and interpret the Muslim masses.'⁶¹ While the Muslim masses were anti-imperialist and longed for revolutionary mass action, the leaders were reactionaries and counter-revolutionary. Dr. Ashraf expected the Congress programme to make use of this 'fundamental contradiction' and win over the Muslim masses.

Congress programme of Muslim mass contact gave rise to feelings of distrust and suspicion in Muslim organizations. Leaders like Nehru had already been marked as a 'mahasabhaite' by the pro-Muslim paper *Eastern Times* for having opposed the Huq ministry in Bengal and Fazl-i-Husain's attempt to work out an autonomous status for the Muslim majority provinces of Punjab and Bengal by working on the federal plan in the proposed constitutional reforms of 1935 was also not looked upon with favour by Congressmen. The PNUP, which had come out with flying colours in the 1937 elections, feared an encroachment on their territories in this renewed drive by the Congress. Khan Bahadur Nawab Ahmadyar Khan Daulatana protested against the attempt of the Congress to win over the Muslim majority province of Punjab as a first step to converting the entire Muslim community of India to the Congress creed. Daulatana warned against 'a fresh chapter of communal controversy' that this attempt was going

to open up as the Unionists had worked out their political platform on a secular economic programme.⁶² Chaudhary Chhotu Ram, another Unionist stalwart, ridiculed Congressmen as *bagla bhagats* (pseudo-patriot) and pointed to their alliance in the Punjab with the Hindu *baniyas* or commercial men, who never supported the Unionist programme for the repudiation of the debts of the peasants and yet wanted to pose as the allies of the Muslim masses.⁶³ Iftikharuddin, MLA in the Punjab Legislature, doubted Gandhi's sincerity in the Hindi-Urdu controversy.⁶⁴ Letters were published in the columns of the *Eastern Times* expressing fears that Dr. Ashraf's propaganda might create division among the Muslim agriculturists in the Punjab and sow the 'apple of discord in the village between landlord and tenant'.⁶⁵ The setting up of the Punjab Provincial Committee by the All India Kisan Committee and the formation of local Kisan Committees in many districts of central Punjab and the Canal Colonies started making a dent into the pro-agriculturist image of the Unionist government. At the All India level, Congress stood for radical agrarian reform. The Punjab Congress Socialist Party helped the Punjab Kisan committees in setting up joint enquiry committees to go thoroughly into the grievances of the peasantry in the area.⁶⁶ All the *karza* (debt cancellation) committees in the Jullunder district sought affiliation from the Indian National Congress. They argued that the existing debt legislation had merely benefitted the big zamindars and placed the poor cultivators at their mercy.⁶⁷ The Kisan committees started indulging in widespread anti-government activities, particularly in Lahore, Amritsar and Lyallpur, where settlement operations had been launched. The Kisan committees became quite influential among rural Sikhs and through the Kisan committees Congress tried to rally the entire rural grievances against the government behind the Congress.⁶⁸

Muslim League Reactions and the Sikander–Jinnah Pact

Probably in response to the Congress drive, Muslim organizations too launched a programme for strengthening their organizational structures and the Muslim League Board embarked upon a plan of mass contact.⁶⁹ The annual membership fee of the Muslim League was reduced to 2 annas. Several resolutions were passed in the general meeting of the provincial Muslim League held at Barkat Ali Hall in Lahore in April 1937. The All India Muslim League too took up the

'attainment of complete independence for India' as its programme. It established a committee to popularize the line and to establish district and local branches throughout the Punjab. Jinnah urged the Muslims to organize themselves or 'they would be wiped out as a political force'.⁷⁰ Attempts were made 'with the aid of unscrupulous propaganda' to rouse Muslims at all levels to the dangers of Hindu domination.⁷¹

In their bid to present themselves as a secular platform, the Unionists in the Punjab had so far avoided all Muslim League links. Their Premier, Sikander Hayat Khan had forged an impartial image for his government where Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims could work together.⁷² But the Congress bid to get closer to the Muslims perhaps created a counter pressure on the Muslim members of the PNUP to move closer to the Muslim League. In October 1937, therefore, Sikander Hayat Khan was forced to respond to the overtures of Jinnah for the Sikander-Jinnah Pact, which made all Unionist Muslims ex-officio members of the Muslim League.⁷³ This was certainly a turning point in the history of the Unionist government as this was the first time when a Unionist Muslim became a Muslim first and a Unionist later. 'By linking himself directly to Jinnah and the League' as David Gilmartin remarked, Sikander 'sought to tie the Unionist Party to a political symbol of Muslim community that would legitimate Muslim authority'.⁷⁴ The successful working of the inter-communal platform depended on the presence of the British as the arbiter between the three different communities. But as new constitutional proposals began to come up with the 1940s, it was no longer possible for the Unionist combination to mask the separatist ambitions of its Muslim members beneath a false veneer of secularism.

Akalis Join Congress in the Legislative Assembly

The teaming up of the Unionists with the Muslim League sent alarm signals to the Akali camp. The elected Akali members of the Punjab Legislative Assembly now decided to join the Congress in the Assembly. Akali-Congress collaboration reached its climax in November 1938 during the all-India Akali Conference at Rawalpindi presided over by the rich Sikh industrialist Baldev Singh. Akali and Congress flags were flown side by side during this conference. Baldev Singh spoke very highly of the Congress, which he described as 'the trustee of our national honour and national self-respect'.⁷⁵ The conference

directed its attacks against the government bills brought by the Unionists in the Punjab Legislative Assembly in 1938. These bills were aimed at breaking the power of moneylenders over the peasants. Mortgages older than twenty years on which interest payments had exceeded the principal were to become void according to one of these bills. All moneylenders were required to register according to one. Another tried to cancel all transactions which had been made to circumvent the Land Alienation Act of 1900. The Congress suggested some amendments in these bills to make them somewhat more acceptable to the trading and moneylending urban interests which they mainly represented in the Punjab. But they were all voted down by the Unionists. Through the action of its urban trading supporters in the Punjab and their Akali cohorts in the Assembly, the Congress in the Punjab appeared in the role of the enemy of rural agriculturists. Satyapal wrote to J.B. Kripalani, the Secretary and to Subhas Chandra Bose, the Congress president, how difficult the Congress position in the Assembly had become.⁷⁶ On the one hand, the Congress was committed at an all-India level to a programme of repudiation of rural debts and relief for the agriculturists; on the other, at the provincial level in the Punjab it was beset with requests from the various trading and mercantile associations to oppose the agrarian reforms tabled in the Punjab Assembly through the initiative of the Jat leader Chaudhary Chhotu Ram.⁷⁷ The half-hearted postures of the Congress in the Assembly merely strengthened the hands of extremist forces like Raja Narendra Nath and Mukand Lal Puri who combined with the urban Akali Kartar Singh to call these bills a vehicle of promoting zamindari interests.⁷⁸ These developments further eroded the support base of the Congress in the rural areas of Punjab and reduced it to a position of insignificance in the politics of the province.

Notes

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Sikhs Come Out of the Orbit of the Congress

Resignation of Congress Ministries

With the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, new equations began to emerge in the relationship of the Sikhs and the Congress. The Viceroy's unilateral declaration of India as a belligerent state on 3 September 1939 without consulting the elected governments in the various provinces was deeply resented by the All India Congress Committee. The vague promise of a 'Dominion Status' after the conclusion of the war failed to satisfy them as they had already fixed *purna swaraj* or complete independence as their goal way back in 1929. The Congress ministries in the various provinces were, therefore, called upon to submit their resignations on 22 October 1939.¹ The vehemence of their utterances against the war soon landed many Congressmen into prison. Mahatma Gandhi decided to resume his Civil Disobedience in protest against the forcible involvement of India into the war effort.

Punjab's Support for War Efforts

Sikander Hayat Khan, the Unionist Premier of the Punjab called upon the people of the Punjab to live up to the reputation of the province as the 'sword arm of India' and launch upon military recruitment on a massive scale in the face of vehement resistance from Congress members in the Punjab Legislative Assembly.²

Akali reactions to the call for collaboration in British war efforts were ambiguous. They had formed the backbone of the Civil Disobedience movement launched by the Congress in the Punjab. The Congress forays into the rural heartland of Punjab had been made possible due mainly to Akali collaboration. Most of their leaders had served prison sentences in the cause of the Congress movement in the Punjab. The 1937 elections to the Punjab Assembly were

fought together by the Congress and the Akalis. They had also formed along with the Congress the opposition to the Unionist government of Sikander Hayat Khan in the Punjab Legislative Assembly. The war, however, unleashed new forces in the Akali–Congress relationship.

A representative Panthic gathering was convened by the Shiromani Akali Dal on 1 October 1939 at Amritsar. The meeting was attended by the representatives of the Akali Jathas, the Singh Sabhas, the Shiromani Akali Dal, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, the local Gurdwara Committees and other Panthic organizations and the smaller sects like the Namdharis and Nirmalas and by several members of the legislative bodies. About 500 representatives from all over the Punjab and important places outside the Punjab took part in this Panthic gathering. The natural acumen of the Sikhs for fighting inclined them favourably towards the British call for recruitment. In spite of being such a miniscule proportion of the total population of India (only 1 per cent) they had contributed a fifth of the total British Indian forces during the First World War. However, the post-War demobilization had affected military employment and a large number of Sikhs had suffered as a result. The Viceroy's call for participation in war efforts was thus a God sent opportunity for them. The political implications of these developments were also not lost on them and they saw a grand possibility of enhancing their influence and prestige in this situation. But they were wary of immediately breaking all ties with the Indian National Congress. Not unaware of the smallness of their numbers in the total population of a large country like India, they were 'hesitant as to their future course of action with regard to the war'. They supported the Congress demand for a 'declaration of the British government's present and future intentions with regard to the political status of India, recognition of India's free and equal status as far as possible under the present war conditions and the immediate implementation of that recognition'.³ They also reminded the government of the great sacrifice which they had to make to secure the Gurdwaras Management Act of 1925, of how the unjust Communal Award had placed them in 'a position of political subjection to the rule of the Muslim majority and how the 'honour and liberty' of the Sikhs are in 'constant danger' during the past two and a half years of Unionist Party rule. They also pointed out how the Government of India circular of July 1934 fixing communal representation in the Central Services denied the Sikhs their rightful place in these services and

how the Governor-General's Executive Council did not have a single Sikh representative.⁴

Sikh legislators in the Punjab Legislative Assembly also aired different views on the subject of support for war. The Akalis criticized British neutrality during the Nazi–Soviet non-aggression pact at the expense of a small country like Poland. But while voting on the war cooperation resolution they remained neutral. Only the Communist Sikhs like Kharak Singh and Sardul Singh Caveeshar, tied to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's Forward Bloc, voted against it.⁵ Sampuran Singh, an urban Khatri Sikh, wanted complete freedom as a price of support and courted arrest in December 1940 leading a Congress demonstration against war. He spoke categorically in favour of enlistment of the Sikhs to serve in the army and confessed to having been compelled to join the demonstration merely to conform to Congress party discipline. Santokh Singh, an urban independent Sikh supported the British stand in going to war but wanted the British to grant India her freedom.⁶

Khalsa Defence of India League

The Punjab Premier now saw an opportunity of weaning away the Sikhs from the Congress and began to persuade the Sikhs that anyone trying to stop them from joining their natural vocation could not be a friend. The British government was also worried about the dissatisfaction among the Sikhs. They did not want to part with this band of fighting men known for their martial qualities. News of the refusal of the Sikh squadron of the Central India Horse to embark at Bombay for the Middle East in April 1940 woke them up to the necessity for some prompt action. In their dire need for competent soldiers, the government decided to requisition the services of General Short, an officer who had once served in the XIth Sikh Regiment and who was known to be able to feel the pulse of the Sikhs better than anybody else. In the summer of 1940 Short and several other officers with experience of working with the Sikhs were deputed to study the mood of the Sikhs in the main areas of Sikh recruitment in central Punjab. They were expected to assuage Sikh feelings in the various army units and put an end to the unrest in the various Sikh army units.⁷ Initially SGPC had objected to the Sikhs wearing the British war helmet but the controversy was resolved by June 1940.

The only hassle now left in the way of a large-scale Sikh recruitment

was the persisting Akali connection with the Congress. The initiative in this matter came from the Congress. Master Tara Singh and Sampuran Singh had attended an All-Parties Sikh rally at Patiala calling for greater Sikh effort during the war to help the British. Master Tara Singh was quite nervous about rumours about the curtailment of Sikh recruitment in the Doaba due to Communist agitation in Hoshiarpur. He was secretly in touch with the Governor through Jogendra Singh of the Khalsa Nationalist Party to make sure that no stern action was taken by the government.⁸ Thus when the Congress President Maulana Azad called for an explanation of their action, Master Tara Singh resigned his Congress membership, putting an end to all hindrance to war time recruitment of the Sikhs. In October 1940 he spoke openly in favour of recruitment calling war 'a golden chance' for Sikhs to retrieve and consolidate their position of favour with the government.⁹ Ajit Singh too came down heavily against the Congress and accused them of insensitivity to the interests of the Sikhs in the Akali Political Conference held at Murrer in Shekhpura district on 7 October 1940. Sikh interests had suffered a lot during the past twenty years, according to him, because of their close association with the Congress. As a result the political position of the Sikhs had been weakened. There was a basic conflict between Mahatma Gandhi's doctrine of non-violence and the Khalsa symbol of carrying a *kirpan*.¹⁰ Early in 1941 (20 January 1941), after some persuasion by the British, the Akalis decided to join the Khalsa Nationalists to form the Khalsa Defence of India League to participate in British war efforts against the Axis Bloc.

Jinnah's Equations with the British

War also came as a great boon for Jinnah and his Muslim League. Under the impact of the reverses of the Muslim League in the Muslim majority provinces of Punjab and Bengal and the spectacular Congress success in the provinces where Muslims were in a minority, the Muslim League was about to be reduced to irrelevance. To enhance his position in national politics Jinnah made a desperate bid to enter into an understanding with the British for the recognition of his position as the sole spokesman of the Muslims. In August 1938 he offered to barter protection for the British at the federal centre for protection of Muslim interests by the British from Congress ministries in the provinces and tried to meet the officiating Viceroy Lord Brabourne

with the offer. There was, however, no immediate response from the British. But it was from about this time that London started waking up to the importance of the Muslim League for the British in putting Congress politicians in their places. The government had already started preparations for clipping the wings of the Congress ministries in the provinces by introducing a new Section (Section 126 A) in the 1935 Act which would enable it to make laws and to exercise full executive authority in the provinces in emergencies like a war. The resignation of the Congress ministries on 10 November 1939, therefore, brought them some relief rather than concern during times of war. 'Collaborating Congress provinces were likely to be more of a nuisance in running India during the war' as Ayesha Jalal interpreted the government's perception of these developments, 'than provinces deprived of their Congress ministries'.¹¹

The federation issue was hanging heavy in the mind of the Viceroy even before the war was announced. Linlithgow could read the 'increasing uneasiness in the mind of the Muslims . . . so long as the federation issue remains unsolved'.¹² In May 1939 Jinnah had warned while inaugurating the Bombay Provincial Muslim League Conference at Sholapur that Muslim League would make the Federation unworkable if the Federation issue was settled with the Congress alone.¹³ With the announcement of the war Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy, invited Jinnah and Gandhi on an equal footing for talks. The talks, however, broke on Jinnah's refusal to accept Gandhi's claim to be the equal representative of both Hindus as well as Muslims.¹⁴ Moreover, the provisions of the 1935 Act were also kept in suspension by the government in view of the emergency arising out of the war. The possibility of Jinnah and Gandhi agreeing upon a deal to the exclusion of the Sikhs sent alarm signals to the Akali camp. Enlistment in the army in large numbers appeared to them to be the only way out of this tangle.¹⁵

The landslide victory of the Congress in the 1937 elections in six provinces alarmed the Muslim political parties. The Congress General Secretary's message to the pro-Congress Ahrars seeking a merger with the Congress convinced the Muslims of their highhandedness.¹⁶ To many it appeared that 'in the garb of nationalism and democracy Congress is a purely communal organisation which aims at the destruction of Islamic culture, Islamic civilization and separate entity of Muslims in India'.¹⁷ Mahatma Gandhi's adherence to the ideal of *Ram Rajya* as an equivalent of perfect administration and Congress'

acceptance of *Bande Mataram* with its Hindu imagery filled the Muslim mind with apprehension. Jinnah openly declared in the Lucknow session of the Muslim League in 1937 that in the six provinces, where the Congress is in a majority 'they have by their words, deeds and programme shown more and more that the Mussalmans cannot expect any justice or fairplay at their hands'.¹⁸

The Congress attempt at Muslim mass contact had been interpreted by Jinnah in the Lucknow session of the Muslim League (1937) as 'calculated to defeat and weaken and break the Mussalman and is an effort to detach them from their accredited leaders'.¹⁹ The All India Muslim Students' Federation pointed out how the Congress never took any interest in the Muslims in the countryside before the Muslim League started its work. Congress efforts at Muslim Mass Contact were ridiculed by them as 'massacre contact'.²⁰

The inclusion of Muslim ministers in Congress ministries were particularly an eyesore. The Calcutta Khilafat Committee called them 'an affront to Muslim public opinion and an insult to Muslim Parties in the provincial legislatures'.²¹ During the Calcutta session of the Muslim League in 1938 the Muslim ministers in Congress ministries were called 'dupes and betrayers' by the Bengal Premier Fazlul Haque. He congratulated himself for having resisted the Congress offer for a coalition in Bengal after the split verdict of the 1937 polls:

If I had responded to these overtures (of the Congress for a coalition cabinet) I would still have been the Premier and continued to be so perhaps for an indefinitely long period. But such a premiership would have been no better and no more real than the Kingship of Shah Alam or the Nizamat of Mir Jafar. Had I signed with my own hands the death warrant of Islam with what face would I have stood before my Maker and Prophet on the day of Final Reckoning!²²

During a by-election in the Bijnor constituency of the UP the District Muslim League of Meerut prepared a cartoon depicting the Congress candidate Maulana Bashir Ahmad as being carried on a Hindu bier for cremation. Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Gobind Ballabh Pant and Madan Mohan Malaviya were shown as carrying the bier. Rafi Ahmad Kidwai and Muhammad Ibrahim were in the cremation scene. Maulana Shaukat Ali at the centre of the cartoon was depicted as exclaiming 'contrast the beginning with the end'. The cartoon hinted that by joining the Congress a Muslim loses his honoured place in Islam and becomes a *kafir* or a man without a religion in the afterlife.²³

Congress success in the Muslim majority North-West Frontier Province in setting up a Congress coalition ministry added insult to the injury of the Muslim League. Fazlul Huq called it a seduction of the Muslims from their allegiance to Islam through the expenditure of Rs. 1 lakh for propaganda by the Congress.²⁴ Muhammad Aurangzeb Khan, leader of the opposition at the NWFP Legislative Assembly called it the 'de-Muslimization' of the Frontier Province. The Khudai Khidmatgars of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan were considered a greater danger to Islam than the Hindu soldiers raised by B.S. Moonje.²⁵

The ban against cow slaughter in Congress-ruled provinces was a clear pointer to the majoritarian arrogance of the Congress. Muslims found the doublespeak of the Congress leader Jawaharlal Nehru particularly glaring in this context. On the one hand, he spoke of relegating religious points to the background and attending to the economic grievances of the Muslims; on the other, came the Congress ban depriving the common man of access to cheap meat.²⁶

In his Presidential Address during the Lucknow session of the Muslim League Jinnah clearly spelt out that 'all safeguards and settlements would be a scrap of paper unless they are backed by power'. This was elaborated further in the Calcutta session:

Muslims have made it clear more than once that besides the question of religion, culture, language and personal law there is the question equally of life and death for them and that their destiny and end are dependent upon their securing definition of their political rights, their due share in the nation and the government and the administration of the country. . . . They will not be submerged or dominated and they will not surrender so long as there is life in them. The Muslim League claims the status of complete equality with the Congress.²⁷

Jinnah's call for equality with the Congress and demand for a decisive say in the future constitutional developments of the country came as a light at the end of a tunnel for Linlithgow after the Congress had thrown in the towel in the provinces on 10 November 1939 with a demand for immediate independence and a Constituent Assembly to prepare a constitution for the country. The only way to tackle the Congress was to let them realize that theirs was not the only voice of India. Lord Linlithgow assured the Muslim League on 18 October 1939 that 'full weight would be given to their views and interests'. 'Jinnah now had the full backing of the government to come out with a definite programme.'²⁸

Jinnah had broken his isolation after the debacle of 1937 with two different kinds of deals with the two formidable Muslim majority provinces at the two ends of India. He wanted recognition as the sole representative of these two provinces at the centre and he had to pay quite a high price by any reckoning to secure this status. In Punjab the Premier, Sikander Hayat Khan, had secured a free hand within the province for his secular Unionist Party, League interference being reduced to a minimum by the Sikander–Jinnah Pact of October 1937. In Bengal he had to counter the regime of the Krishak Praja Party led by Fazlul Haque even when Haque had lost a section of his supporters and the League might as well install its nominee Nazimuddin into the Premiership.²⁹

Sikander's Federal Scheme

The Punjab Premier had already had an idea which way the wind was blowing. He had understood that the federal scheme would not be allowed to work as the Centre was feared to be dominated by a Hindu majority. Sikander had often complained to the Punjab Governor about the oppression of the Muslim minorities under the Congress ministries.³⁰ In June 1939 he gave Laithwaite, the Secretary to the Governor of the Punjab, a draft captioned 'Outline of a Scheme of Indian Federation' which suggested a three-tier constitution with seven different zones, four different kinds of legislative lists and a very complex division of subjects between the Centre and the states to replace the federal scheme of 1935.³¹ These proposals anticipated the subsequent Cabinet proposals in certain respects. Penderel Moon claimed to have seen it as early as 1938 when Sikander had hinted that 'unless positive proposals such as his were put forward for consideration other people would come out with "something worse"'.³²

The Pakistan Resolution

During early 1939 Muslim India was vigorously working on one alternative or the other to get rid of the provisions of the federal scheme. Syed Abdul Latif of Hyderabad put forward a scheme of partition. According to his plan Sindh, Baluchistan, Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Kashmir, Khairpur and Bahawalpur were to be united to form a Muslim state. The Maharaja of Kashmir was to

be compensated for his losses. On the north-east Bengal and Assam could form another Muslim state. There could be two other Muslim zones around Hyderabad and Lucknow.³³

The word 'Pakistan' had originated from a Cambridge student Chaudhuri Rahmat Ali when in 1930 Iqbal mooted the idea of a grouping of the Muslim states of the north-west during the Allahabad session of the Muslim League. During the Lahore session of the Muslim League in March 1940, Fazlul Haque, the Premier of Bengal, was made to move this resolution. It was seconded by the Punjab Premier Sikander Hayat Khan. Jinnah thus tried to commit both Muslim majority province leaders to the cause of Muslim sovereignty against majoritarian domination. The resolution read thus:

It is the considered view of the session of the League that no constitutional plan could be workable in this country or acceptable to the Muslims unless it is designed on the following basic principle, viz., that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted with such territorial re-adjustments as may be necessary that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority, as in the north-western and eastern zones of India, should be grouped to constitute independent states in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign.³⁴

The immediate impact of this League resolution was to establish the credentials of the Muslim League as the premier Muslim organization in the country. Personally Jinnah had gained immensely in prestige for his success in driving a decisive wedge between the Indian National Congress and Muslim India. Pakistan had now become the accepted slogan of the common rural masses. The word 'Pakistan' conjured up for the common rural Muslim the concept of a community 'that transcended the political structure of society'. Through the agency of the Punjab Muslim Students' Federation a series of pro-Pakistan conferences began to be organized to disseminate the ideas of a 'return to the Prophet's early community'. Aspiring after Pakistan was considered as equivalent to identification with the pure way of life as charted out by the Prophet and the Koran. With the close association of Fazlul Haque and Sikander Hayat Khan, the two Premiers of two Muslim majority provinces, with the resolution, Jinnah succeeded in bridging the erstwhile gap between the aspirations of the urban Muslim and his rural counterparts.³⁵ The Punjab Governor was jubilant for the Congress claim to represent the whole of India being 'torpedoed'.³⁶ However, much Sikander would try, it would no longer be possible to push the clock back and Muslim India

was now irrevocably committed to the path of Pakistan. Pakistan now was 'a goal' as Penderel Moon put it, 'which it would be easy for demagogues to pursue to disaster, difficult for statesmen to abandon or render innocuous'.³⁷

Congress leaders tried to belittle the implications of this resolution in their characteristic way. The Ramgarh session of the Congress did not mention it at all. Mahatma Gandhi described the situation following the Lahore resolution as 'baffling' in the pages of his *Harijan*³⁸ on 6 April 1940, while Jawaharlal Nehru, during a speech in Poona on 6 May described the Pakistan scheme as 'highly anti-national and pro-imperialist' and also something 'foolish', which cannot last more than 24 hours.³⁹

Sikh Reactions

Sikh reactions to the Lahore Resolution were much more bitter and violent. Sunder Singh Majithia of the Khalsa National Party, in spite of his being a member of the Unionist coalition under the leadership of Sikander Hyat Khan, could not fail to notice that the resolution was 'fraught with the most dangerous consequences detrimental alike to the best interests of the various communities of the country as a whole. He feared that it might soon bring 'a parting of ways' of the Sikhs and the Muslims in the coalition as the Sikhs were not prepared 'to tolerate for a single day the undiluted communal Raj of any community in the Punjab, which is not only their homeland, but also their holy land'. If Muslims would demand Pakistan, Majithia argued, the Sikhs would also claim back the sovereignty of Punjab which the young Maharaja Dulip Singh had given to the British to hold in trust for him.⁴⁰ The Akali challenge to this demand was absolutely point blank. While presiding over the first UP Sikh Conference at Lucknow on 15 April 1940 the Akali leader Master Tara Singh said that the Muslim League would have to cross 'an ocean of Sikh blood' to achieve Pakistan. To the Akalis the resolution appeared to be a 'mad' call for 'civil war'.⁴¹ At the Akal Takht in Harmandir Sahib at Amritsar 20,000 Sikhs took a vow to oppose the League scheme. Sikh repugnance at the prospect of Muslim domination of the Sikh minority in the Punjab presaged in the Lahore Resolution was given expression by celebrating a *ghallughara* day, trying to revive memories of the brutal massacre of the Sikhs by Ahmad Shah Abdali in 1762.⁴²

The August Offer

The Congress had demanded a provisional national government at the centre, which, though transitory, would have to command the confidence of the elected members of the Central Legislature. However, the Viceroy's proposals in August 1940, known as 'the August Offer' fell far short of their expectations. He claimed to have been authorized by His Majesty's government to expand his Executive Council to admit the leading members of different political parties including representatives from Princely States as well as the establishment of a wider War Advisory Council on an all India basis to look after the conduct of the war. Moreover, all constitutional arrangements henceforth were made conditional upon the acceptance by the minorities. 'It goes without saying,' the Viceroy declared, 'that they could not contemplate transfer of their present responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any system of government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life. Nor could they be parties to the coercion of such elements into submission to such a government.'⁴³

However, the Congress found this 'August Offer' unacceptable as the council members would not be answerable to the legislature. They were to be reduced to the creatures of the Governor-General, owing responsibility only to him. The offer was within the framework of the Dominion Status although the Congress had been committed to the goal of *Purna Swaraj* since 1921. Although the claim for constitutional self-determination was admitted, the meeting of a representative constituent assembly had to wait till the end of the war. Nehru called it 'an insult to India'⁴⁴ and the Congress chose to adhere to Mahatma Gandhi's policy of non-violent non-cooperation and stay away from the war effort.⁴⁵

Sporting Offer of Chakravarti Rajagopalachari

The Sikhs were further incensed by the 'sporting offer' made by Chakravarti Rajagopalachari of the Indian National Congress to have a national government installed at the Centre with a Muslim Premier at its head. However, the 'offer' required that his cabinet colleagues must enjoy the confidence of the elected members of the Central Legislature. The All India Sikh League at its meeting of 30 September 1940 at Lahore described this offer as 'anti-national and anti-

democratic' and wanted the All India Congress Committee to distance itself from such offers.⁴⁶

Cripps' Offer

While the stalemate in British talks with the Congress continued, the Japanese were approaching fast towards the Indian borders. On 1 February 1942 they occupied Moulmein and on 8 February they landed in Singapore. Rangoon fell on 8 March and Calcutta was exposed to the risk of air raids from the Japanese. Japanese Navy secured command of the Bay of Bengal and the entire eastern coastline of India lay exposed to the threat of invasion. India's involvement in the war without her consent became more and more indefensible day by day. 'We cannot fight,' Nehru would continue to argue, 'to defend a freedom we do not possess.'⁴⁷ Gandhi wrote in the 10 May 1941 issue of the *Harijan* that the presence of the British in India was an invitation to Japan to invade India. 'Their withdrawal would remove the bait.'⁴⁸

The British War Cabinet Committee on India headed by Deputy Prime Minister Attlee met on 28 February in view of the emergency to deliberate and decide on promises regarding the future of India. The proposed Indian Union will be equal to the United Kingdom in every respect and would be free to leave the British Commonwealth at will. An elected Constituent Assembly was to be set up immediately on the cessation of hostilities to prepare a new constitution for India. Elected members of provincial legislatures would form an electoral college and elect the members of the Constituent Assembly which would be equal to one-tenth of the electoral college in strength. His Majesty's government would transfer full responsibility to this new body through a treaty. Princely states were to be given the option subscribing to the new Constituent Assembly. Provinces were to be offered the right of staying out of the proposed Constituent Assembly and decide on their separate political status. The responsibility for the defence of India must remain in British hands in view of the emergency but the immediate and active participation of the leaders of the principal sections of the Indian people was an urgent necessity.⁴⁹

Armed with these deliberations in mind, Sir Stafford Cripps, Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons, came to India to have personal consultations with the Indian leaders on the spot and secure their agreement to these proposals. Cripps's draft declaration

presented the War Cabinet proposals with certain qualifications. In Punjab the percentage of population constituted by the Muslims was 57 per cent of the total. But this was not reflected in the proportion of Muslim members in the Punjab Assembly, which was only 50.9 per cent because of the weightage enjoyed by the minorities in the electoral arrangements of the province. In Bengal again Muslims constituted 54.7 per cent of the total, while in the Legislative Assembly their representation was only 49.2 per cent. Cripps proposed that if accession to the Constituent Assembly was not by a 60 per cent majority in these provinces, the minority would be free to demand a plebiscite of the adult male population.⁵⁰

The Cripps proposals satisfied no one except Jinnah, who could now heave a sigh of relief now that the non-accession principle gained such explicit recognition. But he was still apprehensive that His Majesty's government was discussing a single union and the Pakistan principle did not get explicit recognition. The Hindu Mahasabha disapproved of the proposals in very strong terms insisting that: 'The basic principle of the Hindu Mahasabha is that India is one and indivisible. . . . (It) cannot be true to itself or to the best interests of Hindusthan if it is a party to any proposal which involves the political partition of India in any shape or form.'⁵¹

The Congress press could see nothing better in it than 'an invitation to separatism'. In consonance with its non-partisan image it did not favour 'compelling the people of any territorial unit to remain in an Indian Union against the declared or established will'. But it could not be oblivious of the fate of the substantial Hindu-Sikh minority in the Punjab. It is probably with those minorities in mind that the Working Committee objected to 'compulsion being exercised on other substantial groups within that area'. They reiterated what they had always preached, that is, 'Each territorial unit should have the fullest possible autonomy within the union consistently with a strong National State.'⁵²

The toughest resistance came from the Sikhs with their perpetual fear of getting swamped under Muslim domination. All their apprehensions centred round the non-accession proposals. The Sikh All Parties Committee made a representation to Sir Stafford Cripps on 3 April 1942 rejecting the proposals. They thought that the cause of their community had been lamentably betrayed by providing for separation of provinces. Instead of maintaining and strengthening the integrity of India, the proposals had raised the spectre of Pakistan

once again. It is possible to have an idea of the grave forebodings crowding the Sikh mind from the language of their resolution:

Ever since the British advent our community has fought for England in every battlefield of the empire and this is our reward, that our position in the Punjab which England promised to hold in trust and in which we occupied a predominant position has been finally liquidated.

Why should a province that fails to secure 3/5 majority of its legislature, in which a religious community enjoys a statutory majority be allowed to hold a plebiscite and be given the benefit of a bare majority? In fairness this right should have been conceded to communities who are in permanent majority in the legislature.

Further why should not the population of any area opposed to separation be given the right to record its verdict and to form an autonomous unit?

Punjab proper extended upto the bank of Jhelum excluding Jhang and Multan districts and trans-Jhelum area was added by conquest of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and retained by the British for administrative convenience. It would be altogether unjust to allow extraneous trans-Jhelum population which only accidentally came into the province to dominate the future of Punjab proper.⁵³

They spelt out their opposition to the proposals in very clear and unambiguous terms that they would 'resist by all possible means separation of the Punjab from all-India Union'.⁵⁴

Sikander–Baldev Pact of 1942

By 1942 it had become amply clear to the Sikhs that, however, much they would like to hang on to the coat tails of an all-India party like the Indian National Congress to make up for their meagre numbers and their concentration mainly in only one province of the extreme north-west of India, the political decisions of the Congress, often taken from a larger national perspective, would not always fit in with the priorities of the Sikhs. Differences over the question of joining the army had shaken their faith in a blind adherence to the political line followed by the Congress. They had to learn fending for themselves without the protective umbrella of a national party with its myriad concerns which often had little connection with the ground realities in the Punjab. The Punjab Premier stepped in with exactly these local requirements in tow. A cabinet berth had fallen vacant since the death of Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia. Sardar Ujjal Singh was to succeed in order of seniority to this position. But the rural/

urban rivalry played its inevitable role and the rural Dasaundha Singh was preferred to the urban Ujjal Singh by the Khalsa Nationalist Party. Sikander now started a dialogue with the Akalis for admitting one of their numbers to the cabinet.

The Akalis were also put in a tight corner by Jagjit Singh Bedi's bill to bring a revision of the Gurdwara legislation, which would prevent the spending of SGPC money in political matters. Sikander was able to smooth the ruffled feathers of the Akalis by declaring that changes in Gurdwara legislation would not be allowed. Akalis were also suspicious of the effect the Hindu Charitable Endowments Act was going to produce on some Udasi Gurdwaras, which had declared themselves as Hindus to escape SGPC control in the past. This Bill, once it became an Act, was bound to affect Sikh control of these Gurdwaras. Congress support for this Bill embittered the relations of the Akalis with the Congress. Sikander won the confidence of the Akalis by supporting their contention in this matter.⁵⁵

As the war continued in a feverish pitch, Punjab began to be valued more as the 'sword arm of India' by the British. Peace between the two dominant martial tribes, the Sikhs and the Muslims, providing the highest number of recruits to the British Indian army seemed to be an urgent necessity. Linlithgow now recommended the admission of a Sikh member by an expansion of the Viceroy's Council.⁵⁶ Accordingly the Punjab Premier was informed by the new Governor, Sir Bertrand Glancy, of the policy changes at the highest level. Sikander too had understood his priorities very clearly. It was necessary to allay the grievances of the Sikhs and come to an understanding with them to bolster the province's commitment to keep an uninterrupted supply of recruits to the army. The nomination of Sir Joginder Singh to the Viceroy's Council in July 1942 was a step in this direction and further satisfied a long-standing aspiration of the Sikhs to be represented in higher policy decisions of the government.

The Akali-Unionist differences were tried to be bridged yet further by the conclusion of the Sikander-Baldev Pact of 15 June 1942. The constant efforts at mediation by Major Short between the Akalis and the Unionists at last seemed to have borne the desired fruit.⁵⁷ A new interpretation of this sudden diplomatic revolution in this province was the reported move of the Congress in winning over 20 Unionist legislators in the Assembly to form a Congress led government in the Punjab. Sikander had somehow come to know of these developments behind the scenes and stretched himself to the utmost to

forestall this Congress move.⁵⁸ Sikander promised in a letter to the Akali leader Sardar Baldev Singh⁵⁹ to look into the Sikh grievances related to the availability of facilities for *jhatka* meat, the teaching of Gurmukhi as second language in schools of Punjab and raising the proportion of Sikh recruitment to the civil services in the Punjab to 10 per cent. The question of Sikh representation in the central services was also looked into. From the point of view of the Sikhs the most crucial part of the understanding was the promise that in religious matters concerning a particular community, the concerned community would have the sole right of deciding whether it was to be discussed in the Legislature. Baldev Singh joined the Unionist Cabinet on 26 June 1942 and replaced Dasaundha Singh of the Khalsa National Party. This was 'the last joint political effort of the Punjabis of all the three major communities', as Indu Banga remarks, 'for unity and political harmony within the existing framework'.⁶⁰ Although issues like the statutory Muslim majority still continued to haunt the Sikhs, the Premier had tried his utmost to remove the 'existing irritants'. The Pact subsequently faced a lot of criticism for failing to deliver the promised relief to the Sikhs. But this was probably because the spirit of conciliation with which Sikander Hayat Khan had conceived of this Pact did not long survive his sudden demise in December 1942 and the reassertion of the forces of communal competition soon after.

In the immediate present the Akali-Unionist reapproachment had its inevitable consequence in keeping Punjab out of the vortex of the Quit India movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi in August 1942 from Bombay. The British retaliated by the immediate arrest of Mahatma Gandhi and all the Congress Working Committee members like Maulana Azad, Jawaharlal Nehru, Ballabhbai Patel and Sarojini Naidu. Unlike the stormy years of the Civil Disobedience of the 1930s when the Congress could reach out to the rural masses through the cooperation of the Akalis, in 1942 the Punjab countryside remained comparatively quiet.

Notes

1. Ganeshi Mahajan, *Congress Politics in the Punjab (1885-1947)*, p. 96. The actual resignations were submitted on 10 November 1939.
2. Gopi Chand Bhargava, the Congress member of the Punjab Legislative Assembly, recorded his disapproval of the unilateral exhortation of the Premier.

3. Copy of two resolutions passed in a Panthic gathering of the Shiromani Akali Dal sent by Tara Singh, Chairman to the General Secretary, Indian National Congress, Wardha, in AICC Files, no. P 17, 1939-40, vol. II, 4 October 1939.
4. Ibid.
5. Craik to Linlithgow, 15 November 1939, Secret DO no. 193 in Lionel Carter (edited and compiled), *Punjab Politics, 1936-1939: The Start of Provincial Autonomy: Governors' Fortnightly Reports* (Manohar, New Delhi, 2004), pp. 398-9.
6. Stephen Oren, 'The Sikhs, Congress and the Unionists in British Punjab, 1937-1945', in *Modern Asian Studies*, 8, 3 (1974), pp. 397-418.
7. Penderel Moon, *Divide and Quit* (Chatto & Windus, London, 1962), p. 32.
8. Craik to Linlithgow, 15 November 1939, in Lionel Carter, *Punjab Politics*, op. cit.
9. Report of *The Statesman*, 24 October 1940 cited in Stephen Oren, 'The Sikhs, Congress and the Unionists in British Punjab, 1937-45', op. cit.
10. N.N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register*, 1940, II, p. 320.
11. Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985, 1994), pp. 45-6.
12. Linlithgow to Zetland, 12 April 1939 in Linlithgow papers in *Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for Independence in India, 1939*, part 2, ed. Mushirul Hasan with Preface by General Editor Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (Oxford University Press/ICHR, New Delhi, 2008), p. 1773.
13. *Hindustan Times*, 8 May 1939 in 'Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement of Independence of India', 1939, part 2, p. 1785.
14. Craik to Linlithgow, 8 February 1940, Telegram No. 3-G in Lionel Carter, *Punjab Politics, 1940-1943: Governors' Fortnightly Reports* (Manohar, New Delhi, 2005).
15. Tuteja, 'Sikhs and the Congress: 1930-1940', in Paul Wallace and Surendra Chopra, *Political Dynamics of Punjab* (Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1981), pp. 94-112.
16. 'Muslims and the Congress : Sir M. Yakub's Amazing Charges', newspaper cutting from *Star of India*, Bombay, 26 April 1938, in AICC Papers, G 32, 1938 in NMML.
17. Ibid.
18. Jinnah at the Lucknow session of the All India Muslim League, in AICC Files, G 32, 1938 in NMML.
19. Ibid.
20. Speech during Second Session of All India Muslim Students' Federation in AICC Files, G 32, 1938 in NMML.
21. Terms proposed by Calcutta Khilafat Committee for an understanding with the Congress in AICC Papers, in File no. G 32 in NMML.

22. *Hindustan Standard*, 10 April 1938 in AICC Papers, File no. G 32, 1938 in NMML.
23. Propaganda in by-elections, Bijnor in AICC Papers, File no. G 32, 1938 in NMML.
24. Fazlul Haque at the Calcutta session of the Muslim League in AICC Papers, G 32, 1938 in NMML.
25. Aurangzeb Khan, MLA during Calcutta session in *ibid.*
26. Editorial in *Zamindar* of Lahore in *ibid.*
27. Jinnah in Calcutta session of the All India Muslim League in *ibid.*
28. Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, op. cit., pp. 48-9.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 68-9.
30. Craik to Linlithgow, 29 October 1939, DO no. 191, File in Lionel Carter, *Punjab Politics, 1936-39*, pp. 394-7.
31. Sikander to Laithwaite, 29 June 1939 in *ibid.*, pp. 425-33.
32. Moon, *Divide and Quit*, op. cit., p. 19.
33. Editorial in *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 1 April 1939 in *Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for Independence in India, 1939*, part 2, ed. Mushirul Hasan with Preface by General Editor Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (Oxford University Press/ICHR, New Delhi, 2008), p. 1768.
34. Editorial in *Tribune*, 11 September 1940 in K.N. Panikkar (ed.), *Towards Freedom*, part I, 1940 (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2009).
35. Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*, op. cit., p. 176.
36. Craik to Linlithgow, 1 April 1940, Telegram in Lionel Carter, *Punjab Politics, 1940-1943* (Manohar, Delhi, 2005), pp. 108-11.
37. Moon, *Divide or Quit*, op. cit., p. 23.
38. N.N. Mitra (ed.), *The Indian Annual Register: An Annual Digest of Public Affairs* (Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 1990), vol. 1, January-June 1940, p. 58.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 356-7.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 356.
42. Tai Yong Tan, 'A Community in Crisis', in Tai Yong Tan and Gyanesh Kudasiya, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia* (Routledge Studies in Modern History of Asia, 2000), Chapter 4.
43. Reginald Coupland, *The Cripps Mission* (Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1942), p. 11.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
45. N.N. Mitra (ed.), *The Indian Annual Register*, July-December 1940, vol. II, p. 372.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 323; also see V.P. Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India* (Orient Longman, Madras, 1957; rpt. 1993), p. 95.
47. Coupland, *The Cripps Mission*, op. cit., p. 19.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
49. Meeting held in Mr. Attlee's room on 28 February 1942. Attlee (in

- Chair) and Sir Stafford Cripps, Viscount Simon, Sir John Anderson, Mr. Amery, Sir James Grigg, Sir Edward Bridges (Secretary), in Document no. 194, War Cabinet Committee on India L/PO/6/106b; ff 306-9 in Nicholas Mansergh and E.W.R. Lumby, *The Transfer of Power 1942-7*, vol. I (Vikas Publications, London, 1971).
50. Coupland, *The Cripps Mission*, op. cit., p. 36.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
53. The Sikh All Parties Conference to Sir Stafford Cripps, 31 March 1942 in N.N. Mitra, *The Indian Annual Register*, 1942, vol. I; also available in enclosure to a letter of Linlithgow to Amery, Telegram 209 S.C. of 18 April 1942 (Mss Eur. F.125/22) in Document 467 of *The Transfer of Power*, vol. I, pp. 582-8.
54. Ibid.
55. Oren, op. cit., 'The Sikhs, Congress and the Unionists in British Punjab, 1937-1945', in *Modern Asian Studies*, 8 (3), 1974.
56. Linlithgow to Amery, Telegram, 30 January 1942 in Document 47, *The Transfer of Power*, vol. I, op. cit.
57. Kailash Chandra Gulati, op. cit., *The Akalis Past and Present*, p. 82.
58. Ibid., p. 85.
59. Sardar Baldev Singh was the son of Indar Singh, a Jat from Ambala, who had qualified as an engineer and made money in contracts in the various Tata businesses. He had been financing the Akalis for quite some time. He was first elected in 1937 to the Punjab Assembly; this was nullified by an election petition. He was elected again in 1938. He was not a good speaker and Glancy reported about his not having opened his mouth even once in the Assembly from 1938 to 1942. See note by Glancy in Lionel Carter, *Punjab Politics, 1940-3*, op. cit., p. 314.
60. Indu Banga, 'The Demand for Pakistan and Sikh Politics at the Crossroads', in Karamjit K. Malhotra (ed.), *The Punjab Revisited: Essays in Honour of Dr. Kirpal Singh* (Punjabi University, Patiala, 2014), pp. 292-328.

Sikh Quest for Security: From Azad Punjab to Khalistan

THE 'AUGUST OFFER' from the Viceroy as far back as 1940 had already made it clear that the British government in India was in no mood to accept the claim of the Indian National Congress as the sole representative of the people of the subcontinent. As such they would not let the Indian National Congress assume the reins of power as and when the British were going to abdicate from it. The interests of the Muslim minorities figured very prominently in all the schemes planned by them for the transfer of power in India.

It goes without saying that they (the British Government) could not contemplate transfer of their present responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any system of government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life. Nor could they be parties to the coercion of such elements into submission to such a government.¹

The Cripps recommendations had further confirmed this attitude of the government by holding out the prospect of secession from the Indian Union to a dissident minority.² For the Sikhs this amounted to an ultimatum threatening perpetual subjection to a dominant Muslim majority in their own homeland, the land of their Gurus and the land where Maharaja Ranjit Singh had carved out a large Sikh Empire, uniting the distant parts of the Punjab under the Khalsa flag.

The Azad Punjab Scheme

The Akali leaders from this time put forward a demand for a new province – the Azad Punjab – as a counterweight to the demand for Pakistan. In course of an interview with Sir Stafford Cripps on 27 March 1942 the Sikh leaders Baldev Singh, Ujjal Singh, Master Tara Singh and Sir Joginder Singh, representing a Sikh All Parties Committee, expressed the need for security for the Sikh minority in the province in the event of the secession of Punjab from the Indian

Union in deference to the wishes of the Muslim majority expressed through a plebiscite. They could not be comforted by the prospect of being sought after by the Congress for their support in the future Constituent Assembly, where the Congress would have only a small majority. Nor did they feel reassured by prospects of British insistence on clauses for minority protection in the treaty which was to be negotiated. The prospects of receiving 'the most favourable minority protection' from the Muslims in case they were dissatisfied with the constitution and wanted to remain outside by a vote of non-accession in a plebiscite would not satisfy them either. They would not approve of the Cripps Declaration and kept on insisting on a special Sikh area, where vote could be taken to make sure whether the Sikhs would like to join the main union or the Muslim union.³ 'The Sikhs would never tolerate Muhammadan rule, open or disguised' insisted the Akali leader Master Tara Singh and would prefer to carve out a separate province consisting of all the territories south of the Sutlej along with the districts of Lahore (leaving out Lahore city), Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Jullunder, Hoshiarpur and Kangra.⁴ This would give the non-Muslims a majority of 63 per cent in the new province on the east while the Muslims would have a majority of 77 per cent in the new province on the west.⁵ The *Akali*, the organ of the Akalis published from Lahore, found it most reasonable that a separate province should be carved out for the Sikhs in the same way that Sindh had been separated from Bombay in the interest of 38 lakh Muslims.⁶ Giani Kartar Singh, the MLA of Lyallpur, explained in the *Akali* of 27 December 1942 that of the eleven provinces in India Hindus could dominate in seven while the Muslims had been trying to seek the separation of the four, where they were in the majority. The Sikhs did not have the numbers to stop Pakistan at the Central level. Nor could they resist it at the provincial level. They could only demand a readjustment of the provincial boundaries.⁷ The Sikhs could have a better deal, the Giani pointed out in a meeting at Nankana Sahib, if the redemarcation was done on the basis of landed interests instead of on population.⁸ The All India Akali Conference declared that while the Sikhs were opposed to the Pakistan demand of the Muslim League, no single community was to dominate in the new province proposed by them. Cripps proposals were condemned by several Sikh congregations at Sialkot and Jhelum.⁹ The Sikh All Parties Committee also wrote to Sir Stafford Cripps, the Lord Privy Seal that: 'The Sikhs do not want to dominate but they would certainly

not submit to the domination of a community which is bent upon breaking the unity of India and imposing their personal laws and culture on the other sections of the population.’¹⁰

Besides redrawing the boundaries of the Punjab, the Committee also demanded the same weightage for the Sikh minority as had been extended to the Muslim minority. As long as communal electorates existed, provincial governments should be on a coalition basis. In the central legislature they wanted a 5 per cent representation for the Sikhs. The central cabinet should also have a Sikh member. A Sikh should be included in the Defence Advisory Committee to advise the Defence Minister. As the percentage of Sikhs in the defence forces had declined, they wanted it to be raised to its earlier level in keeping with past traditions. Sikh share in central and provincial services should be the same as that of the Muslims. Laws concerning the religious practice of the Sikhs were to be amended only by the votes of the majority of Sikh legislators in the Assembly. The state should allow freedom to the Sikhs in the exercise of their religious rites and their food. They also wanted facility for teaching Punjabi in the Gurmukhi script whenever a sufficient number of scholars would demand it.¹¹

The demand of the Sikhs initially found a favourable response in British circles. The military worth of the Sikhs had made them indispensable allies during the critical days of 1942. Cripps had already talked about a probable ‘sub-division of the Punjab into two Provinces or the setting up within that Province of a semi-autonomous district for the Sikhs on the Soviet model’.¹² David Taylor Monteath, the permanent Under Secretary of State for India and Burma wrote in the Minutes of 24 April 1942 about ‘the eventual adjustment of provincial boundaries’ under Section 290 of Government of India Act of 1935.¹³ The Secretary of State, Mr. Amery mentioned in course of debates in the British Parliament on 28 April 1942 that besides the Cripps Offer ‘alternative methods might arise, which might form a better basis for the definition of boundaries and might give representation for smaller elements, such as Sikhs’.¹⁴ Amery could not help admitting the justice of the Sikh claim on grounds of self-determination. Although he denied that his statement in the Parliament was a ‘pledge’ he had to recognize that the Sikh demand for a ‘Sikhdom’ was just a corollary of the Pakistan demand. The British could not, with justice, press for the one without making provisions for the other. ‘The more Pakistan is pressed,’ he wrote in

a letter to the Marquess of Linlithgow on 20 August 1942, 'the more the Sikhs are likely in their turn to press for a degree of autonomy sufficient to protect them from Muslim domination.'¹⁵ There was also a lurking fear regarding acts of subversion by the Sikhs if they were frightened out of their wits by the 'prospect of a predominantly Muslim and separate Punjab' and the Viceroy Linlithgow mentioned the possibility of the presence of 'clandestine arms in the Punjab'.¹⁶

For the next few months arguments either in favour of or in criticism of this new idea of 'Azad Punjab' occupied most Sikh meetings. The very name chosen by its protagonists revealed 'the loss of hope of getting justice from the Unionists', suggested Ujjal Singh and Baldev Singh, in course of their presidential address in the All India Sikh Youth Conference in Lahore on 30-1 January 1943.¹⁷ The fate of the Sikh shrines in west Punjab, however, continued to agitate the minds of the Sikhs. A meeting of the Shiromani Akali Dal in Amritsar on 4 and 5 June 1943, therefore, laid down that the boundaries of the new province were to be decided after taking into consideration the population, property, land revenue and historical tradition of each of the communities. Besides the Ambala, Jullunder and Lahore Divisions they also planned to take the Lyallpur district out of the Multan Division and some portions of Montgomery and Multan districts.¹⁸ Akali leaders like Master Tara Singh, Principal Ganga Singh, Giani Sher Singh, Giani Kartar Singh addressed several conferences at Lahore (7 June 1943), Attock (16 August 1943), Dhudial (3 and 4 October 1943) to allay the doubts of their supporters. During the All India Akali Conference at Bhowanigarh on 14 March 1943 Master Tara Singh tried to convince the Sikhs that only 5 per cent of the Sikhs and 12 per cent of the Hindus would be left beyond the boundaries of the new state after the readjustment. They would then be entitled to weightage accorded to minorities in other provinces. The Sikhs would thus be entitled to 15 per cent of the seats in the legislature, while the Hindus would get at least 25 per cent and together it would come to 40 per cent. They would then be better equipped to protect themselves than in the Punjab Legislative Assembly, where their combined strength was only 47 per cent and consisted of many conflicting elements not always able to see eye to eye on questions affecting their interests. Jats and Scheduled Castes (*achhuts*), who often combined with the Muslims to gain some advantages would not have such sympathies in Azad Punjab. Thus while Sikhs and Hindus in the Azad Punjab would be freed of Muslim

domination, those living outside its pale would also be able to improve their position appreciably.¹⁹

Impracticability of the Scheme

However, the feasibility of the Azad Punjab scheme was questioned in many quarters right from the moment of its inception. Referring to the Secretary of State's sympathetic words for the Sikh demand for a readjustment of the province's boundaries in the British Parliament, Sir Bertrand Glancy, the Governor of the Punjab, expressed his resentment at the idea of dismembering the very province, which was playing the key role in sustaining the war effort in the hour of crisis with a steady flow of loyal recruits to the British army. 'It is to be hoped that these expressions of sympathy will not go to their heads,' he wrote in despair to the Viceroy, 'and lead them to believe that "Khalistan" is regarded in responsible quarters as a practicable proposition.'²⁰ He anticipated a great upheaval if any attempt was made to tear out a large portion of land from the province, specially as there was not a single district where the Sikhs commanded a majority. Even with the inflated figures of the Census of 1941, when all the communities had tried to record their numbers as high as possible, the Sikhs were found to have a majority in only one state, that of the Muslim state of Malerkotla.²¹

Sikander Hayat Khan, the Unionist Premier of Punjab, too, floated a formula of his own. His intention, as Glancy interpreted it, was to 'bring home to all reasonably-minded men that Pakistan, should it ever eventuate, would smash the Province as it now exists'. Sikander suggested in this formula that the Muslim community might secede from the Indian federation either by a resolution passed in the Punjab Legislative Assembly by 75 per cent of its members or by a referendum of 60 per cent of the Muslim members in the Punjab Legislative Assembly. In case the Muslim members decided in favour of non-accession in the above-mentioned manner, the non-Muslim members too could decide by a 60 per cent majority of non-Muslim members either in favour of accession to the Indian federation or for their separation from the present Punjab province and combination with contiguous territories on the east. Glancy thought that this 'disastrous dismemberment of the Punjab' was mooted by Sikander probably to expose the weaknesses of the idea of Pakistan.²² However, the Viceroy found the formula fraught with possibilities of heightening the

communal tension and failed to discover in it any potentiality of demonstrating Pakistan as an impossible scheme.²³ For the Sikhs the Sikander formula was of no help as the Sikhs even with their weightage added strength of 19 per cent would not be able to make much of an impact against a 75 per cent majority vote. The Akali therefore called it a farce in a special issue.²⁴

The Azad Punjab scheme also ran into rough weather among the Sikhs themselves. The Sikhs who would remain beyond the boundary of the proposed state considered themselves betrayed and left out. Rawalpindi Sikhs considered it to be a stunt of the Government to break the solidarity of the Sikhs. Baba Kharak Singh, who had formed the Central Akali Dal in view of his differences with Master Tara Singh, now tried to expose the weaknesses of the Azad Punjab scheme from *Fateh*, the organ of the Central Akali Dal. It tried to play on the anxieties of the 9 lakh Sikhs who would be left in west Punjab with their assets worth lakhs. Eastern Punjab districts of Lahore, Amritsar, Jullunder and Hoshiarpur had little compensation to offer for their vast and fertile holdings.²⁵ 'I can make absolutely no distinction between Pakistan and Azad Punjab', declared Baba Kharak Singh while presiding over the Akhand Hindustan Conference on 6 June at Minto Park, Lahore. Both were plans for the vivisection of India and 'cut at the roots of its unity and integrity'.²⁶ Baba Kharak Singh raised the spectre of 'Muslim communal Raj' and spoke in favour of closing ranks with the Hindus.

The accusation that Jinnah and Master Tara Singh were sailing in the same boat was levelled once again in the Panja Sahib Conference of 16 August 1943 under the chairmanship of Baba Kharak Singh. Sardar Sant Singh, Amar Singh, Harbans Singh Sestani, Labh Singh Narang, Meher Singh Chakwal and Durlabh Singh all called the scheme suicidal to the Sikh Panth and the country and detrimental to the interests of the entire province.²⁷ The Akhand Hindustan Conference at Chakwal in the Jhelum district held on 15 September 1943 and presided over by Baba Kharak Singh once again expressed the apprehension that the Azad Punjab scheme would further widen the gulf between various communities to a level, where it would never be possible to bridge it. He favoured a national government at the centre and wanted to cooperate wholeheartedly in the national struggle for the emancipation of the country. He also pointed to the presence of diverse nationalities having different cultures in America, Russia and England. When these countries could constitute one

nation, argued the Baba, there could be no earthly reason why India should be deprived of her right to function as a single entity. Sardar Harbans Singh, the Chairman of the Reception Committee, argued that Azad Punjab would reduce the Sikhs in the *ilaga* to the position of 'serfs' and would prove a 'brake for the attainment of the complete independence of the country'.²⁸ Baba Kharak Singh also held conferences in Adamke in Sialkot on 27 November 1943 and in Punjab frontier on the Guru Nanak's birth anniversary in the same year condemning both the scheme and its leaders. Meeting of the Sikhs of Rawalpindi, Jhelum, Attock and the Frontier Province were held at Guru Singh Sabha mobilizing opinion against the scheme.²⁹

The attempt of the Akalis to organize a counter meeting at Gujar Khan in January 1943 with the help of Bakshi Gurcharan Singh, Advocate of Rawalpindi and Sardar Kishan Singh Alaq, President Singh Sabha, Gujar Khan were frustrated through the resistance of the inhabitants of this *ilaga*. The Akali leaders could not set foot in this area till August. Principal Ganga Singh who was trying to reach Panja Sahib to attend a meeting scheduled for 14 August was detained at Sukho and Master Tara Singh and Giani Kartar Singh could not advance beyond Gujar Khan. The resentment of the Sikhs who inhabited these areas, proposed to be left out of the boundaries of the new state, was aired in the speech made by Sardar Uttam Singh Duggal in the meeting at Gujar Khan, where he wondered how the erstwhile nationalists could suddenly turn into Jinnaites and called it 'un-Sikh-like to throw the area where Sikh culture had made tremendous strides and which had given them most men of learning and wisdom at the mercy of a medieval religious state.' To him the scheme appeared to be a device to perpetrate the division of the Jats and the non-Jats and subsequently to break the Jats into pieces.³⁰

Dissidents in the Akali Dal and the opponents of Master Tara Singh derived mileage from these developments and the Central Akali Dal drew closer to the Hindu Mahasabha. During a joint conference of the Central Akali Dal and the Akhand Hindustan Conference at Roomi, a place of historic importance in Ludhiana on 19 and 20 June 1943 Baba Kharak Singh along with General Sham Singh Roomi, Sardar Labh Singh Narang, Bawa Sohan Singh, Giani Puran Singh and Sardar Ajaib Singh questioned the benefits of the Sikander-Baldev Pact. The inability of the government to make facilities for *jhatka* meat available came under severe criticism and the resignation of Sardar Baldev Singh from the Unionist cabinet was demanded.³¹ The

Akhand Hindustan Conference at Minto Park, Lahore, on 6 June 1943 Sardar Pritam Singh Bhatia, the Chairman of the Reception Committee, emphasized the common social and political ties of the Sikhs and the Hindus in spite of their religious distinctions. It was possible to resist 'Muslim communal Raj' in the Punjab if the Sikhs and Hindus united together. The Akali decision to join the coalition government under Muslim League leadership in the North-West Frontier Province was criticized by Sardar Pritam Singh Bhatia as a sell-out and the height of political dishonesty. This was interpreted as an instance of the close collaboration between Jinnah and the Akalis and their collusion in the projected vivisection of India. Baba Kharak Singh wondered how this could be done when 35,000 Sikhs were still imprisoned or interned.³² Again during the Akhand Hindustan Conference at Chakwal in the Jhelum district on 15 September 1943 Sardar Harbans Singh accused the Akalis of mismanagement of Gurdwara funds. The Akali attitude to beef (they would not recommend the ban of beef under Muslim League influence) came under severe criticism and Akali cooperation in the North-West Frontier Province came under attack. Sardar Baldev Singh's inability to stop the appointment of a junior Muslim as the Director of Agriculture on the recommendations of the Governor was also criticized and he was advised to quit the cabinet.³³ This anomaly was, however, rectified during the Khizr regime by the appointment of a European officer for the post.³⁴

Muslim League Attempts to Increase its Influence

Sikh apprehensions of the Pakistan plan were exacerbated as the Unionist leaders were seen to be playing in the hands of the Muslim League. The cry for Pakistan seemed to have caught the imagination of the Muslims as days wore on. The Punjab Premier Sikander Hayat Khan, who could sense the intensity of public feelings, did not risk an open rupture with Jinnah and had to attend a Muslim League meeting held in Lyallpur in November 1942. It left the Sikhs 'injured and bewildered' and put an end to all hopes of cooperation from the Muslims, which the Sikander-Baldev Pact had inspired.³⁵

The unexpected death of Sikander on 26 December 1942 came as a further setback for the prospects of inter-communal understanding. The Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, who was understandably anxious to

hold the communal balance in this province, which was serving the imperial government as a major recruiting centre in the peak of war efforts, wrote to the Secretary of State Amery on 28 December 1942 that:

He has with great skill for a number of years kept together a delicate political mosaic. Sikander was well known to be very non-communal in temper and outlook and he had conciliated a far greater degree of general support in that most important Province than anyone whom I can think of as a possible successor is likely to manage to do.³⁶

The Governor's choice of the successor of Sikander was also a pointer to the fact that Punjab was being regarded as a 'Muslim Province' by the British. Therefore the claims of Chaudhary Chhotu Ram in order of seniority were bypassed for Khizr Hayat Khan, of the Tiwana clan and son of General Umar Hayat Khan, a large landholder of Shahpur district. Khizr had been Minister of Public Works under the late Sikander Hayat Khan. His succession was smooth as there was no serious objection to his candidature for Premiership within the Unionist Party.³⁷ Even this did not please Jinnah and he complained against the Punjab Governor's violation of constitutional procedure in failing to consult Muslim League members in the Punjab Assembly before the appointment of a Premier.³⁸

At the very outset of his career the new Premier was made to understand the changes that were coming over in the political atmosphere of the province. During the Delhi meeting of the Muslim League in March 1943 which the Premier had to attend, Jinnah and his lieutenants complained that the Punjab Unionists were not carrying out all the wishes of the Muslim League to the extent that it would have preferred. They made it very clear that the Muslim League would henceforth like to have a greater degree of control over the Unionist Party. Khizr Hayat Khan acknowledged the Qaid-i-Azam as the leader of all the Muslims in India but he countered the allegations of the Muslim League against the Unionist Party by referring him to the terms of the Sikander-Jinnah Pact. This was concluded during the AIML session at Lucknow on 15 October 1937. According to the terms of this Pact the Punjab National Unionist Party (PNUP) had agreed to follow the Muslim League decisions in all India matters while inside the province it was to be left free to pursue its own policy. He thus succeeded in stalling a proposed League resolution advocating a more active interference of the League in Punjab matters.³⁹

The reprieve won by Khizr, however, proved to be transient and the Governor could foresee 'rocks ahead' in their relationship.⁴⁰ The Punjab press would not let the matter go unnoticed. They started debating vigorously over the fact whether Jinnah was justified in calling the Punjab cabinet a League ministry. The Nawab of Mamdot, the leader of the Provincial Muslim League suddenly created a sensation by making a press statement that the Sikander-Jinnah Pact had ceased to exist. Although Mamdot claimed to have issued this statement on his own yet speculations were rife if he would have gone to such a drastic extent if he did not have the sanction of the Party supremo.⁴¹ In a subsequent meeting with the Premier, Jinnah too maintained that the Unionist Party had come to an end with the signing of the Sikander-Jinnah Pact. It was thus quite obvious that Jinnah had determined to obtain 'mastery for the League over the Punjab Ministry'.⁴²

Muslim League influence in Punjab in the meanwhile continued to advance with rapid strides and Muslim League observed 'Pakistan Day' on 23 March 1943. A 'League Week' was planned from 12 to 18 April, when branch offices of the League were opened, primary members were enrolled and meetings were held to advertise the Pakistan scheme. 'There is no doubt,' the Governor reported, 'that the "Pakistan slogan" is gaining in volume, and I fear that there are a fair number of politicians in the province who would sell the Unionist Government for their personal advantage.'⁴³ The bankruptcy of the Unionist programme was summed up in a note by the Punjab Governor dated 21 July 1943:

The danger of Jinnah's professing to unfurl the green flag of Islam is obvious and it is doubtful how many of the Unionist Muslims would have the hardihood to resist the pressure of this manoeuvre. One of Khizr's main difficulties of course is the absence of any convincing battle-cry with which to rally his followers. He has no inclination to imitate Congress tactics and clamour for the independence of India, nor to abase himself to Jinnah and cry aloud for Pakistan. The pro-zamindar campaign of the Unionist Party with its concomitant agrarian legislation has for the present more or less exhausted itself. . . . Whatever cohesive effect it has exercised on the majority of the Party has been gradually evaporating. The War Effort and the interests of Punjabi soldiers still help to provide the machine with a certain amount of fuel, but, as danger from the enemy has receded, this factor has become less potent than before.⁴⁴

It had become obvious to the Punjab Premier that it was difficult to resist the idea of Pakistan. He could foresee a large exodus of the

MLAs and the Unionist Party tottering to insignificance once elections were announced. It neither had any funds nor did it have any organization and its disappearance would be mourned by none. He feared that the League was soon to employ Maulvis and Mullahs to work up fanatical feeling in favour of the League and the Unionist Party would not be able to stick to its guns in the face of religious prejudice. He would have given in by April 1944 had it not been for the constant exhortation of the Governor not to quit in view of the necessity for putting up an united front in the province with the Hindus and the Sikhs to keep up the War Effort.⁴⁵ Wavell warned Glancy that the Unionist Government should be kept up in the province till the end of war with Japan for the sake of its unity and peace among the different communities. A Muslim League Ministry would not be acceptable to the Sikhs and Hindus. So Khizr was to be persuaded to continue.⁴⁶

However, the Unionist government was being sabotaged from inside by the members themselves. 'Under the stress of the League's growing influence in the Punjab,' as the Viceroy had written, 'the Muslim members of the Ministry and their hangers on have been tempted to show themselves more Muslim than League itself.'⁴⁷ One such was Shaukat Hayat Khan, son of the late Premier, Sikander Hayat Khan. Shaukat had been educated at Aligarh, Government College in Lahore and the Indian Military Academy. He was 28 years of age and had no political background at all. He had distinguished himself in the army on the staff of the Indian Division in the Middle East, had been wounded and taken prisoner in Eritrea. Sentimental feelings for his father had secured his inclusion in the Ministry as Minister for Public Works after the death of Sikander Hayat Khan. He had to seek elections within six months and he chose to stand on a League ticket which was permissible under a clause of the Sikander-Jinnah Pact. He stood from Attock, vacated by his kinsman Muzaffar Khan. Jinnah did not treat him very cordially when he went to meet him; nor did he issue a statement to support Shaukat's candidature. Yet Shaukat must have sensed that his future lay in jumping to the Pakistan bandwagon and he became the centre of a controversy by an indiscreet reference to Pakistan during an election speech in Sheikhupura.⁴⁸ During Jinnah's attempt to transform the Unionist ministry into a Muslim League one, Shaukat was of greatest help to him.

Jinnah visited Punjab in person from 19 April with an intention to force the issue. He must have thought of having Punjab decisively

in his train before launching an all-out tirade against majoritarian domination in the country. He claimed that the League had the right to terminate any coalition in the Assembly. His sole ambition was to 'kill the name Unionist'.⁴⁹ The Punjab governor thought that his keenness for obliterating the existence of the Unionists in the Province was for appropriating the glory of their peasant friendly agrarian measures.⁵⁰ Jinnah must have been aware that the World War was drawing to a close and elections in the Province would follow immediately on the wake of the cessation of hostilities. It was therefore necessary to challenge the bluff of the Unionists before the Province could pass into the election mode. Khizr held long meetings with Jinnah, often stretching over 2 to 2½ hours trying to convince him of the inadroit nature of his move which would disturb the peace among the three different communities in the province. However, the very fact of Khizr trying to remonstrate with Jinnah convinced Khizr's Muslim adherents of the strength of Jinnah's position vis-à-vis the Unionist Premier and they felt 'that their safest plan is to show their adherence to the winning party before it is too late'.⁵¹ Attempts were made to collect signatures from MLAs promising to resign from the Muslim League if Jinnah insisted too much on dropping the name 'Unionist' from the Ministry and 22 such signatures were collected. 'But it is doubtful whether in any case they will all be effective,' as the Governor reported to the Viceroy, 'since some of those concerned are suspected to have promised allegiance to the other side as well.'⁵²

Khizr now decided upon the dismissal of Shaukat from the ministry with the hope of producing a salutary effect on the remaining MLAs and restraining their anti-Unionist inclinations. Shaukat had terminated the services of Mrs. Durga Prasad, an Indian Christian Inspectress of Schools on some flimsy ground sometime back. An Enquiry Committee headed by Mr. Kennedy, the Chief Officer of the Lahore Corporation, established that not one of the eight different charges on which she had been framed could be proved. Khizr was advised to use this matter as a pretext for getting rid of Shaukat from his Cabinet without making the political reason too obvious. The reports for the Enquiry were therefore brought to the notice of the Ministry 'a very serious miscarriage of justice' and Captain Shaukat Hyat Khan was relieved of his responsibilities as a minister.⁵³

The Lahore talks finally broke down on 27 April 1944 when Khizr refused to drop the word 'Unionist' from the name of the Ministry. The Sialkot session of the Muslim League on 30 April called upon

every Muslim member of the Punjab Assembly that he owed allegiance solely to the Muslim League Coalition Party. Jinnah denied that any kind of assurance of non-interference in the working of the provincial government had been given in the Sikander–Jinnah Pact. He denied the existence of any Pact worth the name. ‘How could there be a Pact between a leader and a follower or a prospective follower?’ What was being represented as a Pact was nothing more than a written statement of what Sikander had promised to do.

In Sialkot Shaukat Hayat Khan was represented as a martyr. Jinnah thought that constitutional norms did not permit the dismissal of a single minister as the cabinet was collectively responsible to the Assembly for its conduct:

Sardar Shaukat Khan has been dismissed and victimized because of certain political views that he holds, under cover of some plausible wrong which is attributed to him. If this be the case, then it destroys the very foundation of democracy and if revenge can be taken against a person in this manner through the instrumentality of the Governor by his exceptional powers then this constitution becomes a farce.⁵⁴

Raja Ghaznafar Ali’s comment that the Unionist Party was ‘only an instrument to lower the prestige and influence of the Muslim League in the Province’ could not induce Khizr to join the Muslim League. He would not agree to accept the nomenclature Muslim League Coalition Ministry except as part of an all-India understanding. Jinnah ruled out such an understanding as ‘preposterous’ as the non-Muslim members in the Punjab Cabinet did not represent more than 20 members altogether, Sir Chhotu Ram representing nine Hindu Jat members, Sardar Baldev Singh only another nine of the total of 28 Sikh members and Manohar Lal had no following at all.⁵⁵ Khizr’s non-compliance was punished by the Muslim League Committee of Action on 27 May 1944 by expelling him from the membership of the Muslim League.⁵⁶

Sikhs Trying to Keep Options Open

The Sikhs viewed with concern how Khizr was tried to be made subservient to the Muslim League. The Congress members of the Punjab Assembly too had become extremely worried at the prospect of the Ministry subordinating itself to the Muslim League. They therefore tried to move closer to the Sikhs and Hindus and improve relations with each other. Master Tara Singh went to meet the

Governor in Simla and issued a statement that his government will have nothing to do with a Muslim League.⁵⁷ Sardar Baldev Singh saw in the move an attempt 'to divide the people of this province by aggravating communal bitterness' and 'a commitment to a vague Pakistan scheme'. The Sikander-Baldev Pact, which had represented an understanding between the Akalis and the Unionist Party would also stand dissolved if the Unionist Party ceased to exist. Muslim League attacks on the Unionist Party were tantamount to a repudiation of all the pledges that had been made to the non-Muslims by the Unionists. This would make it difficult for Sikhs to trust any promises by the Muslim League in future.⁵⁸ The Sikhs also wanted to express their disenchantment with Muslim League promises by forcing the resignation of Sardar Ajit Singh Sarhadi from the North-West Frontier Province Ministry.⁵⁹ Amongst the Akalis, however, there were many shades of opinion. For the time being the pro-Congress Nagoke group was in the ascendance. News of the release of Mahatma Gandhi gave them a moral boostup and they could toe the nationalist line. The Giani Kartar Singh group in the Akali Party opposed to them, on the other hand, had a meeting on 3 May with 50 leading Sikhs who wanted to keep open the door for negotiations with the Muslim League in case it succeeded informing the Muslim League Coalition Party in the Assembly. They would not like the Sikhs to shun all contacts with the Muslim League in the Assembly and get reduced to insignificance without a berth in the Cabinet.⁶⁰

Jinnah's aggressive attitude had virtually alienated all non-Muslims in the Punjab Assembly. None supported his case except a few Scheduled Castes, eager to fish in the troubled waters. Even the rural Muslim members were not with him. To come out of his isolation Jinnah spoke of his coalitions with other parties in various provinces like Bengal, Assam, Sindh and the North-West Frontier Province. He publicly expressed his willingness 'to come to any fair and equitable adjustment with them' and requested the Sikhs 'to make their proposals as to what they want'. Since this question mainly concerned the Punjab and did not need to be treated from an all-India perspective he thought it could be resolved quite easily.⁶¹

The Muslim League tried to consolidate its following in the province by appealing to urban middle class elements through the foundation of a new periodical to carry on its propaganda. This was announced by Azizul Haque in the All India Muslim Educational Conference.⁶² Two members of the All India Committee of Action

were posted at Lahore ostensibly to suggest measures for the educational, economic and industrial uplift of the Muslims of Punjab; their real object, however, was to maintain constant pressure on the Muslim MLAs, to monitor their behaviour in the Assembly and to try to rouse the rural masses through intensive propaganda. A sub-committee was appointed by the Working Committee of the Punjab Provincial Muslim League to divide Punjab into division and district areas with five organizing secretaries for propaganda purposes; and to appoint permanent paid personnel to form a training centre at Lahore for the institution of volunteers and to employ members of the Provincial Muslim Students' Federation during the vacations for League propaganda.⁶³ The Muslim League National Guard was organized in June and volunteers for an urban militia began to be trained to meet emergencies.⁶⁴ It even proceeded to the length of using mosques for propaganda purposes.⁶⁵

The Unionists made a last ditch attempt to organize its house by introducing two new faces in the ministry from rural constituencies – Jamal Khan Leghari, a Baluch Tumandar and Nawab Ashiq Hussain of Multan for the strong followings in rural areas that they commanded. Although the usual quota of six was violated by the inclusion of a seventh Muslim minister, the non-Muslim parties could appreciate the calculations behind this move and allowed Khizr to make his efforts at strengthening his fort.⁶⁶

The Chakravarti Rajagopalachari Formula

It was exactly when Jinnah had his back to the wall after being administered a rebuff by the Unionist Premier that Gandhi came to his rescue. Immediately after his release on 10 May 1944 Gandhi dug out the proposal chalked out long ago by Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, the former Congress Premier of Madras, of the 'Sporting Offer' fame. This was nothing but a renewed version of the Cripps offer. Rajagopalachari had earlier (9 July 1942) been made to resign his party membership for proposing a resolution in the AICC about the principle of territorial self-determination. It was his fond hope that thereby Jinnah and the Muslim League would be reconciled and join the Congress in a united front against the British. Rajagopalachari came up with his old formula once again in a pamphlet called *The Way Out* on 30 November 1943 whereby contiguous areas in the north-west and the east of India might demand a plebiscite

by a 60 per cent majority vote in the legislature. The plebiscite held on the basis of adult male suffrage might decide on the non-accession of those areas to Hindustan.⁶⁷ As early as May 1943 Gandhi tried to open up a dialogue with Jinnah from his prison cell. But the British government was not prepared to allow any communication between Jinnah and Gandhi at this time. When Jinnah heard of this move on the part of Gandhi he interpreted it as an attempt by Gandhi to embroil him in a conflict with the British government.⁶⁸ The Rajagopalachari pamphlet seemed to have somewhat assuaged Muslim League feelings and Jinnah agreed to meet Gandhi for a discussion from 19 August in Bombay. Tej Bahadur Sapru advised Gandhi to confine the discussion around the 1935 constitution and the Cripps offer. Gandhi, however, refused to be tied down to any preconceived programme and wanted to take things in his stride.⁶⁹ Congress eagerness to come to an understanding with Jinnah at this point became more obvious with Bhulabhai Desai's approach to Liaqat Ali Khan for an alliance. The Viceroy viewed these as desperate moves on the part of Gandhi and the Congress to bring Jinnah to address a joint petition for the release of the Congress Working Committee members, who alone could set the final seal to a settlement between the Congress and the Muslim League.⁷⁰

Jinnah–Gandhi Talks

The Jinnah–Gandhi talks which continued from 9 to 27 September were conducted under strict secrecy. It was not known till after it drew a blank that it had failed. Gandhi was ready to accept Pakistan as proposed in the Lahore Resolution of 1940. But Gandhi would agree to their separation like members of a single family agreeing to live separately with certain common matters to be decided in common like defence, finance, commerce, foreign policy, etc. They disagreed on the basic demand of the Muslim League, that the Muslims were a separate nation with absolute freedom to decide on these crucial subjects of governance like defence, foreign policy, internal communications and finance. Jinnah wanted that the Muslims alone would have the right of self-determination while Gandhi insisted on similar rights for other minorities in the six provinces of Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan, North-West Frontier Province, Bengal and Assam, which Jinnah had demanded. This was totally unacceptable to Jinnah as this would mutilate the boundaries of these provinces beyond

recognition. This would leave merely the 'husk' of Pakistan as he put it.⁷¹

Sikh Reactions

Gandhi's initiative in conducting negotiations with Jinnah was not viewed with favour by the Sikhs. They thought it to be a betrayal of Gandhi's 1929 Lahore Congress promise not to do anything affecting the Sikhs without taking them into confidence.⁷² They expressed their strong resentment in being used as a 'pawn' in Gandhi's game at all crucial junctures of national politics.⁷³ Jinnah's promise of 'some kind of special autonomy for the Sikhs within Pakistan' did not satisfy them.⁷⁴ An All Parties Sikh Conference at Amritsar on 1 August presided over by Sardar Baldev Singh called back Master Tara Singh from his retirement to provide leadership in a countrywide agitation against the Rajaji formula. This was followed by another All Parties Conference on 20 August 1944 which denounced the Rajaji formula as it would divide the Sikhs into two sections and 'hold them in perpetual bondage'; in 12 districts Muslim would dominate and in 17 others the Hindus would dominate. Master Tara Singh rejected Jinnah's offer for better terms as the Sikhs would not like to 'live on anybody's charity'. Giani Sher Singh pointed out that the Muslims, who sometimes constituted a strong minority of 46 per cent, with the connivance of their ally *achhuts*, could even get hold of the outskirts of Amritsar like the tahsils of Ajnala, Nakodar, Zara, Batala and Shakargarh if plebiscite was held in accordance with the Rajagopalachari formula. The Sikhs, who had been rulers of the Punjab before the British came, would not tolerate it. Santokh Singh, the leader of the Opposition in the Assembly said that Pakistan would mean 'Muslim Raj' and 'no one, not even ten Gandhis had the right to barter away the Sikhs'. Giani Kartar Singh said that Sikhs always went to Gandhi like beggars. That is how Gandhi took them for granted and could approach Jinnah. If Sikhs did not oppose Pakistan they would never be able to fight it out. The task of protecting the Hindus, as Mangal Singh pointed out, would ultimately fall on the Sikhs. Muslims might want all the territories from Constantinople to Delhi. Gandhiji should not have tried to appease them. He did not want Punjab to become another Poland. In reply to Rajaji's question whether the Sikhs and Hindus of Punjab wanted Mr. Amery to decide everything for them, Mangal Singh asked if Rajaji would

make the Punjabi Hindus and Sikhs agree to Pakistan with the help of Mr. Amery's bayonet. 'If Muslims could not be prevailed upon to remain in a united India' quipped in Master Tara Singh, 'the Sikhs could not be forced to go out of a united India into Pakistan.'⁷⁵ The pro-Congress Nagoke group alone among the Akalis wanted to consult the Congress before doing anything extreme. But they had very few supporters.⁷⁶

On behalf of the Hindu Mahasabha, Syama Prasad Mookerjee offered to build a common front with the Sikhs. He argued that if the Hindus and Sikhs of Punjab stood together with Bengal, Pakistan would never materialize. But the All Parties Sikh Conference of 20 August at Amritsar decided against the Hindus for fear of desertion at a later date.⁷⁷

Master Tara Singh would rather rely on the political influence that the Sikhs derived from their contribution to the British War Efforts. He therefore exhorted young Sikhs to get enlisted in the army in large numbers.⁷⁸ This, however, was something strongly disapproved of by Baba Kharak Singh of the Central Akali Dal. Kharak Singh had ruled out cooperation with the British War Efforts and had no desire to take British help in forming a separate Sikh province on the strength of Sikh contributions to the armed forces.⁷⁹

The Communists alone of all groups, were in favour of Gandhi-Jinnah talks as they supported the right of self-determination of all nationalities. Sajjad Zaheer urged in the *People's War* of 10 February 1944 that 'the tie which keeps the nationalities of the USSR together is the right to secede from the Union vested in each of the 15 constituent republics.' The August 1942 AICC Resolution recommending that all residuary powers should be left to the provinces was also 'a step in the direction of accepting the right of self determination'.⁸⁰ Arguments of this kind made the Communists the *bête noire* of the Akalis. They were excluded from the Akali Conferences for being atheists.⁸¹ At the Gate to All India Akali Conference at Lahore on 14 October 1944 there hung a board with the inscription 'Beware of the Russian Agents' to make a show of the Akali dislike of the Communists.⁸²

Khalistan

In their futile quest for security the Sikhs could think of nothing else except a separate and independent state for themselves free of the

domination of either the Hindus or of the Muslims. It is doubtful how far this demand was in earnest and how far was it a pressure weapon against the unsympathetic treatment meted out by Gandhi towards the interests of their community. Sardar Ujjal Singh spoke of it in the Panthic gathering at Amritsar on 20 August, a demand which he had voiced thirteen years ago at the Round Table Conference in 1931.⁸³ 'If a common rule of all the communities was not possible in India' as Giani Sher Singh put it, 'the Sikhs would also like to see their own flag flying somewhere in their own territory.'⁸⁴ Glancy, the Governor of the Punjab, reported to the Viceroy that this idea of a Sikh state envisaged a state of affairs 'where the community, if not actually in a majority, will be in a commanding position by holding the balance between equal number of Hindus and Muslims'.⁸⁵

The idea of an independent Sikh state had been floated by V.S. Bhatti of Ludhiana in a pamphlet demanding the establishment of a buffer state or Khalistan, between India and Pakistan. The Khalistan, as he conceived it, would include some of the predominantly Sikh districts of Punjab, the Sikh princely states of Patiala, Nabha, Jind, Faridkot and Kalsia and non-Sikh princely states such as Malerkotla and Simla Hill States. The Punjab districts which were to be included in Khalistan were Ludhiana, Jullunder, Ambala, Ferozepore, Lahore, Amritsar, Lyallpur, Gujranwala, Sheikhpura, Montgomery, Hissar, Rohtak and Karnal. At the head of this state was to be the Maharaja of Patiala with a cabinet representing the federating units. A large assembly of 120 members met in Amritsar on 19 May 1940 to discuss this scheme on the invitation of Sikh leaders like Baba Gurdit Singh, Ranjodh Singh Tarsikka, Jagjit Singh, the editor of the *Khalsa Sewak*. The conference went a step further than Bhatti's scheme had originally conceived and also proposed to include the territory from Jammu to Jamrud which the Maharaja Dulip Singh had given to the British as *amanat* (to be held in trust). A sub-committee of 21 members with powers to co-opt ten more was formed to carry on propaganda in favour of a *Guru Khalsa Raj*. Another conference of the Sikhs of Malwa at Jagraon on 24 May 1940 reiterated this demand for Khalistan in case the British conceded the demand for Pakistan.⁸⁶ This scheme had earlier suffered an eclipse due to the united opposition of the Akalis and the Congress. But it came handy as an immediate and appropriate reaction to the Jinnah-Gandhi attempt to give shape to Pakistan during the fateful days of September 1944. The Sikhs now

went a step further and began to claim themselves as a separate nation and urged the Government to treat them as a distinct minority. They would not like to be the slaves of either Hindustan or Pakistan and wanted the Hindus and Muslims to deal directly with them instead of approaching them through any constitution making body that might be set up in the future. 'If Pakistan was to be formed' argued Giani Kartar Singh, 'why not give an independent state to the Sikhs too?'⁸⁷ They refused to be ignored by the government and threatened to oppose any attempt on the part of the government to accept an agreement reached by the League and the Congress over the heads of the Sikhs.⁸⁸

Master Tara Singh actually unfurled the Sikh flag amid the tune of bands and shouts of Sat Sri Akal during the All India Akali Conference at Lahore on 14 October 1944. Jathedar Pritam Singh demanded a homeland for the Sikhs in the Punjab on the basis of their importance and the land which they held in the Punjab. The Sikhs had been the rulers of the Punjab before the British and numbers did not matter in those days. Sardar Mangal Singh, a devout Congressman, threatened to discard non-violence and embrace the weapons in which the Sikhs were initiated by Guru Gobind Singh. The Sikhs had suffered Muslim Raj for the past eight years in the name of provincial autonomy. The Muslims were given statutory majority under the Communal Award. Sikh homelands were now being transferred to the Muslims under the protection of the British bayonet. Master Tara Singh referred to the case of Ireland which had successfully carved out a separate state in spite of their small numbers.⁸⁹

The British took great comfort at the wedge the Rajaji Formula and the Gandhi-Jinnah talks had driven between the Congress and their Sikh allies. Viceroy Wavell had noted with alarm how the Akali Mangal Singh had accepted the Congress whip in the Punjab Legislative Assembly. He now expected the Sikhs to listen to better counsel and get closer to the Muslims and cooperate better in the British war efforts:

The Sikhs are puzzled and apprehensive. . . . They feel that in any compromise between the Hindus and Muslims they may be left out in the cold. Tara Singh and his supporters seem to realise that a separate Sikh state is not really possible and that transfers of population about which they talk glibly enough, would be very difficult indeed. The right line for the Sikhs is undoubtedly to act as good Punjabis. If they did this wholeheartedly, they would almost

certainly do very well for themselves. No Government in the Punjab can disregard them and they have everything to lose in getting involved in All India Politics.⁹⁰

The fear of Pakistan, however, was too strong a bond to make the various groups of Akalis forget their dissensions and keep their squabbles in the background. The pro-Congress Nagoke group could come to the fore once more as the political prisoners began to be released to create an atmosphere of sympathy and understanding by the government as a prelude to a better coordination of the war efforts against Japan and also to build the foundations for a better post-war rapprochement. Akali–Congress cooperation thus continued in the face of the shocks and surprises of the Rajaji formula and the Jinnah–Gandhi talks.

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Groping in the Dark

AS THE WAR began to run its course in the European theatre, the question of handing over power in India by Her Majesty's government in Britain came to occupy the attention of all concerned in Britain and India. The Rajagopalachari initiative in papering over the cracks in inter-communal relations were initially interpreted by the Akalis as an attempt by the Congress to come to a settlement with the Muslim League without a thought to the problem of the Sikhs. But as news of the strong stand taken by Mahatma Gandhi on the question of minority right to self-determination in the Muslim majority provinces filtered in, the doubts of the Sikhs in Congress sincerity were set at rest. Many Sikh leaders, mostly Congressmen or men under the spell of the ideology of Communism, had been taken into custody since the launching of the Civil Disobedience in 1942. It was hoped that Gandhi could arrange for the early release of these persons if he could resolve the outstanding communal issues with the Muslim League and bring the Muslim League to join the Congress in pressurizing the government about the early release of the detenus.

Return to the Congress Fold

Sikh leaders like Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna, Baba Wasakha Singh, Sardar Sarmukh Singh Jhabal and Sardar Amar Singh Jhabal assembled their followers in Amritsar on 11 September 1944 in a conference to reaffirm their faith in Gandhiji's leadership in steering the country towards freedom. About 250 workers of the Central Sikh Youth League, Progressive Akali Party and Malwa Khalsa Darbar had gathered. Some of them were Communists, some Congressmen and many came as representatives of workers from districts, who were not allowed to attend. Many of these workers, who were prevented from joining the Conference, had been participants of the Gurdwara movement, who had suffered imprisonment in the 1920s. Messages, making touching references to the days of the Akali movement and

the support extended by Gandhiji to that movement, were read. It was announced that letters bearing signatures and thumb impressions of workers and women, who could not attend personally, but who nevertheless wanted to convey their support for Gandhiji's mission, had been sent to the Mahatma in Bombay in an expression of solidarity. Sikh demonstrations in Bombay against the Mahatma's initiative were strongly condemned. Master Tara Singh's call to unite against the Congress was described as 'a betrayal of the country and the rights of her people'. It would merely strengthen the foothold of British imperialism in India, it was suggested. The purpose of the assembly, declared Sardar Amar Singh, was to disprove the allegation that in trying to work out a solution of the communal problem the Mahatma and the Congress had forfeited the support of the Sikhs. Sardar Amar Singh Jhabal refused to be intimidated by Master Tara Singh's *bukamnamas* declaring communists as 'atheists' and 'non-Sikhs'. Sardar Sarmukh Singh Jhabal compared the behaviour of the office bearers of the Akali Party to that of the members of the Chief Khalsa Diwan in 1914, when the latter had been reduced to an instrument of the British government. He condemned the way religion was being exploited to serve political and anti-national ends. Sardar Autar Singh Daler, President, Central Sikh Youth League, compared Master Tara Singh with Savarkar of the Hindu Mahasabha, both of whom were aiding the cause of British imperialism in India through their opposition of the forces of freedom. He cited the Sikander-Baldev Pact in the Punjab and Akali participation in the Muslim League Cabinet in the North-West Frontier Province as instances of the Akali avidity for the loaves and fishes of power. Sardar Teja Singh Swatantra, MLA insisted that the idea of Pakistan had taken such strong hold of the Muslim mind that it was no longer realistic to resist the idea. He thought that the Akalis were well-known fence-sitters, waiting to jump to the nationalist bandwagon if the Jinnah-Gandhi talks succeeded. However, Sardar Durlabh Singh, General Secretary of the Progressive Akali Party, hoped that Gandhiji would not commit anything without consulting the Sikhs. The Conference hoped that the successful conclusion of Gandhi-Jinnah talks would force the British government to release the political prisoners and hasten the formation of a national government. Sardar Dinshaw Wacha deprecated the government's attitude towards political detenus. Leaders like Sardar Sohan Singh Josh and Sardar Deva Singh also joined in the resolution in favour of an early release of all freedom fighters.¹

As the Sikhs still entertained some doubts against Gandhiji and some of the Akali leaders tried to whip up anti-Congress sentiments against his attempt to patch up the differences with the League over the heads of the Sikhs, Sardar Durlabh Singh, General Secretary of the Central Sikh Youth League, enquired from Gandhi in a letter addressed to him on 12 November 1944, whether the Rajaji formula did not conflict with the 1929 Lahore session Resolution of the Congress promising the Sikhs that no constitution would be acceptable to the Congress, which did not give full satisfaction to the Sikhs. Durlabh Singh also wanted to know why Gandhi did not have a meeting with the Sikh leaders before he started the talks with Jinnah, more so, because Master Tara Singh had proposed such a meeting. Gandhi's talks also went against the Jagat Narain Lal resolution of May 1942, which stated that Congress would never be a party to the vivisection of the country.²

Gandhi's reply of 14 November 1944, relieved all the anxieties of the Sikhs as to his attitude vis-à-vis the Sikhs in the changed context of his acceptance of the Rajaji formula:

My association with Rajaji in his formula could not affect the Sikh position in the slightest degree, even if Qaid-i-Azam Jinnah accepted it. The Lahore resolution of the Congress referred to by you stands. The result of Qaid-i-Azam Jinnah's acceptance would have been that both of us would have gone to the Sikhs and others interested to secure their acceptance. I had made this clear in my letter to Masterjee. . . . My meeting a deputation was unnecessary in view of my absolute assurance.³

Close on the heels of these exchanges was held the Akali Jubilee Conference at Jandiala at Jullunder on 25 November 1944 by the pro-Congress Akali group, who had been behind bars since 8 August 1942, and who had recently been released. Among them were Sardar Pratap Singh Kairon, MLA, General Secretary, Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee, Sardar Darshan Singh Pheruman, Giani Gurmukh Singh Mussafir, Baba Labh Singh of Jullunder, and Sardar Basant Singh of Moga. In course of his presidential address, Sardar Ishar Singh Majhail reaffirmed the faith of the assemblage in the Congress leadership and criticized the Communists for their opposition to the 1942 movement. He referred to the Jagat Narain Lal resolution of May 1942 and stated that the C.R. formula had failed to find an acceptable solution of the country's problems. He thought that the British were worse than the Mughal conquerors of India as they were out to destroy Indian unity by creating Pakistan: 'The Mughals

identified themselves with the people of India and ultimately adopted India as their homeland. But the policy of the British has created so many warring sections in the body politic of India that the Muslims belonging to the Muslim League are demanding 'Pakistan', viz., a sovereign state of their own. . . . The C.R. Formula has strengthened the hands of Pakistanists and has hit those countrymen hard who stand for an akhand Hindustan.⁴

The Sikhs wanted 'a free India, where the Sikhs are also free like all other communities'. The Sardar emphatically stated that the Sikhs will never accept Pakistan and they would 'fight it to the finish'.⁵

Sapru Committee

While these controversies over the C.R. Formula regarding the future shape of the constitution were raging, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, President of the India Liberal Federation, a forum for non-party public men in the country, decided to form a committee to devise ways and means for an agreed constitution. A renowned advocate from a rich landlord background, Sapru had once been a member of the All India Congress Committee and served as a Law Member in the Viceroy's Executive Council from 1920 to 1923. It is said that when Gandhi failed to make much headway in his talks with Jinnah and did not see much hope of being able to put up an united front against the British government for an early transfer of power, he had encouraged Sapru to go ahead with his non-party colleagues to look for some solution acceptable to politicians of all shades. The Sapru Committee, which was announced on 20 November 1944, issued a questionnaire to a good number of political parties soliciting their views on the fundamental rights of the people, representation of communities in the services, the Pakistan issue and territorial adjustment and other alternatives to Pakistan.

This committee created great enthusiasm among the Sikhs and all the different groups among the Akalis cooperated and even invited the views of some non-Akali leaders to prepare Memorandum to be submitted to this committee. It was signed by 30 prominent Sikh leaders like Master Tara Singh, Giani Kartar Singh, Sampuran Singh Lyallpuri, Surjit Singh Majithia, Bhai Jodh Singh, Swaran Singh, Ujjal Singh and Ishar Singh Majhail. The Memorandum summarized the various grievances of the Sikhs and suggested ways and means of addressing them.⁶

The Memorandum urged that although on a population basis the Sikhs trailed to a poor third in British India, their political, historic and economic importance far outweighed their numbers. They were 'the backbone and the flower of the Indian army. Since the second half of the nineteenth century they had contributed 30 per cent of the country's armed forces inspite of being a mere 2 per cent of the total population. Their contribution to the country's defence forces during the last war had been 15 per cent.'⁷

The authors of the Memorandum denied that the Punjab was a Muslim province. Rather Punjab was the homeland of the Sikhs with more than 700 historic Gurdwaras with the memories of their Gurus, saints and martyrs attached to them. They had contributed to the educational progress of the province by setting up and financing over 400 educational institutions, colleges, schools, girls' seminaries and technical establishments. Through their hard labour they had made the barren wastes fertile and owned the best and most fertile lands in the province. More than 80 per cent of the urban property was in non-Muslim hands and more than 80 per cent of the income tax and urban property tax came from the non-Muslims. An overwhelming proportion of the industrial enterprises, factories, mills, insurance companies, film industry and business, shop keeping, trade and commerce were in non-Muslim hands by virtue of their skill, industry and special aptitude. The cultural life of the province was also created and determined by impulses emanating from non-Muslim sources.⁸

The memorandum deprecated how the Act of 1935 had reduced the Sikhs into 'complete ineffectiveness in all spheres of the political life of the country' by assigning them only 33 seats in a house of 175 in the Punjab legislature, 3 in the North-West Frontier Province, 6 among 250 in the Federal Legislative Assembly and 4 seats in 150 in the Council of State. In the Minority Pact arrived at in London during the Round Table Conference, even though the Sikhs were not a party to it, they had been allocated 5 per cent of the seats in the Federal Legislature. In the Allahabad Unity Conference in 1932 it was unanimously decided to give 14 seats to the Sikhs in the Federal House out of a total number of 300. However, the British government failed to honour the Sikh claims later on.⁹

The Sikhs were not given any seats in the UP and Sindh, where they were important minorities. While 13 per cent Muslims in the UP were given 30 per cent seats, 13 per cent Sikhs in the Punjab were given only 19 per cent of the seats. Sikhs claimed to have annexed

the North-West Frontier Province to India and protected and preserved the indigenous non-Muslim cultural heritage of this Province as its former rulers. Yet the minority representation in this province had been monopolized by the Hindus alone.¹⁰

The position of the Sikhs was progressively undermined under the Unionist Ministry in the Punjab. While in 1923 there was one Sikh minister among a total of four, after the elections of 1937 the total number of ministers became six without any addition for the Sikhs. During the Muslim League–Unionist tussle, one more Muslim was included in the Cabinet, thus reducing the Sikh share to one/seventh of the whole.¹¹

‘The political subjugation and helplessness’ of the Sikhs under the Unionist rule did not end there. Although the Sikh share of the services had been fixed at 20 per cent on paper, actually the Sikhs were not given more than 10 per cent of government appointments. Sikhs had no voice in the administration of the Punjab University and there were only seven Sikh Fellows in the Senate. Primary education was kept in the hands of local bodies and Western districts received larger grants than Sikh educational institutions concentrated in the Central districts. Opportunities for teaching Punjabi (using the Gurmukhi script) were also few. Facilities for *jhatka* style of animal slaughter for consumption of meat were also scarce, making it difficult to follow the injunctions of their religion. Scheduled Caste members of the Sikh community were not allowed the due concessions and facilities for educational and franchise purposes. Since the Gurdwara movement the government of Fazl-i-Hussain represented the Sikhs as rebels against the British government and cut down their recruitment in the army. In non-military central services they were lumped together with the Parsees, Christians and the Anglo-Indians reducing their share to a miniscule percentage.¹²

For the signatories of the Memorandum the C.R. formula was an anathema. They thought that:

As a matter of fact, this formula contemplates a worse fate for the Sikhs than the Pakistan demand; for, in the latter case, they can at least look forward with satisfaction to the probability of being persecuted, and dying altogether, while in the former case, a small compact community is divided into almost two equal parts, each going into two sovereign states.¹³

The authors of the Memorandum were of the opinion that the creation of Pakistan would not bring an end to the communal conflict. Rather, the communal tangle would get aggravated in a divided India.

They thought it ‘unnatural, reactionary, and in opposition to the best political and economic interests of the country as a whole’. For the Sikh community it would spell great harm and would be tantamount to ‘signing the death warrant of the future of the Sikh community’.¹⁴

However, if Pakistan was imposed forcibly by the British government or agreed upon by the Hindus and Muslims, the Sikhs would demand a separate Sikh state, ‘which should include the substantial majority of the Sikh population and their important sacred shrines and their historic Gurdwaras and places with provisions for the transfer and exchange of property’.¹⁵

The committee concluded its final session on 8 April 1945 and circulated 15 resolutions recommending an Indian Union on the basis of parity between caste Hindus and Scheduled Castes on the one hand and Muslims on the other, with a joint electorate. It ruled out Pakistan as an impracticable proposition and wanted the British to transfer power to an Indian Union.¹⁶ Disappointed at the Committee’s repudiation of the Pakistan idea, Jinnah attacked the Sapru Committee as ‘a front for the Congress’.¹⁷ Ayesha Jalal, while admitting that Sapru was a ‘respectable channel of moderate liberal opinion’, also thought that he had been reduced to being ‘a postman between correspondents who mattered’.¹⁸ The Sikhs probably valued his initiative for the very reason that he was maligned by those who wanted to stand by Pakistan and expected him to be able to find a way out of the deadlock by exploiting his position as ‘a point of contact between Congress and British politicians’.¹⁹

Desai–Liaqat Agreement

At about the same time that the Sapru Committee was groping for a solution of the problem of transfer of power from the British to the satisfaction of all the different communities that were concerned with the subject, Bhulabhai Desai, the leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party in the Central Assembly and leader of the opposition in it, was carrying on an informal dialogue with Nawabzada Liaqat Ali Khan, Deputy Leader of the League Parliamentary Party to effect an understanding. It was believed that they had entered a pact conceding Jinnah’s demand that the Muslim League would have equal representation with the Indian National Congress in any Central and Provincial Executive that must be formed. The initiative had the blessings of Gandhi, who saw in it a way out of the communal problem

that provided the British with an excuse against the concession of representative institutions. He had promised to use his influence with the members of the Congress Working Committee to persuade them to accept his proposal. But when the members of the Congress Working Committee were released and refused to go by the pact, Gandhi did not say anything to save Desai from their wrath and Desai's name was excluded from the list of names submitted to the Viceroy for inclusion in the proposed interim Executive Council.²⁰ Nor did Jinnah show much enthusiasm about the Pact, publicly disowning it in a press interview of 22 January 1945 that there was 'absolutely no foundation for connecting my name with the talks which may have taken place between Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan and Mr. Bhulabhai Desai'.²¹

Although the support for Desai's scheme was uncertain from either camp, the Congress or the Muslim League, it elated the Viceroy to learn that there was an initiative from the Indian side for a coalition on the basis of parity between the Congress and the Muslim League both at the Central as well as the Provincial levels. 'In fact his proposals are very near', the Viceroy wrote on 13 January 1945 in his journal, 'what I have put to the HMG.'²² At least it made him more confident of the acceptability of his plans and he could leave for London to face the War Cabinet with greater confidence.

Sikh Response

For the Sikhs, however, neither the Sapru proposals nor the Desai-Liaquat Pact brought much relief from their anxiety about Muslim domination in a province, where they had been the rulers only till recently and which had been taken over from their boy Maharaja by the British as an *amanat*. In course of his Presidential Address in the two day session of the sixth UP Sikh Conference at Kanpur on 29 and 30 April 1945, Master Tara Singh spelled out very clearly that while the Sikhs had no desire to rule over anyone any more, they would not like to be ruled by any other community either. Just as Muslims would not accept nationalism for fear of Hindu rule in another name, Sikhs would also not accept Muslim majority rule in the Punjab. He expressed surprise why the Sapru Committee did not suggest anything to counterbalance Muslim majority in the Punjab. When Hindu majority at the Centre could be scrapped to accommodate Muslims, why nothing could be done in favour of the Sikhs in the

Punjab, he wondered. Master Tara Singh would like an interim government where no one community would predominate. The Minority Commission proposed by the Sapru Committee was a farce in his assessment. He criticized the Sapru Committee for totally ignoring the question of Sikh interests in the army. Sikh representation in the UP, Sindh, NWFP and other provinces were also not mentioned by the Committee.²³

Master Tara Singh resented how the Desai–Liaquat Pact negotiated the representation of only two political parties, the Congress and the Muslim League, instead of working out a solution of the conflicting interests of the different communities. It merely provided the British government with an excuse for deferring the surrender of power, citing the inability of the communities to effect an agreement between them and using the Princes as their puppets to block liberty for the country.²⁴

The pro-Congress Akali, Sardar Mangal Singh in his Presidential speech at the Frontier Akali Conference at Peshawar on 5-6 May 1945 nearly echoed Master Tara Singh's UP Conference speech in voicing Sikh opposition to communal domination and statutory communal majority of a single community either at Delhi or in Lahore. He wanted an all party central government at Delhi to address the problems of post-war reconstruction. The Sapru proposals for the composition of the central government were welcomed by him.²⁵

At the provincial level, he demanded a 30 per cent reservation of the seats in the Legislature for the Sikhs in the Punjab. He wanted power in Punjab to be equally shared by all the three communities and the office of the Premier, the Deputy Premier and the Speaker to be held by the three communities by rotation. He wanted a uniform formula for the protection of the smaller minorities in all the provinces all over India. Encouraged by the Sapru Committee's repudiation of Pakistan, he demanded an assurance from the government that the demand for Pakistan would never be conceded in any future constitution.²⁶

Mangal Singh was speaking at a time when a Congress ministry led by Khan Sahib, brother of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, had just assumed office in the North-West Frontier Province. This was the first ministry to take charge since the mass resignation of all Congress ministries in the Provinces in 1939. Mangal Singh reaffirmed the faith of the Shiromani Akali Dal in the Congress and promised wholehearted cooperation except regarding issues affecting the Sikhs

in particular. He demanded the inclusion of at least one Sikh minister in the Frontier Cabinet.²⁷

The Simla Conference

The Sapru Committee's proposals were submitted to the Viceroy. But Sir Archibald Wavell was in no mood to entertain these recommendations. The announcement of the Sapru Committee had filled him with dismay, as he feared that it 'will be hailed with delight by HMG as an excuse to postpone consideration of my proposals'.²⁸ Ever since his appointment as Viceroy in June 1943, he had been longing to bring about a solution to the communal problem in India. On 14 September 1943 he had submitted a paper for the consideration of the Cabinet Committee, proposing the establishment of a coalition government of party leaders at the centre, working under the existing constitution and willing to support the war effort. He wanted a free hand in inviting selected political leaders to a meeting to discuss the matter.²⁹ He was, however, not allowed to go ahead with his plans by the Prime Minister, who was still expecting to hang on to the levers of power with the help of a centre with representatives from the provinces and the princes as provided in the 1935 Act.

Wavell was not new to the politics of India. As Commander-in-Chief he had participated in the deliberations of the Viceroy's Executive Council for several years. He was already familiar with Gandhi's political tactics of 'agitation, conflict, suppression and appeasement'.³⁰ The Congress without Gandhi would be more tractable and easy to come to a settlement with. But Wavell also had to admit the use of Gandhi to prevent a swing of the people to the Hindu Mahasabha. He understood how Congress was having almost an unchallenged sway in Indian politics as most men from the better educated classes, who had any interest in politics, had flocked under its banner. But it was dominated by the Caste Hindus and had almost no place for Scheduled Castes, aboriginal tribes and the lower strata of Hindu society known as the depressed classes. The 25 delegates to the AICC, who had taken the rebellious Quit India resolution were mainly composed of Brahmins, Banias, Jains, and Maratha Kunbis to the exclusion of the vast millions of the country. The Quit India agitation of 1942 had added a lot to his worry, while prosecuting a difficult resistance against Japan. He had noticed how during 1942 the Muslim majority provinces had remained nearly free from unrest.

Wavell could find 'no indications whatsoever so far that the Congress is in a mood to make concessions either to the Muslim League or to the British Government'.³¹ If British power and British influence in India had to meet the challenge of the Congress, it needed to prop up the Muslim League on the plea of the admission of the principle of self-determination, although he admitted in a private communication that 'this comes rather near a recent and more crudely put suggestion by Jinnah that we should openly concede Pakistan'.³² Wavell, therefore, needed the support of men like Rajagopalachari and Bhulabhai Desai to give shape to his plans. He liked the Cripps offer for its emphasis on the doctrine of self-determination and wanted to make use of it as the main plank of his India policy:

The Cripps offer envisages not only a settlement between the Congress and the Muslim League but also the negotiation of a treaty between the HMG and the proposed Constituent Assembly which will make provision for the safeguarding of British interests as a world power and for winding up British control on terms which will be just and equitable.³³

As the war in Europe was drawing to a close and British administrative, military and financial power in India was getting depleted, it began to dawn on experienced India hands like the Commander-in-Chief, all eleven Governors of the Provinces of British India, and all the senior members of the Services, who were consulted by the Viceroy for their opinions, that the days were very rear when the British Empire in India would finally have to close shop. Since self-government had already been declared as the goal of imperial policy, it would not be possible for long to resist the demand of Indian politicians for self-rule. The Viceroy would find it difficult to face the Indian members of his Council (they were ten among a lot of fourteen) without some positive steps in the direction of a handing over of power. Moreover, the end of the war would make governance difficult; scarcity of food,³⁴ demobilization and the tapering off of wartime occupations would give rise to unemployment and create a discontented public willing to lend ears to the propaganda of erstwhile political activists, who would have to be released from prisons. It would be difficult to keep such discontent under control with a moribund Civil Service, where the number of Indian recruits had to be curtailed to keep the European vs. Indian ratio in the administration intact.³⁵ The British Indian army, which had the last word in such volatile political situations, had been pruned beyond recognition to suit the flagging strength of the British Indian exchequer and it was

impossible to keep the nationalists at bay and continue to garrison the state and rule by force.³⁶

Withdrawal being eventually the goal, it was necessary to ensure the security of British economic and financial interests in India as much as possible before the final hour came. It was on the future British relations with India that the entire British position in the Far East and the Middle East would hinge. It was therefore of crucial importance to make India a willing partner in the British Commonwealth through the cooperation of those to whom power would have to be surrendered. Wavell tried to draw the attention of the Prime Minister to these matters in a letter of 24 October 1944:

I feel very strongly that the future of India is the problem on which the British Commonwealth and the British reputation will stand or fall in the post-war period. To my mind, our strategic security, our name in the world for statesmanship and fairdealing and much of our economic well-being will depend on or be entirely subject to what happens in India. If we can secure India as a friendly partner in the British Commonwealth our predominant influence in those countries will, I think, be assured; with a lost and hostile India, we are likely to be reduced in the East to the position of commercial bag-men.

The real essential is a change of spirit, a change which will convince the average educated Indian that the British Government is sincere in its intentions and is friendly towards India. . . . In fact, if we want India as a Dominion after the war, we must begin treating her much more like a Dominion now.³⁷

Wavell was able to secure a hearing from the Cabinet Committee only on 26 March when the Prime Minister could spare some time from the meeting of the Big Three for a post-war settlement. The Cabinet Committee was not favourable to Wavell's idea of pandering to the 'party caucuses'. It would also necessitate the release of all political prisoners, creating fresh difficulties in prosecuting the war. If admission of representatives of political parties to the highest Executive in India could not be resisted anymore, they should at least come elected through the provincial and central legislatures. But they had finally to give way to Wavell's persistence on 31 May.³⁸

On 14 June the Viceroy broadcast his proposals to the Indian political leaders³⁹ proposing to meet them with a view to the formation of an Executive Council, more representative of organized political opinion, with an equal number of representatives from the Muslims as well as the Caste Hindus. The Council was to be entirely Indian except for the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief. And for the

first time the government proposed to hand over the Home, Finance and Foreign Affairs portfolios to Indian hands. The main task of this Council was to prosecute the war, but it was also to consider the means of working out a permanent constitution. All members of the Congress Working Committee were also to be released.⁴⁰

The leaders of political parties, however, did not respond as cordially as the Viceroy would have expected. Wavell found Gandhi and Jinnah behaving like 'temperamental prima donnas' on being approached by the Viceroy. The Simla Conference which met from 25 June was vitiated by their intransigence right from the outset so much so that the task of tackling with them was compared with getting 'mules into a railway truck'. Gandhi (who was present in Simla in his personal capacity, but did not attend the Conference) demanded the release of all political prisoners and not merely of the Working Committee members. He bombarded the Viceroy with daily telegrams, objecting to parity of the caste Hindus with the Muslims. He took strong exception to the term 'Caste Hindus', since he denied that there was any place for caste discrimination in the Congress. Gandhi would rather prefer the term 'Non-Scheduled Hindus'. He would also like the Congress to name Muslim and Scheduled Caste candidates from among members of the Congress.⁴¹ As Wavell explained to Amery on 25 June 1945, the Congress objected to the Muslim League having an exclusive right to nominate all Muslim members for fear of 'being manoeuvred into a position in which the Congress can be regarded as a purely Hindu body'.⁴²

The pitch was also queered by the need to accommodate a Unionist Muslim from Punjab if the Unionist Ministry was to be maintained in power, as was pointed out by Bertrand Glancy, the Governor of the Punjab:

Whether Jinnah co-operated or not, the invitation to the Muslim League on the lines proposed would, I feel, produce a devastating effect in the Punjab. It could not fail to give the impression that the Muslim League was the only section of Muslims to which Government attached importance. (Firoz Khan Noon's inclusion would make no material difference: he is not conspicuous for his staunchness, and would soon wobble over to the League.) The shares of the League would in this way be forced up and many who had been wavering would desert the Unionist cause. Non-Muslims would be greatly perturbed. Khizr's position would tend to become impossible and I think it not unlikely that he and his colleagues would resign.⁴³

The Premier Khizr Hayat Khan spoke of the loyalty of Punjab and

reminded the Viceroy of the presence of one Punjab Muslim in the Viceroy's Council since 1919. He could have the willing ears of the Viceroy as most of the recruits for the army and the food for the country in a widespread situation of famine, was coming from the Punjab.⁴⁴ Rising grain prices had made agriculture an attractive proposition and the number of willing recruits to the army was on the decline. It was only through the cooperation of the Unionist leaders and the exercise of their influence in the countryside that adequate number of recruits could be enlisted to the British Indian army. The 'city-slickers' of the League were of no use to the government in those times of stress.⁴⁵

Jinnah, however, was not willing to admit the claims of either the Congress or the Unionists to nominate the Muslim members. He did not seem to be certain about being able to command a majority in the proposed Council even after his demand for the inclusion of five Muslims, five Caste Hindus, one Scheduled Caste and one Sikh was admitted. He claimed the sole right for the Muslim League to nominate all Muslim members to the Council. Sir Francis Mudie later tried to offer an explanation for Muslim League intransigence to Sir Evan Jenkins by pointing out that Jinnah must have feared that their participation in a central government might irretrievably commit them to a course of action, which would prejudice the Pakistan demand. Congress readiness to participate and nominate Muslim members made them suspicious as they thought, as Chaudhuri Khaliquzzaman had put it, 'there are no lengths to which they will not go to destroy the Muslims'.⁴⁶ Sir Francis Mudie referred to Nehru's comparison of Congressmen, who had just been released from prison, to 'resistance groups . . . held underground until only recently'. Once rescued from their incarceration, they wanted to come to power. The Muslims, on the other hand, had opposed the rebellion. They were, therefore, like collaborators, who did not hope for mercy. The rivalry of the two communities, as Mudie would like to view it as a revival of the power struggle between the Hindus and the Muslims till the entry of the British on the scene:

August 1942 made it clear that we have in this country two very different communities, or to use Jinnah's words, nations, struggling for power, not two parties competing for office. From this point of view the real offence of the British in Congress eyes is that they stand in the way of the Hindus, led by the Congress, imposing their rule over the whole of India. The present struggle is only a part of the Hindu counter attack which, starting with the

death of Aurangzeb or perhaps the last battle of Panipat, was interrupted by the British conquest and will be renewed when we go.⁴⁷

The Congress had already submitted fifteen names among which there were several representatives from minority communities. It was also important to have at least one Unionist to represent the Muslims. But since Jinnah was adamant, the Conference could not make much headway. Wavell could have gone ahead without the Muslim League. But he was not willing to do away with the Muslim League as he understood their value as a potential counterweight to the unchallenged sway of the Congress. Governor Glancy from Punjab had clearly spelt out where exactly matters stood in his communication to the Viceroy on 3 July 1945:

I agree with you that it would be inadvisable if Jinnah maintains his present attitude to attempt forming Council without League representation. This would place Congress in an unduly dominating position. Muslim members apart from the Unionist and Congress nominees would probably be of dubious value: every individual Muslim representative would be subjected to continual vilification from League-controlled Press and would be likely to feel insecure. Jinnah would pose as an Islamic hero and though after some interval the falseness and untenability of his position might be appreciated and his power for mischief broken, it seems not unlikely that meanwhile the central machine would collapse.⁴⁸

It was clear that the scheme would not work without the participation of all the concerned parties. Wavell was given a go ahead by a reluctant home government on the understanding that he would be able to get things going before the problems that demobilization and the end of the war would set in. 'The Simla initiative had secured the assent of Churchill's government on the assurance that reconstruction would proceed by agreement' as R.J. Moore remarked. And 'its rationale was to secure an accommodation of communal differences'.⁴⁹ So Wavell declared the Simla Conference 'a failure' and flew to London once more to confer with his mentors in the War Cabinet.

The Simla Conference and the Sikhs

The Sikhs in the Simla Conference were represented by Master Tara Singh, although he was neither the representative of the Shiromani Akali Dal or the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee. These bodies were being dominated by the pro-Congress Udham Singh Nagoke group. Babu Labh Singh, the President of the Shiromani

Akali Dal, and Jathedar Mohan Singh Nagoke, the President of the SGPC, were both inclined towards the Congress. They had both participated in Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha of 1941 and his Quit India movement of 1942. Master Tara Singh, however, wanted to make a stand independent of both the Congress and the Muslim League. The inclusion of a Sikh representative in the negotiations for the future government of India overwhelmed him with the euphoric vision that no decision about the country's future would be taken without the agreement of the Sikhs. He, therefore, ended with a speech that although Pakistan was more harmful for the Sikhs than for any other community yet he would concede Pakistan provided Pakistan agreed to the formation of a separate Sikh state. This, he thought, would provide ample protection to Sikh interests and free the Sikhs of the necessity of hanging on to the coat tails of one community or the other. He wanted the new state to include all Sikh holy places in Central Punjab and Lahore. Although the Sikhs were not in a majority in these places, Master Tara Singh cited the analogy of Palestine, where the Jews had been provided with their homeland in spite of being only 10 per cent of the total population.⁵⁰ In the opinion of Sukhmani Riar, this demand was put forward by Master Tara Singh probably to win Congress support for the Sikhs as the Muslim League was making rapid strides in the Punjab with Communist help.⁵¹ Master Tara Singh also tried to alert all parties who contemplated a partition of the country to its dangers by bringing up the question of the history and tradition of the Indian army. Trying to impose new ideas on it might pose a security risk, he suggested.⁵²

The Wavell New Plan

Before his visit to England, Viceroy Wavell had met all his provincial governors in a conference on 2 August to ascertain their views about his future course of action. All except the Punjab Governor had suggested the holding of elections leading to the formation of provincial and central assemblies as a preliminary to the formation of a constitution-making body. To create an amicable ambience for these, the first step suggested was the release of political prisoners and the lifting of the ban on Congress organizations.⁵³

At home Wavell found the India Cabinet Committee, especially Sir Stafford Cripps, in a hurry to see the reincarnation of his earlier

proposals. Wavell demurred, but Pethick Lawrence, the Secretary of State convinced him about the pressure of world opinion regarding the steps taken by Britain towards the decolonization of India on the eve of Ernest Bevin's forthcoming meeting with the Foreign Ministers of America and Russia. Thus when Wavell returned to India, his first task was to make an announcement on 19 September 1945 on behalf of the HMG that elections to the central and provincial legislatures were to be held during the coming cold weather. An Executive Council was to be constituted with the support of the prominent Indian parties and a Constitution-making body was to be convened. It was to be ascertained from the members of the provincial legislative assemblies whether the 1942 Declaration would be enough to meet the needs of the two communities or whether any other formula was required. The Indian States were also to have their representatives in the Constitution-making body. Finally their task would be to conclude a treaty between Britain and India prior to the severance of the colonial connection.⁵⁴

Notes

1. N.N. Mitra (ed.), *The Indian Annual Register* (Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 1990), 1944, vol. II, pp. 215-17.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 221-2.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 222.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 223.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Harnam Singh, *Punjab: The Homeland of the Sikhs together with the Sikh Memorandum to the Sapru Conciliation Committee* (1945).
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 63-5.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-7.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 67-8.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 77-8.
14. *Ibid.* p. 77.
15. *Ibid.* p. 78.
16. N.N.Mitra (ed.), *The Indian Annual Register: An Annual Digest of Public Affairs*, 1945, vol. I, pp. 310-16.
17. Patrick French, *Liberty or Death: India's Journey to Independence and Division* (Penguin Books, London, 2011, 1st pub. 1997), p. 139.
18. Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the*

- Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, 1st pub. 1985), p. 71.
19. Patrick French, *Liberty or Death* (Penguin Books, London, 2011), p. 192.
 20. Mitra (ed.), *The Indian Annual Register*, 1945, vol. I, pp. 130-1.
 21. Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, op. cit., p. 126.
 22. Penderel Moon (ed.), *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal* (Oxford University Press, London, 1973), p. 110.
 23. Mitra (ed.), *Indian Annual Register*, vol. I, op. cit., pp. 303-4.
 24. Ibid.
 25. Ibid. pp. 304-5.
 26. Ibid.
 27. Ibid.
 28. Moon (ed.), *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal*, op. cit., p. 101.
 29. Ibid. p. 17.
 30. Field Marshall Viscount Wavell to Mr. Amery, 16 April 1944 in Document No. 462 in *The Transfer of Power*, vol. IV, p. 883.
 31. Ibid.
 32. Ibid.
 33. Ibid.
 34. The Viceroy was already struggling under the shadow of a great famine in Bengal in 1943, which later turned out to be an outcome of panic accumulation for military supplies in view of the advance of the Japanese in the rice belt of the South-East. For details see Paul Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal: The Famine of 1943-44* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1983).
 35. D.C. Potter, 'Manpower Shortage and the End of Colonialism: The Case of Indian Civil Service', in *Modern Asian Studies*, 7.1 (1973), 47-73.
 36. R.J. Moore, *Escape from Empire: The Attlee Government and the Indian Problem* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1983), p. 23.
 37. Moon (ed.), *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal*, op. cit., pp. 94-9.
 38. Ibid., pp. 121-35.
 39. Altogether twenty-one leaders were to be invited. Among them were to be Premiers of provincial governments; persons who last held the office of the Premier in provinces administered by Governors; the leader of the Congress party and the Deputy Leader of the Muslim League in the Central Assembly; the leaders of the Congress and Muslim League in the Council of State; the leaders of the Nationalist Party and the European Group in the Central Legislative Assembly; Gandhiji and Jinnah, as the recognized leaders of the two main political parties, and a representative each of the Sikhs and Scheduled Castes. Initially Abul Kalam Azad's name was not in the list of invitees for fear of offending Jinnah. But Gandhi insisted that the task of representing the Congress belonged to the Congress President alone, as he did not represent any institution.

- V.P. Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India* (Orient Longman, Madras, 1957), pp. 182-5.
40. Moon, *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal*, op. cit., p. 141.
41. Ibid., pp. 142-4.
42. Wavell to Amery, 25 June 1945 in *The Transfer of Power*, vol. V, Document No. 538, p. 1157.
43. Note by Glancy to Wavell, 26 October 1944 in Lionel Carter (ed.), *Punjab Politics, 1st January 1944-3 March 1947*, pp. 104-7.
44. Moon (ed.), *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal*, op. cit., p. 147.
45. Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, op. cit., p. 87.
46. Enclosure in the letter of Mudie to Jenkins, 16-17 July 1945 in *The Transfer of Power*, vol. V, Document No. 622, p. 1269.
47. Ibid.
48. Glancy to Wavell, 3 July 1945 (telegram) in Lionel Carter, *Punjab Politics, 1 January 1944-3 March 1947*, pp. 135-6.
49. Moore, *Escape from Empire*, op. cit., p. 57.
50. K.C. Gulati, *The Akalis Past and Present* (Ashajanak Publication, New Delhi, 1974), pp. 111-12.
51. Sukhmani Riar, 'Khalistan: The Origins of the Demand and Its Pursuit Prior to Independence, 1940-45', in Pritam Singh and Shinder Singh Thandi (eds.), *Punjabi Identity in a Global Context* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999), pp. 233-44.
52. Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, pp. 197, 212.
53. Moon (ed.), *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal*, entry for 2 August 1945, p. 163.
54. Ibid., pp. 170-1.

The Punjab Elections of 1945-1946 and its Aftermath

ELECTIONS IN THE Punjab were being held in spite of the worst premonitions of the Governor Sir Bertrand Glancy. He was apprehensive that it would tear the entire fabric of Punjabi society apart and pull all the three communities asunder from each other.¹ Although the plan goes under the name of the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, it was actually the India Cabinet Committee and Sir Stafford Cripps, most of all, which was in a hurry to see the Indian question settled to their liking. The Punjab Governor had also expressed his reservations against the Cripps' offer for provinces to opt out of the Indian Union, as 'a Province as now delimited' might contain large contiguous areas as large as a Division or more, which might wish to stay back. He specifically mentioned the case of Jullunder and Ambala as well as Amritsar in the Punjab.² It was thus the Pakistan question around which the elections in the Punjab revolved.

1946 Elections and the Sikhs

The Sikhs were not slow to comprehend the implications of the elections announced by the Viceroy for the cold weather of 1945-6. The end of the War meant demobilization and unemployment for the Sikh fighting men. The timing of the elections was not very opportune for their community. For them the elections at this juncture appeared to be an attempt by the British government to thrust Pakistan down the throats of the Sikhs. The carving out of Pakistan in the Punjab meant the subjugation of their homeland and a challenge to their unfettered existence.

'The Sikh Panth will resist Pakistan to the last man', declared Sardar Ishar Singh Majhail while unfurling the *Nishan Sahib* (the Sikh flag) in Ranjit Nagar in Gujranwala on 29 September 1945 at an Akali Conference attended by over a lakh of men and women. The Conference was conducted with great pagaeantry, the President-

elect being carried on elephant back in a 2-mile long procession. Thousands of men and women thronged the way through which they passed. Akali *jathas* numbering more than 60, decked in multi-coloured dresses and turbans and carrying swords, spears and Sikh flags were led by five camel-sawars and another 101 on horse-back flaunting naked swords in their hands. It took them three full hours to reach the place where the Conference was to take place.³

It was decided that all the Sikh candidates would fight only on the Panthic ticket. The veteran Akali leader Master Tara Singh was entrusted with the task of a Sikh Election Board in consultation with all the important groups in the community. The issue involved in the coming elections was so vital that it was desirable that the Panth should speak in a single voice. With all their readiness to cooperate with the Congress and to participate in all their programmes in the service of the country, the Akalis tried to break away from toeing the Congress line in its entirety. Sardar Ujjal Singh spoke of the Congress insensitivity to the problems the Sikhs had been anticipating for themselves in the proposed Pakistan. In spite of their 1929 assurance to the Sikhs not to reach any settlement without their consent, they had ignored Sikh interests during the Round Table Conference. Master Tara Singh revealed before the audience how the Congress had already committed itself to the principle of Pakistan. Sikh voters were exhorted to rally round the Panthic flag, which was the emblem of sacrifice and freedom. Drawing on a slogan raised by Master Tara Singh, the Conference decided on a manifesto *Panth Azad, Mulk Azad* which meant that the liberation of the land was inextricably associated with the question of the independence of the Sikh community.⁴

‘The opinion of the Sikhs about Pakistan is crystal clear,’ lashed out Babu Labh Singh, President-elect of the Akali Conference, ‘the patriotic Sikhs shall never tolerate a vivisection of their beloved country at any price.’⁵ Sardar Baldev Singh, who had accepted a berth in the Khizr Cabinet, said that ‘even if the Muslim League promised to build houses of gold for the Sikhs in Pakistan, they would refuse to live in it. . . . The Sikhs would be ready to shed their last drop of blood to maintain the unity and integrity of their homeland if Pakistan is ever forced on them.’⁶ The creation of Pakistan would irretrievably damage the Sikh position in the Punjab, where the Sikhs had been the dominant group before the British took over the reins of power from them. Nothing would now persuade them to accept the position

of a 'sub-national group' where there had been a Sikh Raj only a few years earlier. Sikh fear grew, as he complained to the Governor, from cases of intimidation of voters in the Ambala Division, declaring that a time would soon come when Shariat law would be the only law and everyone, even non-Muslims, would have to take their cases to the mosques for adjudication.⁷

There were about 900 delegates in the Conference at Gujranwala. All the speakers in this conference like Sardar Baldev Singh, Sardar Ishar Singh Majhail, Master Tara Singh, Jathedar Labh Singh, Sardar Ujjal Singh, MLA, Sardar Sant Singh, Sardar Mohan Singh, Sardar Santokh Singh, MLA, Sardar Amar Singh Dosanj, Professor Ganga Singh, Sir Jogendra Singh, Udham Singh Nagoke, Harnam Singh Advocate were critical of the Communist support for Pakistan. A single vote in favour of the Communists would mean a vote for Pakistan and the Muslim League, said Sardar Baldev Singh. Sardar Ajit Singh Sarhadi, former Akali Minister in the North-West Frontier Province and Sardar Basant Singh Mogha also supported the Resolution.⁸

The only seats for which the Akalis entered into an electoral understanding with the Congress were those where they wanted to defeat the Sikh candidates, who had stood on a Communist ticket. The Communist candidate Sohan Singh Josh was being opposed by the Akali party Secretary Ishar Singh Majhail. Majhail even hoisted the tri-colour in his camp and put a Congress flag on his car.⁹

The Akalis even extended olive branches to Baba Kharak Singh and his Central Akali Dal for closing their ranks. But the Baba was adamant. He would fight on a Panthic ticket, but preferred to remain aloof from those who had collaborated with the Unionists. They would rather stand by the Congress in the coming elections. However, he was also no less opposed to Pakistan than the Akalis. 'So long as even one Sikh child is alive, Pakistan will not be allowed to be established and Hindustan will remain Akhand Hindustan,' Baba Kharak Singh declared in front of a large conference of the Central Akali Dal at Lahore on 30 September 1945. He wanted Congress to stand by these demands. Among his other demands the most important were weightage for the Sikhs at par with that given to the Muslims in the legislatures of the UP, CP or Madras or equal representation for all communities in the provincial legislatures; 6 per cent of seats in the central government and the same rights for the Sikhs as the other communities of India.¹⁰

Elections of 1946 and the Muslim League

Jinnah and his supporters had been 'loudly clamouring for general elections'¹¹ and with the declaration of elections in the winter months of 1945-6, the Muslim League entered the fray with a no-holds-barred programme. However, Punjab had grown its own tradition and as Ian Talbot has rightly pointed out, it was not easy to bring about a change in those conventions:

It (the Pakistan Resolution) was deliberately left vague in its territorial definition in order to leave Jinnah room for manoeuvre, and to provide a rallying call for Muslims from both the minority and majority areas. The League faced an uphill struggle to 'sell' the idea to the majority areas' politicians. They did not feel so threatened by the Hindu and Sikh communities as did their brethren elsewhere in India. In the case of the Punjab Unionists their interests were tied up in cooperation with these groups.¹²

The Muslim League was thus left no option but to raise a cry of 'Islam in danger' and resort to crude religious symbolism to win over the innocent and simplistic rural inhabitants to their cause. League propagandists used the mosques in the countryside as their launching pad and regular League meetings followed the Friday prayers with the Imam's permission.¹³ The League had succeeded in winning over many Pirs and Maulavis all over the countryside to their cause and these Pirs and Maulavis singled out the opponents of the League as infidels. The Holy Koran was carried everywhere as an emblem of the League. The preachers even went to the extent of declaring that every vote cast in favour of the League was a vote for the Holy Prophet.¹⁴ In some places Maulavis and Pirs preached that those voting against the League would be excommunicated, they would cease to be Muslims and their marriages would become invalid.¹⁵ In some places voters opposing the League were threatened to be excluded from Muslim congregations and refused permission in burial grounds for the disposal of their dead.¹⁶ League volunteers went to the Badshahi Mosque at Lahore, where more than 50,000 had assembled on Eid day to say their prayers, and sold League emblems to be pinned on *kurtas* and *sherwanis*.¹⁷ The Muslims were openly asked to make a conscious choice between *din* (religion) and *duniya* (wordly gains), two radically opposed worlds painted in absolute terms, the one strictly removed from the other; the former stood for 'righteousness and faithfulness', 'the problem of saving Muslims from

the slavery of Hindus', 'the unity and brotherhood of all Muslims', 'the Holy Muhammad and Ali' and Muslim League and Pakistan; the latter would bring squares and jagirs, zaildaris, lambardaris and safedposhis, which went with men like Khizr, Baldev Singh, the Congress and the Unionists leading the path to *kufristan* (reign of the infidels), idol worship and *biraderi* and clan considerations.¹⁸ Thus a direct appeal was made to the religious sensibilities of the believers and relegate the rivals to the opponents of the faith cherished by the people as their own since long. Deviation from these ideas would mean the condemnation of the believer to the dark forces of immorality and infidelity. There was thus a direct onslaught on the conscience of the Muslim masses.

The Muslim League had found a strange ally in the Communists, who saw an urge of the Muslim people for self-determination in the demand for Pakistan.¹⁹ The Communist ideologue G. Adhikari had written in the party organ *People's War* of 8 August 1942 that the Muslims of western Punjab (beyond the river Sutlej), 'bear the distinct impress of a nationality with a contiguous territory, language, culture, economic life and psychological make-up'.²⁰ Daniyal Latifi, who had become the office secretary of the Punjab Muslim League headquarters at Lahore in June 1944, drafted the election manifesto of the Punjab Muslim League. Its aim was

humanising the conditions of agricultural and factory labour by the provision of medical aid, maternity facilities, education, the abolition of forced labour and the arranging of a reasonable security of tenure, the fixing of fair rents and of decent housing conditions, minimum wages, shorter hours for industrial workers, the strict enforcement of factory legislation, the right of collective bargaining through trade unions and unemployment and sickness insurance.

The manifesto attacks the privileges of the comparatively few well-to-do and visualizes the reform and codification of the land laws, the establishment of cooperative farms and the shifting of burden of taxation to the shoulders of the rich landlords.²¹ Sajjad Zaheer, a Communist Party activist devoted himself heart and soul to developing the Muslim League into a mass organization. They helped the League to hold meetings in Moghulpura, the working class suburbs of Lahore and 2,000 persons attended a well-organized Muslim League Conference in those *mohallas*.²² They helped the Punjab Provincial Muslim League to organize League Organizers' Political Training Schools at Bhagwanpura at Lahore. This was attended by village

teachers, poor Maulavis, students, peasants and small zamindars, who had been devoting their attention to developing the League organization in their areas. Communist intellectuals like Mian Bashir Ahmad, Abdullah Malik and Daniyal Latifi lectured in this school.²³ Student propagandists commissioned by the League could reach peasant homes in the countryside, accompanied by kisan workers. In December 1946, 250 Aligarh students spent a three weeks' holiday in the Punjab taking the message of freedom to the people. Another 275 students from Islamia College, Lahore went to the countryside campaigning for the League went in December and were carrying on their work among the people till late in January 1946.²⁴

Muslim League could also take full advantage of the post-war economic dislocation, demobilization, rising unemployment, scarcity of essential consumer goods and rising prices. The administration had been planning some *jangji* (military) land grants in the Canal Colonies for returning soldiers, but they were not yet ready in 1945.²⁵ The flow of commodities was not immediately as free as had been expected. Glancy reported considerable disappointment at the non-availability of extra sugar during the Ramzan (Muslim ritual fasting) month.²⁶ There was a shortage of cloth and rationing of cloth had to be introduced in 44 towns in the province.²⁷ There was a sudden slump in agricultural prices in 1944 resulting in frustration among agricultural producers. In the wake of it came a scarcity of food as hoarders and black-marketeers immediately started sending the rice and wheat across the border to UP, where the prices were much higher both in the open market as well as in ration shops. As a result wheat and rice disappeared from the open market.²⁸ Some Rohtak zamindars belonging to the Zamindara League, recently revived by Premier Khizr Hayat Khan as a last ditch effort to hold his dismembering group of supporters together, had actually been involved in the hoarding and black-marketing of crops. This alone would explain how the League meetings could record an attendance of more than 50,000 in Rohtak (a small district of the Ambala Division), supposedly an Unionist stronghold. A great awakening seemed to have been taking place in the massive Muslim belt of the western Punjab, in the Multan and Rawalpindi Divisions. Both Mumtaz Daulatana, the General Secretary of the Provincial League and Ataulah Jahania, a rising young League agitator and organizer, reported the attendance in large numbers of peasants, oppressed and terrified by landlord *zulum* to the League meetings. Landlords were exhorted to rise above

their narrow clan and tribal considerations and devote themselves to the service of the Muslim *qaum*.²⁹

All these, however, cannot explain the spectacular success of the Muslim League in the elections of 1945-6 in stark contrast to what it had accomplished in 1937. What the League ultimately needed for its success was what it had been trying to achieve since 1944. This was the wholesale appropriation of the Unionist Muslims for the League camp. Here lay the tragedy of the League, since its success in this respect contained the seeds of the defeat of the radical programme envisaged by it since 1944 in collaboration with the Communists. The Simla Conference had demonstrated that the British were not willing to go ahead with the task of preparing a constitution-making body without the Muslim League. The end of the war and the general elections of 1945-6 showed that the British were serious about handing over power to the elected representatives of the people. The Unionist government could hold together as long as the British were present as the arbiters between the different communities. But the prospect of British departure immediately brought forth the mutual doubts and suspicions of the different communities. With the Hindus raising the slogan of *Akhand Bharat* and the Sikhs harking back to the glories of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the cry of 'Islam in danger' only sounded too convincing in a Muslim-majority province. The Punjab Governor was not far too wrong when he remarked that 'since Jinnah succeeded by his intransigence in wrecking the Simla Conference his stock has been standing very high with his followers and with a large section of the Muslim population. He has been hailed as the champion of Islam'.³⁰ The Pirs and Sajjada Nashins, who had been consistently backing the Unionists for all the temporal influence that went with it, now judged it politic to switch allegiance to the League. As these Pirs were believed to be commanding Baraka (charisma) and the ability to act as a link between God and the ordinary believer through the original saint and the power to bring the favour of God to the devotees on the day of the *urs* or death anniversary of the original saint, lying in his tomb in the various shrines, dotting the Punjab countryside, they could command the allegiance of the entire flock of their devotees. Once a Pir crossed over to the Muslim League, the Muslim League was assured of the support of the entire bulk of his devotees along with him.³¹ The Pirs issued *fatwas* or dictates in favour of the candidates, whom they wanted to get elected.³² The post-war economic grievances of the

peasants and the demobilized military personnel merely strengthened the logic of this support.³³

As the election campaign began to progress, idealists like Sajjad Zaheer began to discover how the League leadership had not hesitated to 'give shelter to rank opportunists with it, whose very presence weakens its mass democratic basis'.³⁴ Such were the Nawab Sir Mehr Shah, a member of the big Pir family of western Punjab, Khan Saheb Makhdum Syed Ghulam Mustafa Shah Gilani and Major Ashiq Husain, a minister in the Union Ministry (both from Multan). Sayyad Mohyud-din Lalbad Shah, the Pir of Makhad in the Attock stood as an independent and defeated the Muslim League candidate, Shaikh Muhammad Yusuf, a pleader of Talagang. But thereafter the Pir himself went over to the Muslim League after the elections. Similarly Major Nawab Ashiq Husain in Multan won on a Unionist ticket but joined the Muslim League immediately after the elections.³⁵ David Gilmartin thought that some of the revivalist Pirs like Pir Fazl Shah of Jalalpur, the Pirs of Taunsa, Golra, Alipur and Sialsharif, who had been looking for an opportunity of enforcing their ideals into the political arena, but had stayed away from the Unionist experiment for its emphasis on temporal concerns, saw an opportunity of the expression of their ideals in the religious commitments of the Muslim League.³⁶ Thus the old feudal order, which the Unionists and the British had been propping up all these years, was once again underwritten by the Muslim League, throwing all its radical potentialities to the winds. Initially the League tried to shed its urban image and tried to exploit peasant grievances against the Unionist 'toadies' and 'blackmarketeers' with the help of the rural contacts of the Communists. But very soon they understood that the key to the rural votes lay in the support of the Pirs. This compelled them to jettison their Communist allies and cement their bonds with the Pirs. Talbot called it 'the Unionist Party's defeat, but not that of Unionism itself'.³⁷ The paradoxes in their approach were brought into sharp focus by Tariq Ali, who questioned the rationality of the Communist leaders in trying to work out a radical populist programme through the help of a party with a strong feudal base.³⁸

Unionists form Government

The results of the 1946 elections in the Punjab had definitely established the Muslim League claim to be the sole voice of the

Muslims in the province. It had come victorious in 75 of the 86 Muslim seats (all the 11 urban and 64 of the 75 rural) in the 175 members strong assembly. Other parties representing the Muslims like the Ahrars and the Khaksars were all swept off. The Unionists were reduced to a rump of 17. In the Ambala Division, which was a stronghold of Hindu Unionists, the party could secure only three seats including one Scheduled Caste seat. Its place was captured by the Congress in this Division, the seats formerly held by the noted Jat leader Chhotu Ram and that held by the former Revenue Minister Chaudhuri Tikka Ram both going to the Congress. The Unionist position was further eroded later due to several defections and was reduced to 10. However, even with the support of a few Scheduled Castes and Indian Christians, the Nawab of Mamdot, the Muslim League leader, could not muster a majority in the assembly. The opposition on the other hand was stronger in numbers, with 51 Congress, 23 Panthic, 17 Unionists, 2 Indian Christians and one Independent. Mamdot had approached the Panthic Party for their support, but nothing short of an immediate definition of the exact area of Khalistan would induce them to team up with the Muslim League.³⁹ League approach to the Congress, which had emerged as the sole representative of Hindu interests in the province by winning all the Hindu seats, for an understanding also floundered. Congress could shelve the Pakistan question if the League would accept its economic programme embracing all communities alike. But the Congress president could not accept their demand that there could be no Muslim nominees in the cabinet except those representing the League.⁴⁰

Since the coalition members had a marginal numerical superiority, finally the Governor had to invite their leader, Khizr Hayat Khan⁴¹ to form a government. But he found it 'a strange anomaly'⁴² that a coalition with only a small percentage of Muslims should be in power in a province, where the Muslims were in a majority. It was the first non-Muslim majority government in this Muslim dominated province since the inception of the provincial administration in 1923. League leaders tried to work up the feelings of their supporters by celebrating a 'traitors day' and a mock funeral of Khizr. A clash between students from Hindu and Muslim communities resulted in the death of one Muslim. Subsequently one Hindu student was wounded in police firing and another was stabbed by a Muslim. Talks of a celebration of a martyr's day were anticipated to result in further trouble and the police were planning to clamp down Section 144 in Lahore.⁴³

Congress ministers were the *bête noire* of Muslim officials and disaffection was also spreading among the police. Several communal incidents took place in Hissar, Kartarpur, Amritsar and Multan and the different communities started building up their private armies in anticipation of further trouble.⁴⁴

The Cabinet Mission Proposals

In the meanwhile, the communal situation in India was being studied with interest by men in the India Committee like Sir Stafford Cripps, who had retreated before Gandhi's call for 'Quit India' in 1942, but found his own comprehension of the communal tussle vindicated when the Muslim League fared well in the winter elections of 1945-6. The post-war international situation was making disengagement imperative. But they were unwilling to hand over power to the 'principal political party',⁴⁵ the Indian National Congress to the eclipse of the minorities. In the note to the HMG that the Viceroy had sent in the first week of November 1945 Wavell predicted 'a serious attempt by the Congress, probably next spring, but quite possibly earlier, to subvert by force the present administration in India'.⁴⁶ He vociferated against the provocative election speeches of Congress leaders like Vallabhbhai Patel in Bombay and Nehru and Pant in the United Provinces and the valorization of the 1942 movement. The formation of the Defence Committee headed by Bhulabhai Desai in which Nehru himself participated with prominent liberal leaders like Tej Bahadur Sapru for saving INA personnel also sent alarm signals to his mind:

I believe that the Congress are counting on the INA as the spear-head of their revolt; they would subordinate the Indian army if they could, and they hope that their threats will impair the loyalty and efficiency of the police. They have been encouraged by events in French, Indo-China and Indonesia which they are watching carefully; and a good deal may depend upon what happens there in Syria and Palestine.⁴⁷

It was obvious that Wavell, who had been in-charge of quelling the 1942 disturbances as Commander-in-Chief, had never quite succeeded in shaking off the trauma of those years. Spectres of those troubled times came back to him again and again:

Whatever the leaders themselves might say publicly, there would be organised attacks on the railways and public buildings, treasuries would be looted and records destroyed. In fact, Congressmen would attempt to paralyse the

administration, as they did in 1942; they would attack and possibly murder any officials, British and Indian, on whom they could lay their hands.⁴⁸

Once again in his 'Appreciation of political situation' for the Cabinet sent to the Secretary of State on 27 December 1945 he reported that: 'The Congress commands the support of practically the whole of articulate Hindu opinion; and could undoubtedly bring about a very serious revolt against British rule.'⁴⁹

The Congress was ardently supported by the Press, had the most organized political machine and commanded almost 'unlimited financial support'. They had the entire community of educated Hindus and students strongly arrayed behind them. They were feared to be capable of rousing mob power and turn violent any time. There was no check on their progress except from that of the minorities, who were themselves divided. Though the Muslim League was the principal minority party it represented 'entirely sectional interests and not all-India'.⁵⁰

The Attlee government wanted to define a clear course of action for the formation of a Constitution-making body and understood the need for deciding on a policy in case the minorities disagreed regarding its procedure. Cripps made his ideas very explicit when on 19 December 1945 when he declared that 'we might have to contemplate a division of India into Hindustan and Pakistan as the only solution.'⁵¹ R.J. Moore referred to two papers sent to him on 21 November and later on 21 December 1945 by Major Short which further convinced him of the correctness of the course that he was recommending. These two papers were by Penderel Moon, ICS (Moon's paper had the very suggestive title 'The Pakistan Nettle') and by Freda Martin, wife of the 'India watcher' Guy Wint. They argued that Jinnah was going to create a deadlock in all discussions for constitutional arrangements unless Pakistan was guaranteed to him in advance. The British government should therefore make definite plans regarding the form this Pakistan was going to have. Mrs. Wint also suggested that the boundaries of Punjab and Bengal must be adjusted to leave out the non-Muslim minorities if Pakistan was agreed upon.⁵² Cripps' papers led Moore to conclude that HMG had already been preparing plans for Pakistan months ahead of the elections of 1945-6.⁵³

Guy Wint and Major Short wanted to help the Viceroy with a constitutional adviser to get across the complications that might arise over the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan. The need for a policy to

meet the post-election contingencies in India was emphasized as early as 14 January 1946 when it was decided by the India Committee that a mission of three ministers should be sent to India after the elections. The Secretary of State, Pethick Lawrence wanted to go himself; he was to be accompanied by none other than Sir Stafford Cripps, who had already offered Pakistan in embryo in 1942 by suggesting the secession of provinces, in case they desired it to be so. On 22 January 1946, the Cabinet cleared the name of A.V. Alexander, First Lord of the Admiralty in both Churchill's coalition and Attlee's government to look after the defence aspect of the expected settlement. Major Short, who had retired from the Indian Army (5/11 Sikhs) was also included in their team probably to take care of the outbursts of resentment that the ensuing settlement was anticipated to create among the turbulent Sikhs community. The delegation was in India from 19 March to 29 June 1946.

The task of the mission was to bring about an agreement between the representatives of the main political parties regarding the method of framing a constitution and thereafter to help the Viceroy in forming an Executive Council with these representatives to carry on the administration while the constitution was under process. The Congress and the Muslim League viewpoints were apparently irreconcilable; this was sufficiently clear from their election manifestos. The Congress demanded immediate independence and transfer of power to one Indian Union; they would not admit the principle of Pakistan, unless its exact area and its degree of cooperation with the rest of India was defined. They were not willing to accept 'two entirely separate sovereign states'. The Muslim League wanted a sovereign Pakistan comprising six provinces. The boundaries and cooperation for defence and foreign affairs would be decided only after the principle of a sovereign Pakistan had been agreed upon.⁵⁴ The Rajaji formula had already offered it to Jinnah, provided he agreed to leave out the non-Muslim areas in these provinces. But Jinnah found it economically unviable and had rejected it as 'moth-eaten'.⁵⁵

In course of a meeting with the Cabinet delegation and the Viceroy on 2 April, the Nawab of Mamdot argued that the objection to the present boundaries of the provinces on the ground that substantial non-Muslim minorities would then be left in Pakistan was not tenable as a large number of Muslims would also remain in Hindustan. He discounted the idea that Hindus and Sikhs would not be treated well in a democratic Pakistan. He wanted to offer 'reasonable terms' to

the Sikhs. The boundaries of Sikhistan remained uncertain; they were demanding eight districts with a marginal non-Muslim majority (50 to 53 per cent). But in all these districts, Muslims outnumbered the Sikhs. In the Amritsar or Ferozepur districts there were five divisions and it was only in one out of five of these in each that the Sikhs were in the majority.⁵⁶ Mr. G.M. Sayed ruled out a separate Sikh state as 'impracticable' unless there were extensive transfers of population since the Sikhs were not in a majority in any district.⁵⁷

The Sikhs, however, were adamant. Master Tara Singh told the Cabinet delegation point blank that the Sikhs would not like to be subordinated to either of the two unions that were being planned, the Hindu or the Muslim. Mamdot's promise of just treatment in a democratic state did not carry conviction with the recent unpleasant experience of the working of the provincial autonomy in the Punjab, where the Sikhs felt swamped. Even if the Sikhs did not command a majority yet they too had 'a right to exist'.⁵⁸ Sardar Harnam Singh argued that although numerically superior (being 57 per cent of the population), the amount of land revenue paid by the Muslims (Rs. 4 lakh) and the extent of landownership in the province (30 per cent) by the Muslims was far outstripped by the Sikhs, who paid Rs. 8 lakh in land revenue and held 60 per cent of the land in the Lahore district. In Amritsar also the Sikhs paid nearly Rs. 12 lakh of the total revenue of Rs. 15.75 lakh, while the Muslims paid only Rs. 3 lakh. Population figures for the province, the Sardar pointed out, were not an accurate index of the actual state of affairs, as it included non-indigenous migratory labour. The Census of 1941 was, moreover, tampered with by dishonest officials, who tried to artificially inflate the number of Muslims. The Census Commissioner Yealts had himself written about it in his report. The rationing enumeration gave a more correct view, which showed Muslims to be less and Sikhs more in number than was given in the 1941 census. Harnam Singh further argued that arrangements under government supervision can be made for a peaceful transfer of population, whereby it was possible to create a Sikh state.⁵⁹ Giani Kartar Singh argued that if there could be two different Constitution-making bodies then there could also be a third for the Sikhs. With government assistance the Sikh population could be brought to the areas spoken of in about five to ten years. In reply to the Secretary of State's suggestion that Sikh position in the army would always ensure their influence in any all-India Constitution the Giani retorted that instead of being an

advantage it was rather a handicap as entire India was suspicious of the Sikh position in the army and thought that they were 'a creation of the British'.⁶⁰ Moreover, as Sardar Baldev Singh revealed during his meeting with the delegation that the Sikh position in the army was constantly on the decline. While before 1914 they constituted 19 per cent of the forces, it had fallen to 14 per cent since the Gurdwara movement shook the government's faith in the loyalty of the Sikhs. In 1939 there was an attempt to keep Sikhs out of the army. Sikh share in the Civil Service had also declined from 33 per cent and after 1937 there was only one Sikh in the ministry. He recounted the bitter experience of the Sikhs in the Unionist government, when even the minor provisions of the Sikander-Baldev Pact were not fulfilled. In the event of the creation of Pakistan, he feared, Sikhs would 'not be able to live'. Sardar Baldev Singh, therefore, urged that a Sikh state be created out of the Punjab leaving out the Multan and Rawalpindi divisions with an approximate boundary along the river Chenab. The Sikh states might be invited to join this 'Sikhistan' and Sikh population in this area might increase through a transfer of population. As the British would not be present to hold the balance between communities, the Sardar insisted, they must do something for the Sikhs before their departure. The Sikhs had a claim on the British as they had been the rulers of the Punjab before the British took over. They had no faith in what the Muslim League promised as this was probably a ploy to make the Sikhs agree to Pakistan.⁶¹ Khizr Hayat Khan Tiwana, the Punjab Premier confirmed the Sikh contention that it would be difficult for the Sikhs to survive in Pakistan. Communal clashes and threat of external aggression would soon undermine democratic institutions in the country and some form of dictatorship, military or political, would follow.⁶²

When the parties failed to agree after protracted discussions, the Mission itself offered a solution on 27 April. It proposed a three-tier government, a federal centre with common subjects like defence, foreign affairs and communications; a group of states consisting of predominantly Hindu majority provinces and another group composed of contiguous Muslim majority areas; the provincial governments were to have all residuary powers. The princely states were to be accommodated within this structure and appropriate terms were to be negotiated with them. The Mission then withdrew to Simla and the leaders (but there was no Sikh representative among them) were invited for discussing the proposals.⁶³

In course of the discussions Jinnah merely stuck to his demand for a six province Pakistan. But the Congress criticized the formation of groups on a communal basis. The grouping would result in confusion as it would mean three sets of executive and legislative bodies. They would also weaken the federal centre and result in deadlocks. However, the Mission publicly put it forward as a proposal for the constitution of independent India in a statement of 16 May. The Cabinet Mission proposals had thus decisively rejected Pakistan. The six province Pakistan would leave out vast areas containing Muslims from the proposed Pakistan. Moreover it would mean the inclusion of 38 per cent non-Muslims in it in the west and 48 per cent in the east. The statement made particular reference to the Sikhs, who would be affected by it. Even a smaller and truncated Pakistan would also divide the Sikhs, 'leaving substantial bodies of Sikhs on both sides of the boundary'.⁶⁴

The constitution devised by the mission was to be brought into being by means of a Constituent Assembly to be elected by the members of the provincial legislatures. As a concession to the sentiments of the Muslim League, it was provided that later on the Assembly could separate into three sections and prepare constitutions for the provinces or groups of Provinces.⁶⁵

The Cabinet Mission proposals remained short of the expectations of all the communities; but the Sikhs were the worst off. The Governor of Punjab tried to warn the government regarding the Sikhs as potential trouble-makers, as 'their religious agitation of the 1920s shook a Provincial Government far stronger and more stable than the present one'.⁶⁶ Although their case in the context of Punjab was very similar to that of the Muslims vis-à-vis the Hindu majority in India, yet the Cabinet Mission did not seem to have paid a thought to it.

Their case against the Punjabi Muslims is virtually the same as Jinnah's case against the All-India Hindus. . . . They will say that the Muslims have got what amounts to Pakistan, and that they are embedded for all time in a Muslim state. The solution must make it clear that the Sikh position – which has no counterpart in the rest of India – is fully understood, and must if possible provide for safeguards for the Sikhs.⁶⁷

The Mission's award came as a bitter blow to the Sikhs and Master Tara Singh and Sardar Baldev Singh thought that the inclusion of the Sikhs in Group B alongside the Muslim majority provinces North-West Frontier Province, Sindh, Baluchistan and Punjab without any

safeguards did not augur well for what the Sikhs were to expect in the Constituent Assembly. The number of Sikh representatives was to be only 4 as against 9 Hindus and 23 Muslims. There was every chance of their being ignored if the two major communities agreed.⁶⁸ Master Tara Singh threatened 'some measures in order to convince everybody concerned of the Sikh anxiety, in case they are subjected to a perpetual Muslim domination'.⁶⁹ Sardar Baldev Singh wanted a communal safeguard within Section B of Constituent Assembly similar to that granted to Hindus and Muslims within the Union Assembly. He proposed an amendment in the Cabinet Mission recommendations that: 'In matters of Sikh communal issues within Group B, no decision should be arrived at without the support of a majority of Sikh representatives present and voting in the Group.'⁷⁰

The Cabinet Mission recommendations so alarmed the Sikhs that, irrespective of their affiliations to the Akalis or the Congress, they decided to present a united front. 'Never before in the history of the British rule in India were the Sikhs so much perturbed and distressed,' wrote Sardar Mangal Singh, a Congress Sikh, to Wavell, 'as they are now over the Mission's proposals. They feel that they have been sacrificed at the altar of appeasement and have been thrown at the mercy of a perpetual communal majority of the Muslims.'⁷¹

Yet more poignant was what Sardar Santokh Singh, another Congress MLA and a postgraduate from Oxford University had to say to the Secretary of State:

They (the Sikhs) are a small minority in numbers but they are not a minority in the realm of service and sacrifice. They are a real force in India. History will show what sacrifices the Sikhs have made in every theatre of war out of all proportion to their numbers and this inspite of differences in home politics. These achievements are due to the influence of their religion, their culture and their attitude on life. A minority of this description which is so vital to the life of a nation must have a home of itself where it may be able to live its life in its own way and preserve its religion and culture. . . . Every Sikh feels that the Cabinet Mission by making these proposals have snatched away their very home from them.

The situation is painful for the Sikhs particularly as the proposals emerge from the British. . . . Sikh blood has been spilt ungrudgingly at every war for the last century in which the British have been involved. . . . Their feelings should be understood when their very existence is threatened.⁷²

The Sikhs held protest meetings from 26 May and Baldev Singh informed the Punjab Governor that the Sikh members were planning

to resign their seats in the Legislative Assembly in protest on 9 June when the next meeting of the Mission was scheduled.⁷³

In the meanwhile there were intense efforts to bring about a compromise between the Sikhs and the Muslim League in the Group B constitution. Jenkins tried to persuade them that their compact and homogeneous settlements in the districts adjoining Lahore and in the Lahore district itself would give them great power to manoeuvre. Their social and economic importance in Central Punjab and the success that they had achieved in business was to add to their influence even further. Baldev Singh had already received proposals from Jinnah (through Kazi Muhammad Isa of Baluchistan) for cooperation in drafting a strong Group constitution. Jinnah promised weightage in the civil services for the Sikhs and a good share in the Defence Services of which he wanted to get a share of 40 per cent for the Group B provinces. Though apparently attractive, Sardar Baldev Singh could place no faith in Jinnah's words and turned down an offer for a meeting from him over the telephone. The Governor thought that Baldev was probably hesitating in view of the forthcoming Gurdwara elections where they counted on the cooperation of the Congress. A deal with the Muslim League at this hour would have been most inopportune.⁷⁴

Sikh discontent reached such intemperate proportions by 29 May that Jenkins sent an urgent telegram to Wavell recommending immediate and serious steps for redressing the grievances of the Sikhs. 'As compact religious community confined to one group and without hope of all-India influence,' as he pointed out, 'they have reasonable apprehensions and their sense of grievance is real and urgent.' On the practical side also it was advisable to attend to the grievances of this community as 'in the Punjab Sikhs could wreck any scheme of which they really disapproved'. He anticipated wide-scale disturbances requiring military intervention if they were not conciliated before 9 June, when the Cabinet delegation was to meet.⁷⁵

However, the government was unwilling to bring changes to an accomplished fact at this stage. Wavell mumbled an excuse about having made a mistake in not giving a communal safeguard to Sikhs. 'I think we discussed it once,' he explained, 'but did not put it in for some reason.'⁷⁶ George Abell, Private Secretary to the Viceroy, replied that he would discuss with the Secretary of State if it was possible to announce that the mission will discuss with the Congress and the League what assurances can be given to the Sikhs.⁷⁷

Safeguards for the Sikhs were, however, not an easy proposition as it was feared to result in a deadlock. If the Sikhs and Hindus together demanded a representation of 25 per cent or more each, as Abell wrote to V.P. Menon, the Reforms Commissioner to the Government of India from 1942 and Secretary to the Governor-General, the Muslims would be converted into a minority. Representation in government service would be according to population and there would be no quotas for the Sikhs. That would have to be left to the discretion of the new government and the Legislature.⁷⁸ The Governor of Punjab had not weighed the implications of making concessions to the Sikhs from the all-India perspective. In view of 'the peculiar position of advantage of the Sikhs in the Punjab and the difficulty of any community to get on without their willing cooperation', the Reforms Commissioner thought that they should be persuaded to join the Constituent Assembly and cooperate with it. They were also to be informed that His Majesty's government would use its good offices to protect their minority rights and one Sikh was to get a place in the Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights.⁷⁹ This decision was confirmed by Pethick Lawrence in a letter to Sardar Baldev Singh.⁸⁰ Pethick Lawrence also assured Master Tara Singh that the Viceroy would discuss the position of the Sikhs with the main parties once the Constituent Assembly had been formed.⁸¹

These assurances from the Viceroy and the Secretary of State did not satisfy the Sikhs and Baldev Singh continued to insist that 'Punjab should have been partitioned in the interests of the Sikh community on the same basis' just as Group B had been created to suit the Muslims. Even if this had split up the Sikh community into two yet 'those of us in non-Muslim territory would have found adequate support and means for protecting the rest in case of need'.⁸²

In the assessment of Major Short the Sikhs did not pose a real danger as long as the army remained untouched. He expressed greater concern regarding the impact produced on Jinnah's mind when he would come to learn of Sikh restlessness. He would have preferred to see the Sikhs 'sit still, stop being an hysterical introvert and not irritate Jinnah but give him time to consolidate, and therefore time to realise that he cannot consolidate without, or at the expense of, the Sikhs'. If this advice was not heeded to, Short feared, 'the Sikh will have evoked irreparable suspicion and thereby done irreparable damage to his position . . . in the armed forces'. It would then be

beyond the powers of the British to help the Sikhs retrieve their position.⁸³

Reassured by Short's observations, the Viceroy and the Delegation met Master Tara Singh and Sardar Baldev Singh in an interview on 6 June. Master Tara Singh was desperate about convincing the Viceroy of the predicament of the Sikhs. He cited an instance of the perfidy of the Muslims in the Lahore Corporation. Although there was an equality of vote during the appointment of committees, the Mayor, who was a Muslim, had a casting vote. This power of the Mayor was exercised to appoint committees without any representative of the Hindus, Muslims and the Indian Christians. The Mission's proposals offered no protection, contended Master Tara Singh, against such a strategy. But even this argument did not move the Delegation and Cripps said that if safeguard was incorporated for the Sikhs then all other concerned parties would also demand similar safeguards. Instead of attaching an exaggerated importance to the number of seats that they could obtain in the constitution-making body according to their population ratio, the Sikhs, the Viceroy reiterated should 'rely on their quality and not on their numbers' and look to their position as an important minority. He still thought that Jinnah meant no harm to the Sikhs. He also promised to try to get them a better deal. If the Sikhs launched an agitation at this point, they would lose the 'sympathy and good offices of the British Government'.⁸⁴

But the Sikhs were adamant and a Panthic Conference held in the Teja Singh Hall at Amritsar on 9 June 1946, which was attended by 10,000 Sikhs of all shades irrespective of their minor theological differences, like the Akalis, Ramgarhias, Namdharis, Nirmalas, Nihangs, All-India Sikh Youth League, the Sikh Students' Federation and nominees of all Singh Sabhas of northern India. Sardar Mohan Singh of the Akal Takht carried on the proceedings as stage secretary. On 10 June Col. Narinjan Singh Gill was appointed 'Dictator of a Council of Action'. Col. Gill had served in the INA, which was a *bête noire* of the British and a hot favourite with all nationalists, Sikh, Muslim and Hindu. The Council was to resist the proposals of the Cabinet Mission which had liquidated the position of the Sikhs in the Sikh homeland and start struggle from 23 June which was fixed as a 'prayer day'. It also formed a Panthic Pratinidhi Board with representatives of all shades of Sikhs to keep the solidarity of the Panth and for lodging a vigorous protest against the Cabinet Mission. Sardar Ujjal Singh thanked the Mission for uniting all Sikhs irrespective

of their differences and exhorted the Sikhs to resist the Proposals with the last drop of their blood. The Cabinet Mission, in the words of the Secretary of State had 'made it possible for the Muslims to secure all the conditions of Pakistan without incurring the dangers in it'. Thus the Sikhs had been exposed to the danger of domination by Muslims and their cultural, social and political life threatened to get submerged.⁸⁵ Sardar Sarmukh Singh Chamak, President of the Ramgarhia Sikh Federation said that 'the British have tried to atom bomb the Sikhs'. Babu Labh Singh, President of the Shiromani Akali Dal, said that the Sikhs would prefer death to being slaves. Col. Gill said that the followers of Guru Gobind Singh would not only free the Panth but make the whole country and the world proud of their deeds. Sardar Baldev Singh even told some newsmen that Sikhs had been thinking of 'Direct Action'.⁸⁶ Pro-Congress newspapers like the *Nationalist* and the *Hindustan Standard* made much of the resolve of the Sikhs and reported:

It was not a petty show of a few discontented agitators grinding their private axes. It was a representative assembly of the brave Sikh community attended by all groups within it. And the decisions it has taken have all the solemnity of a crusader's sacred vow. It would be a fatal blunder to dismiss the whole thing as an emotional outburst not likely to be translated into action. That would be to forget the fighting history of the Sikh community which is written in the blood of martyrs. If the Sikhs are roused to activity it will not be an easy task to quell them.⁸⁷

The Central Akali Dal had earlier on 4 June held a separate meeting in Minto Park in Lahore on the occasion of Guru Arjan Dev day. Baba Kharak Singh had condemned provincial grouping in the Cabinet Mission proposals and said that it would 'undermine the very existence of the Punjab as a distinct unit in the Indian Union'. Baba Kharak Singh was ready even to face 'bayonets and bullets' on this issue. Sardar Gurbhajan Singh, the President Elect of the Central Akali Dal, said that the Cabinet Mission proposals neither solved the communal problem nor did it bring the independence of the country within sight. Although the word 'Pakistan' was not used by the Cabinet Mission, it was virtually conceded in spirit. It was a negation of the unity and integrity of India and nothing short of betrayal of the confidence reposed by the Sikhs on the British people. Guru Arjan Dev's sacrifices had imparted to them the lesson that they should never bow their head before injustice and *zulm* and should always be prepared to fight untruth and injustice. They thought that joint

electorates with reservation of seats for the minorities both at the centre and in the provinces was enough to protect the minorities.⁸⁸

Nationalist Sikhs like Prof. Mota Singh, Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir, S. Nidhan Singh Alam, Sardar Sant Singh and Sardar Amar Singh held a meeting resolving for amalgamation with the Akalis. Giani Gurmukh Singh and Nidhan Singh Alam had already become members of the Panthic Pratinidhi Board. It was also suggested at this meeting that the Sikhs should form a united front with the Hindus and Nationalist Muslims of the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sindh, Assam and Bengal, who were to be affected by the grouping of provinces. Gandhi's sympathetic words in the columns of his paper *Harijan* were timed exactly to fan the flames of Sikh anguish. 'Are the Sikhs, for whom the Punjab is the only home in India,' he quipped in, 'to consider themselves against their will, as part of the Section which takes in Sindh, Baluchistan and the Frontier Province?'⁸⁹ The acceptance of the Cabinet Mission proposals in the meeting of the League Council on 5 June had sent alarm signals in the Congress camp. It was feared that League entry to the interim government would be followed by a demand for parity with the Congress and this would be used as a precedent during the formation of the future union government. The Congress leaders were bent upon preventing such a thing from happening and for this they needed the Sikhs with them. They read veiled references to Pakistan in League Resolutions although the Mission tried to appease Congress by mutilating facts.⁹⁰

Pro-Congress papers like the *Hindustan Standard* and *Nationalist* now started campaigning for the support of the Sikhs:

If the Sikhs desire to consolidate their position they can do so only by strengthening the forces of nationalism and not by raising communal slogans. And to that end they must follow the lead of the Indian National Congress, the citadel of nationalism in this land. Instead of wasting their energies in isolated struggles let them make their struggle a part of the bigger struggle led by the Congress. There are many patriotic Sikhs within the fold of the Congress. Let the entire Sikh community now pledge its support to the country's national organization. It will be a tower of strength to the Congress.⁹¹

The *Nationalist* went a step further and reminded Sikhs of their past mistakes in splitting up the anti-imperialist front and urged them not to repeat history:

The Sikhs are among the bravest and most warlike people in India. Their

political awareness has not always been equal to their courage and it is for this reason that the British Empire found in them willing tools. The Sikhs have much to atone for. It was primarily with Sikh assistance that the mutiny was suppressed. A British writer refers with evident unctiousness to the valuable help rendered by the Sikhs in Imperialist war: 'Within three years of the trim carnage of Chillianwallah Sikh soldiers were fighting for the Company in Burma of their own free will and when a little later the mutiny threatened the existence of British domination in India and offered to all subject peoples an unequalled opportunity for vengeance on their conquerors, the Punjab was fettered in its loyalty.' The Sikhs were slow to read the lessons of Maler Kotla and Jallianwala Bagh.

That is our chargesheet against this brave and soldierly people. By rendering valuable help to the Empire they alienated themselves, to a certain extent from the rest of the country. Even now they harp on their services to the Empire, not realizing that these meant a corresponding disservice to the country. One of the speakers at the All-Party conference referred with evident pride to the fact that two hundred thousand Sikhs had joined the armed forces. The shame was partly removed by the National Army. It could be completely atoned for if a large number of determined volunteers enlisted in a *morcha* against Imperialist Britain.⁹²

The Sikhs now expressed their full confidence in the Congress High Command and made an appeal for assisting the Sikhs in safeguarding their own interests and those of other minorities in the Punjab. A formal request was also sent from the Punjab Provincial Congress Committee to the All-India Congress Committee to start agitation on behalf of the Sikhs. Col. Narinjan Singh Gill had already reached Delhi to coordinate strategies with Sardar Patel.⁹³ The internal rivalries of the Sikhs between the Master Tara Singh group and the Udham Singh Nagoke group, in the meanwhile, surfaced again. There was a split in the Panthic Board itself as Narinjan Singh Gill was one of Nagoke's men. The Council of Action was not formally formed and the matter was shelved till Gill's return from Delhi.⁹⁴

Master Tara Singh published a pamphlet, which was signed by six other Akalis. This pamphlet repeated the demand for the creation of a Sikh State, embracing the districts of eastern, central and northern Punjab with its border at the Chenab. In this province no one community would be able to dominate and the Sikhs would be able to have an effective share in the administration. He also wanted a substantial share in the Legislature and Government of the Punjab with a power of veto in the Punjab and in the union centre on Sikh questions.⁹⁵

In the meanwhile the Muslim League passed a resolution accepting

the scheme as it approximated to a semblance of Pakistan in Groups B and C of the proposed Constituent Assembly. Jinnah expected it to hold its own against a Hindu-dominated centre as decisions in the Sections would be by representatives of provinces and not by individual provinces. But to this the Congress would not agree. They were expecting freedom for individual provinces to join or opt out of a Section. But the Cabinet Mission insisted that the constitution must come into force only through Groups. Individual Provinces could opt out of a Group by vote in the new Legislature only after the constitution came into being. Nor would the Congress agree to the League claim for parity with the Congress in the Legislature and an exclusive right to nominate Muslim members as the latter amounted to an absolute denial of the Congress claim to represent all communities. An agreement thus proved to be elusive.⁹⁶

However, the Mission was in a hurry as it was going to leave on 29 June. Therefore on 16 June the Viceroy decided to announce the government's intention to form an interim government with 14 members of which six would be Hindus (including one SC), five Muslims, one Sikh, one Parsee and one Indian Christian. Although Jinnah's claim to parity with Congress was not granted, his claim to represent Muslims was honoured. This was followed by a Resolution that the government would go on with the task of constituting the interim government and constitution making even if one party did not take part in it.

The Sikhs had decided not to join the interim government but not to boycott Constituent Assembly elections. Master Tara Singh threatened mass arrests and mass hunger-strikes in jails, as was usually practised by the Congress. The Governor's report, however, spoke of 'more violent possibilities'.⁹⁷ The Sikhs were trying to raise their private army. A thousand leaders watched by a crowd of a lakh, representing the Akalis, Congress, Namdharis, Nirmalas, Chief Khalsa Dewan, Singh Sabhas, district Akali Jathas from all over the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Delhi, UP and other places had taken pledge at Teja Samundri Hall before the Akal Takht, the highest seat of Sikh religious authority, to raise two lakh volunteers. This number was equal to the number of Sikhs who had joined the British army during the Second World War. Sikhs in the service of the government had to contribute their salary of a month to raise and equip this army. It was rumoured that recruits to this army had to sign a pledge with their own blood. Sardar Narinjan Singh Gill compared the occasion

to the liberation of Singapore in 1942 by the INA.⁹⁸ Master Tara Singh warned that the Sikhs could do more harm than the Muslims if they were angry. 'As it was, there were only two ways open to the Sikhs,' he threatened, 'either to finish the British or be finished themselves.'⁹⁹ However, Qizilbash, the Unionist Revenue Minister, who had a long experience of the ways of the Sikhs, predicted that nothing much was going to come of it till the Akalis received the signals from the Congress. But the Governor would not trust the professional agitators among the Sikhs, who cared very little for sane and educated opinion.¹⁰⁰

Notes

1. Glancy had written to Wavell in a communication of 16 August 1945 'I must confess that I am gravely perturbed about the situation, because there is a very serious danger of the elections being fought, so far as Muslims are concerned, on an entirely false issue. Crude Pakistan may be quite illogical, undefinable and ruinous to India and in particular to Muslims, but this does not detract from its potency as a political slogan. . . . If Jinnah contrives by this campaign to consolidate his position still further, it seems to me that the difficulty of finding any satisfactory solution of the Indian problem will be greatly enhanced.'
And again –
'If Pakistan becomes an imminent reality, we shall be heading straight for blood-shed on a wide scale; non-Muslims, especially Sikhs, are not bluffing, they will not submit peacefully to a Government that is labelled 'Muhammadan Raj'. . . . No Punjabi, however uninformed, would contemplate with equanimity so shattering a dismemberment of the Province involving in effect the disappearance of the word 'Punjab', which has been held in honour for the last two thousand years. Lionel Carter (ed.), *Punjab Politics, 1 January 1944-3 March 1947* (Manohar, New Delhi, 2006), pp. 140-3.
2. Glancy to Wavell, 16 August 1945 and Glancy to Colville, 1 September 1945 in Carter (ed.), *Punjab Politics*, pp. 140-4. Bengal and Assam too would have similar problems if Cripps offer was revived, Glancy pointed out.
3. N.N. Mitra (ed.), *The Indian Annual Register, 1945*, vol. II, pp. 164-71.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p. 169.
6. Ibid., pp. 164-71.
7. Glancy to Wavell, 27 October 1945 in Carter (ed.), *Punjab Politics*, pp. 150-3.

8. Mitra, *The Indian Annual Register*, vol. II, pp. 170-1.
9. *People's Age*, Sunday, 10 February 1946.
10. Mitra (ed.), *The Indian Annual Register*, op. cit., p. 169.
11. Glancy to Wavell, 16 August 1945 in Carter (ed.), *Punjab Politics, 1 January 1944-3 March 1947*, op. cit., pp.140-3.
12. Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement* (Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1988), Introduction, p. xiv.
12. Ian Talbot, 'The 1946 Punjab Elections', in *Modern Asian Studies* 14(1), 1980, pp. 65-91.
13. Glancy to Wavell, 27 December 1945 in Carter (ed.), *Punjab Politics*, op. cit., pp. 159-61.
14. Glancy to Wavell, 2 February 1946, in Carter, *ibid.*, pp. 170-2.
15. Glancy to Wavell, 16 January 1946, *ibid.*, pp. 166-8.
16. *People's Age*, 6 December 1945.
17. Translation of a poster issued in Urdu by the League candidate Raja Khair Mehdi Khan of Jhelum and written by Abbas Ali Shah, Katib in Enclosure to a letter of Glancy to Wavell, 28 February 1946 in Carter (ed.), *Punjab Politics*, pp. 172-5.
18. Dr. Gangadhar Adhikari, the Communist theoretician, wrote in favour of the rights of the Muslims for a separate state in a pamphlet *Pakistan and National Unity*, cited in Satya M. Rai, *Legislative Politics and Freedom Struggle in the Punjab, 1897-1947* (ICHR, New Delhi, 1984) , p. 300.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 301.
20. *Manchester Guardian*, 15 November 1944 in L/P&J/8/662, Collection 117 C 70 in India Office Library, London.
21. *People's Age*, 6 December 1945.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Romesh Chandra, 'Under Glancy Raj in Punjab: Rule of Terror to Bolster Unionists', in *ibid.*, 10 February 1946.
24. Glancy to Wavell, 7 July and 27 October 1945 in Carter (ed.), *Punjab Politics*, pp. 137-8 and 150-3.
25. *Ibid.*, 16 August 1945, in *ibid.*, pp. 140-3.
26. Glancy to Wavell, 16 August 1945 and 13 September 1945 in *ibid.*, pp. 140-3 and 144-6.
27. Glancy to Colville, 13 September 1945, in *ibid.*, pp. 144-6.
28. Glancy to Wavell, 16 November 1945, in *ibid.*, pp. 154-6.
29. Sajjad Zaheer, 'A Glance at Punjab League Election Campaign: Mass Upsurge of Muslim People', in *People's Age*, 6 December 1945.
30. Glancy to Wavell, 16 August 1945 in Carter (ed.), op. cit., pp. 140-3.
31. David Gilmartin, 'Religious Leadership and the Pakistan Movement in the Punjab', in *Modern Asian Studies*, 13(3), 1979, pp. 485-517.
32. Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement* (Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1988), pp. 98-9.

33. Talbot, 'The 1946 Punjab Elections', in *Modern Asian Studies*, 14(1), 1980, pp. 65-91.
34. Zaheer, 'A Glance at the Punjab Election Campaign', in *People's Age*, 6 December 1945.
35. A.J.V. Arthur Papers, File no. 3, Attock District in the Centre for South Asian Studies, Cambridge.
36. Gilmartin, 'Religious Leadership . . .'; also see David Gilmartin, 'Biraderi and Bureaucracy: The Politics of Muslim Kinship Solidarity in Twentieth Century Punjab', *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, 1(1), 1994, pp. 1-29.
37. Talbot, *Provincial Politics*, op. cit., p. 103.
38. Tariq Ali, *Pakistan: Military Rule or People's Power?* (London, 1970). He called the Communist attempt 'Utopianism Gone Mad', cited in Satya M. Rai, *Legislative Politics and Freedom Struggle in the Punjab*, p. 303.
39. Note by Glancy, 7 March 1946 in Carter (ed.), op. cit., pp. 175-9.
40. K.C. Gulati, *The Akalis Past and Present* (Ashajanak Publication, New Delhi, 1974), pp. 114-15.
41. Ian Talbot, *Khizr Tiwana: The Punjabi Unionist Party and the Partition of India* (Curzon Press, Richmond, Surrey, 1996).
42. Glancy to Wavell, 15 March 1946 in Carter (ed.), op. cit., pp. 179-81.
43. Ibid., 15 March 1946 in *ibid.*
44. Ibid., 2 May 1946 in *ibid.*
45. *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal* (Oxford University Press, London, 1973), p. 196.
46. Ibid. p. 183.
47. Ibid. p. 182.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid. p. 197.
50. Ibid.
51. Cited in R.J. Moore, *Escape from Empire*, p. 42.
52. Ibid., pp. 58-9.
53. Ibid. p. 60.
54. Memo by Major Woodrow Wyatt for Sir Stafford Cripps, 29 March 1946 in Nicholas Mansergh (editor in chief) and Penderel Moon (assistant editor), *The Transfer of Power*, vol. VII (London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office), p. 54.
55. Penderel Moon, *Divide and Quit* (Chatto & Windus, London, 1962), p. 45.
56. Note of a meeting between Cabinet Delegation, Field Marshal Viscount Wavell and the Nawab of Mamdot, Tuesday 2 April 1946 in *The Transfer of Power*, vol. VII, p. 90.
57. Note of a meeting between Cabinet Delegation, Field Marshall Viscount

- Wavell and Mr. G.M. Sayed, 2 April 1946 in *The Transfer of Power*, vol. III, p. 42.
58. Record of a meeting between Cabinet Delegation, Field Marshall Viscount Wavell and Representatives of the Sikh Community, Friday, 5 April 1946, in *The Transfer of Power*, vol. VII, pp. 138-41.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
61. Record of a meeting between Cabinet Delegation, Field Marshal Viscount Wavell and Sardar Baldev Singh on Friday, 5 April 1946, in *The Transfer of Power*, vol. VII, pp. 141-3.
62. Note of Meeting between Cabinet Delegation, Field Marshall Viscount Wavell and Khizr Hayat Khan Tiwana, Friday, 5 April 1946 in *ibid.*, p. 147.
63. Moon, *Divide and Quit*, op. cit., p. 46.
64. Ibid. p. 47.
65. Ibid.
66. Jenkins to Wavell, 9 May 1946 in *The Transfer of Power*, vol. VII, op. cit., p. 483.
67. Ibid.
68. Meeting of Wavell and A.V. Alexander with Tara Singh and Baldev Singh, 16 May 1946 in *ibid.*, p. 576.
69. Master Tara Singh to Lord Pethick Lawrence, 25 May 1946 in *ibid.*, p. 696.
70. Sardar Baldev Singh to Lord Pethick Lawrence, 26 May 1946 in *ibid.*, pp. 700-3.
71. Sardar Mangal Singh to Wavell, 29 May 1946, in R/3/1/132, F592/63/GG/43 of 1946 in Microfilm Collection from India Office Library, London in the National Archives of India, New Delhi.
72. Sardar Santokh Singh to Lord Pethick Lawrence, 1 July 1946 in Microfilm from India Office Library, London in NAI, New Delhi.
73. Jenkins to Wavell, 21 May 1946 in Microfilm from India Office Library, London in NAI, New Delhi, pp. 644-6.
74. Jenkins to Wavell, 21 and 27 May 1946 in *ibid.*, pp. 644-6 and 710-13.
75. Ibid., 29 May 1946 (telegram) in *ibid.*, p. 724.
76. Ibid. p. 724.
77. Ibid.
78. Abell to Menon, 30 May 1946 in *ibid.*, p. 739.
79. Menon to Abell, 30 May 1946 in *ibid.*, p. 740.
80. Pethick Lawrence to Sardar Baldev Singh, 1 June 1946 in *ibid.*, p. 760.
81. Pethick Lawrence to Master Tara Singh, 1 June 1946 in *ibid.*, p. 761.
82. Sardar Baldev Singh to Lord Pethick Lawrence, 4 June 1946 in *ibid.*, p. 797.
83. Note by Major Short, 5 June 1946 in *ibid.*, pp. 821-2.

84. Record of Interview of Cabinet Delegation and Field Marshall Viscount Wavell with Master Tara Singh and Sardar Baldev Singh, 6 June in *ibid.*, pp. 827-9.
85. *Hindustan Times*, 12 June 1946.
86. N.N. Mitra (ed.), *Indian Annual Register*, vol. I, 1946, pp. 202-5; also see Note by P.E.S. Finney, Deputy Director, Intelligence Bureau, 14 June 1946 in R/3/1/132, F592/63/GG/43, 1946, Collection I in Microfilm Records from India Office Library, London in the National Archives of India, New Delhi; *Nationalist*, 12 June 1946 in I.B. Records File no. 313-41 in West Bengal State Archives (WBSA), Kolkata.
87. *Hindustan Standard*, 13 June 1946 in I.B. Records, File no. 313-41 in WBSA, Kolkata.
88. *Hindustan Times*, 5 June 1946; Mitra (ed.), *Indian Annual Register*, p. 202.
89. Moon, *Divide and Quit*, op. cit., p. 50.
90. *Hindustan Times*, 6 June 1946, in NMML.
91. *Hindustan Standard*, 13 June 1946 in I.B. Records, File no. 313-41 in WBSA, Kolkata.
92. *Nationalist*, 15 June 1946, in File no. 313-41 in WBSA, Kolkata.
93. Note by P.E.S. Finney, Deputy Director, Intelligence Bureau, 14 June 1946 in Microfilm Records from IOR in the NAI, New Delhi.
94. *Ibid.*
95. *Ibid.*
96. *Hindustan Times*, 27 June 1946. Also see 1,500 word letter from the Congress President Maulana Azad to the Viceroy in this paper on that date explaining the reasons why Congress rejected the proposals for the interim government.
97. Jenkins to Wavell, 26 June 1946 (telegram) in Microfilm Records from IOR in NAI, New Delhi.
98. Amritsar, 10 June in *Hindustan Standard*, 11 June 1946 in I.B. File no. 313-41 in WBSA, Kolkata.
99. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 12 June 1946 in IB File no. 313-41 in WBSA, Kolkata.
100. Jenkins to Wavell, 29 June 1946 in Note by P.E.S. Finney, Deputy Director, Intelligence Bureau, 1946 in Microfilm Records from IOR in the NAI, New Delhi.

The Failure to Secure Sikhistan

IN THE TANGLED web of inter-communal relations during the formation of the interim government in 1946 the Sikhs had suddenly become the centre of attraction for all. Their small numbers did not warrant a position of great importance in national politics, where the major players were the Congress and the Muslim League. In their hurry to settle the transfer of power the British were mainly concerned with achieving an understanding between the two major parties regarding the sharing of power at the time of their departure. They wanted the Sikhs themselves to work out their own solution with the two major parties. As the Sikhs were mainly concentrated in the north-western part of the country, the British saw it in the interests of the Sikhs to make a compromise with the Muslim League and live like other minorities. The problem arose because the Sikhs were not reconciled to such a position of dependence and insignificance. They wanted their commanding position, which they had acquired through their predominant position in the Army, to be maintained even after the departure of the British. But the other major parties were not ready to concede this.

Sikh Demands

However, while the British remained, the Sikhs could still appeal to their close collaboration with the British, specially at the military front. They had enough nuisance value to wreck a settlement that could be reached between Jinnah and the Congress as Punjab was vital to any calculations about the future Pakistan. In his letter of 3 July 1946 Jenkins therefore advised the Viceroy to keep in touch with the Sikhs so that they were kept in good humour and did not try to impede the settlement of the communal problem.¹

While an official caretaker government was in office till negotiations could be started for the formation of an interim government, Sardar Baldev Singh continued to remonstrate with the Viceroy for more

seats in the Constituent Assembly.² He also addressed a letter to the Governor of Punjab on 3 July seeking the same safeguards for the Sikhs, which had been provided to the Muslims in the Constituent Assembly during the review of the work of the Cabinet Mission in the British Parliament. He also protested against the right given to the two major parties to select Executive Councillors from the Minorities (para 5 (iii) of Viceroy's letter to Jinnah of 20 June) as an 'encroachment on Sikh rights and reduces the community to an inferior status.'³ But Pethick Lawrence replied to Wavell on 24 July 1946 that it would not be possible to revise the statement of 16 May which had the full approval of the His Majesty's Government at the time 'in the way the Sikh desires'. Moreover, the Sikh decision to stay out of the Constituent Assembly made it more difficult to raise these matters there.⁴

Giani Kartar Singh too met the Governor and tried to impress upon him how the Sikhs had suffered discrimination under the Muslim-dominated Unionist government regarding their religious and cultural rights like availability of *jhatka* meat in police lines and jails, sanction of adequate government funds for the teaching of Gurmukhi, use of Punjabi as court language and medium of instruction in Sikh districts and discrimination to Sikhs regarding school fees and educational grants. When the professedly non-communal Unionists with an Akali Minister in the Cabinet could discriminate like that then the Sikhs could not imagine how much worse could happen under the dispensation of a staunchly Islamic party like the Muslim League! The Giani 'did not want the Sikh case to stand or fall on Jinnah's view of it, which was tainted by Muslim ambitions'.⁵ Earlier Baldev Singh had told the Viceroy that Jinnah had sought Sikh support for weakening the Centre by demanding that the Centre must depend on contributions from the Groups rather than having the right of direct taxation. They thought this was too high a price.⁶

As the idea of Pakistan began to gather substance, a separate Sikh State continued to colour Sikh imagination as the only way out. Baldev Singh recommended to the Governor a scheme for a Sikh State published in the *Hindustan Times* of 1 July 1946 suggesting a grouping of the Sikh States in the Punjab like Patiala, Nabha, Jind, Malerkotla (ruled by a Muslim Prince) and Faridkot. Kalsia and Kapurthala were also eventually to be brought into the group. The area of this unit was about 4,199 sq miles with a total population of

21,16,302 of whom nearly a half were Sikhs. If the Moga tahsil of Ferozepore district, which was densely populated by the Sikhs could be added to this new unit, it could form 'a rallying point for the Sikhs of the Punjab to enable them to carve out a Sikh unit for themselves'.⁷ This would 'satisfy the aspirations of the Sikhs who wish to have a unit where they could be in a majority'.⁸ In his letter of 2 July Baldev Singh suggested that these States should be induced by the British government to have Sikh prime ministers so that these States did not stray from the Sikh tradition.⁹ But the Governor pleaded his inability to force the States to engage only Sikh prime ministers. He also informed that the move was to be initiated by the States themselves. This was later confirmed by the Viceroy.¹⁰

Giani Kartar Singh too had discussed the plan for a separate Sikh State with the Raja of Faridkot on 3 July and reports of the interview were sent to the Governor, and through the Governor it reached the Viceroy. The Giani and the Raja had agreed that the League should first be approached for a 20 per cent representation all through and a safeguard that all matters affecting a particular community should be decided by the majority of the members of that community. Failing that, they should try to carve out a separate Sikh State with all the Sikh States, Malerkotla, Jullunder and Ambala Divisions and Amritsar district. A small portion of Montgomery and one or two tahsils of Hissar could also be added to this state. Some neighbouring Hindu States could also be invited to join this State. They had also been toying with the idea of including Kashmir in the proposed State. However, this was to be kept strictly confidential as Gurdwara elections were to be held soon and the conservative element among the Akalis might not favour the idea of inviting Hindu States. Muslim-dominated States like Bahawalpur, Durjana, Loharu and Pataudi were to be kept out of this State.¹¹ Finally the Secretary of State put an end to all their speculations by making a statement in the House of Lords on 18 July 1946 pointing out that 'the inescapable geographical fact of the situation' was that the Sikhs were a mere 50,00,000 among an overwhelmingly large majority of 9,00,00,000 Muslims. Their situation was not such as to allow the carving out of an area where they would find themselves in a majority.¹²

Interim Government

Since the departure of the Cabinet Mission on 29 June the Viceroy was trying desperately to achieve an accord between the two major

parties. The Congress had initially decided that it would not join the Interim government. But it had conveyed its acceptance of the long-term proposals of the Mission, that is, a three-tier constitution. But they meant to stick to their own interpretation that the provinces could opt out of Groups by majority vote. Jinnah, however, agreed to come to the interim government and insisted on sticking to 16 June Resolution, which had said that government could be formed with those who are willing to come, even if some party did not accept the invitation. Congress now openly declared that they had only agreed to go to the Constituent Assembly and nothing else. The Constitutional Assembly was a sovereign body and could take decisions on its own regardless of the terms and on the basis on which it was proposed to be set up. Once the Constituent Assembly met, by sheer force of numbers the Congress members could wreck the form of the Grouping of the Provinces and could extend the powers of the Union Centre. During ratification of the Constituent Assembly plan, the AICC session in Bombay took the view that provinces might realign themselves according to their desires in the beginning, instead of after a stated period as outlined by the mission.¹³ Nehru now started freely airing his views of the matter. 'The big probability,' he spelled out 'is that there will be no grouping.'¹⁴ When Jinnah understood that the Congress was determined to leave no elbow room for even a slow and furtive advance towards his goal of Pakistan, he decided to reject the Cabinet Mission plans altogether. He called it a 'breach of faith by the British Government' and the Viceroy going back on the 5:5:2 (5 Muslims, 5 Hindus, one Sikh and one Indian Christian) formula.¹⁵ Liaquat Ali Khan said it would be suicidal to participate in the interim government as it stood at that time. Congress position would make Constituent Assembly a sovereign body. 'We would have no place in it because we would be one against four.'¹⁶ Jinnah now went back to the Pakistan cry. The League Council had to reconsider its acceptance of the Cabinet Mission Plan in view of the new situation created by the Congress. A meeting of the Muslim League in Bombay on 29 July 1946 decided to go for 'Direct Action' against the 'dishonest methods of British Statesmen' and the 'Fascist technique of the Hindu Congress'.¹⁷

When Wavell failed to secure an agreement between the two parties after an abortive meeting between Nehru and Jinnah on 15 August, he wrote to Nehru, who had recently succeeded Maulana Azad as the Congress president, inviting him to form an interim government. The Congress now accepted the invitation. But before anything could

materialize, Muslim League 'Direct Action' showed its fangs in the violent outbreak of riots in Calcutta, Dacca, Noakhali and Tipperah.¹⁸

The subsequent Congress decision to join the interim government was interpreted in Muslim circles as 'the installation of a purely Congress government at the centre'.¹⁹ As news of persistent and intense Congress activity in London through Reginald Sorensen and William Coxe, advocates of the Congress in the Parliament reached India, Jinnah feared a British Labour Party plan 'to entrust even more power to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and his colleagues'²⁰ and finally after some negotiations, decided to join the interim government on 15 October 1946. 'We are going into the Interim Government' explained Ghaznafar Ali Khan, member designate of the interim government, addressing Islamia College students in Lahore on 19 October 'to get a foothold to fight for our cherished goal of Pakistan' and they expected to use their position in the interim government as a part of their Direct Action Campaign.²¹

Sikh Response

Unable to make much headway in the direction of a separate Sikh unit, the Sikhs gradually inclined towards the Congress. There were secret reports from the Intelligence Bureau that Baldev Singh and the Sikhs had been given an assurance by the Congress that they would not agree to any form of constitution in the Constituent Assembly unless the Sikh demands were accepted.²² Patel wrote to Narinjan Singh Gill promising Congress support and the Sikhs wanted this to be confirmed by an AICC resolution. The Governor believed that the Congress was going to take the Sikhs under its wings to be able to use Sikh objection to any proposal as a 'major communal issue'.²³ Nehru attached great importance to the four Sikh seats in the Constituent Assembly. The Panthic Board had initially decided to boycott the elections. They later agreed to participate in deference to Congress wishes.²⁴ But later when they found that Partap Singh Kairon had been elected to the Congress Working Committee they decided to withdraw again. Nehru then took Partap Singh Kairon and Bhim Sen Sachar to task for having mismanaged the whole affair and advised them to apply for bye elections. Baldev Singh then saw Partap Singh Kairon, recently appointed to the Congress Working Committee and strongly advised him to nominate four Nationalist Sikhs. This provoked the Akalis to nominate four of their own. Thus

Baldev Singh's strategy worked.²⁵ A delegation consisting of Giani Kartar Singh, Udham Singh Nagoke, Ishar Singh Majhail and Narinjan Singh Gill went to Wardha to make sure how much help the Sikhs could expect from the Congress. Since the Muslim League had refused to join the interim government, the Congress wanted to associate the Sikhs very closely with them.²⁶ Although this was not a very deep-seated alliance, it was the Governor's impression that the Akalis and the Congress both were probably thinking that they could use each other to their advantage.²⁷ The Viceroy too had his doubts regarding the basis of this alliance between the Sikhs whom he found to be 'communal' and the Congress, which professed to be 'nationalist' in their goals.²⁸

The Sikhs held a large *diwan* at Sultanwind near Amritsar on 7 July where the proceedings were dominated by the former INA member Mohan Singh. Violent speeches were made in it. Master Tara Singh and Giani Kartar Singh were conspicuous by their absence from this *diwan*.²⁹ Narinjan Singh Gill announced a gigantic Sikh gathering to be held at Amritsar in September, when the Sikh *jathas* from various corners of Punjab would converge on Amritsar.³⁰ As Narinjan Singh Gill and Mohan Singh were stealing all the wind from Master Tara Singh's sails, the Master started to plan a break away from the Panthic Board and a *morcha* leading to hunger strikes and arrests in the manner of the Congress. Master Tara Singh and Giani Kartar Singh were two leaders with a real following among the Sikhs. So the Congress could not afford to alienate them. They were trying to stop this break by all means. If the Sikhs started a movement at this point, it would result in the collapse of the Unionist ministry. The survival of the Unionist ministry was so important for the Congress strategy in the Constituent Assembly to succeed that they tried to cajole the Sikhs not to start an aggressive movement at this point.³¹

The main problem of the Sikhs, as many of the contemporary observers had realized, was not merely their small numbers. Their stumbling block was their internal feuds and jealousies. 'The inherent weakness amongst the Sikhs lies in their failure, as has been proved often in the past,' pointed out a report of the Intelligence Bureau, 'to come to an agreement even on major matters due to personal jealousies amongst their leaders.'³² As late as October the Punjab Governor reported the presence of at least three groups among the Sikhs. They were officially allied to the Congress, but some influential

Sikhs wanted to keep a line of communication open with the Muslims too. They were totally unreliable as allies in a crucial juncture.³³ Even the Viceroy was disgusted with their inability to agree among themselves. He did not have the heart to ask the Sikhs to name their representatives to the Constituent Assembly as he knew that 'the effort of selecting one would probably split them from stem to stem'. Even Baldev Singh could not deny this weakness in the Sikh character.³⁴ Even when Pakistan was looming large on the horizon, the Sikhs did not pay heed. Like the Muslim League, he too was probably feeling jealous of the strong position enjoyed by the Congress in the interim government. The unilateral entry of the Congress to this government, by taking the Sikhs under their wings was resented by the Sikh leader Master Tara Singh. He felt restless of the control about the Nagoke group on the members of the Shiromani Akali Dal and the domineering style of Narinjan Singh Gill in the Panthic Board. Securing 80 per cent of the votes in the Gurdwara elections gave him a shot in the arm and he too wanted to stake a claim in the Shiromani Akali Dal, like Jinnah had done earlier in the context of the Muslim community, to the sole representation of the Sikhs. In spite of their being officially pledged to act in unison with the Congress and united in a coalition government in the Punjab, Master Tara Singh wrote to the Viceroy on 30 October 1946 to let them nominate their own members to the Executive Council free of the interference of the two major parties.³⁵

The Collapse of Unity

The Muslim League nominated five members to the interim government including one Scheduled Caste member 'as a gesture of goodwill towards the downtrodden'³⁶ but the Muslim League had entered the interim government, as Raja Ghaznafar Ali Khan had declared, 'to make the Congress understand our standpoint which alone can usher in a free Pakistan and a free Hindustan'.³⁷ For him the interim government was 'one of the fronts of the Direct Action campaign. 'The disturbances which have occurred in many parts of the country after the installation of the purely Congress Government at the Centre have established the fact beyond any shadow of doubt that the ten crores of Indian Muslims will not submit to any Government which does not include their true representatives.'³⁸

Even after the League joined the interim government, they

continued to oppose the policies of the Congress. They attached a few civil servants to their support and tried to build a bloc within the government. The Viceroy therefore hesitated to summon the Constituent Assembly as he found the League unwilling to cooperate. But finally he had to summon the Constituent Assembly under pressure from the Congress on 9 August. The Congress now wanted Jinnah to drop the 29 June Resolution for Direct Action adopted in Bombay. But Jinnah refused to withdraw the Resolution unless Congress accepted the 16 May announcement in toto. He advised the Viceroy to postpone the Constituent Assembly sine die. When the Viceroy persisted with the invitations, Jinnah advised the League representatives not to attend.³⁹

The British Prime Minister Attlee then invited all the three, Jinnah, Nehru and Baldev Singh, to London to resolve the crisis. The Congress was finally made to accept that provinces should act in a group. The only question was that whether the provinces could vote as provinces or part of an entire section. Although Congress would have liked them to vote as provinces, there was a declaration on 6 December that provinces should act in unison with other group members. Congress was forced to accept this with the caveat that the Sikh rights in the Punjab should not be jeopardized.

But Jinnah suspected that the Congress must be having other plans up its sleeve in the name of the caveat. Their worst fears were confirmed when Gandhi started singing a different tune. In reply to a query from some Assam Congressmen he said, 'Assam should not go into Sections. It should lodge its protest and retire from the Constituent Assembly. I have the same advice for the Sikhs.'⁴⁰ The Muslim League interpreted it as the non-acceptance of the 6 December declaration by the Congress. They too retaliated by refusing to drop their Bombay Resolution. Congress now threatened to resign unless League members were expelled.

The British government was unwilling to rule with one community. They feared communal outbreaks if Muslim League was totally excluded. The army and the police had also been infected with the communal virus and there was some polarization according to communities. In the event of a communal outbreak large-scale deployment of British army would be needed. This was anathema to the British. They were keen on disengagement. Civil servants were asking to be relieved and pensioned off. They were not in a position to begin a new phase of imperialism. They hoped that agreement

could be forced by announcing a definite date for withdrawal. They therefore declared on 20 February 1947 that the British government was determined to hand over charges anyhow latest by June 1948.

Fall of the Unionist Government

Khizr Hayat Khan Tiwana had been trying to lead a coalition of 51 Congress and 23 Sikh members with an Unionist rump of 9 by shutting out the single largest party from power but he soon learnt to his dismay that it was impossible to function properly unless a government commands 'not merely a majority in the Assembly but a majority in the major communities in the province as a whole'.⁴¹ His rule was plagued by problems from the very beginning. There were outbreaks of communal violence in all parts of the province from Amritsar and Multan to Ludhiana and Rohtak. The province was, to quote the Governor, in the grip of 'civil war atmosphere'⁴² at this time and all the three communities developed their private armies – the Muslim League National Guard, the Rashtriya Swayam-sevak Sangh of the Hindus and the Akali Sena of the Sikhs. There was a press report that 1,000 steel helmets were found in the Muslim National Guard headquarters at Lahore during a raid on 24 January 1947. The Unionist government tried to deal with the situation with an iron hand and promulgated the Punjab Public Safety Ordinance in November 1946. In January the government revived the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1908 and banned both the associations, the RSS as well as the Muslim League National Guard. Several Muslim League leaders were also arrested.⁴³ This raised a great hue and cry in Muslim circles and the Muslim League launched a Civil Disobedience movement on the lines of the Congress in the 1920s. The agitation consisting of *bartals*, processions and meetings had the sympathy of most Muslims, official and non-official. Villagers joined it without comprehending much except that it was directed against Khizr and would eventually bring Pakistan. All the districts witnessed some trouble or the other, Multan, Gujarat and Jullunder in particular. Leghari tribesmen at Dera Gazi Khan had also been threatening to take part in the demonstrations.⁴⁴ As transfer of power became more of a certainty, the Muslims became more impatient of the constitutional stratagem by which the representatives of the non-Muslim minority were able to shut the Muslim delegates out of power. They were probably encouraged by the Muslim League high command, as Sardar

Patel had rightfully complained to the Viceroy.⁴⁵ Khizr Hayat Khan was able to sense their mood and lifted the ban on Muslim League National Guard on 26 February. The Muslim League interpreted it as a sign of weakness and started agitating against bans on public meetings and speeches and demanded the cancellation of the ordinance itself. League leaders openly declared that their goal was the removal of the Coalition Ministry. 'Khizr Ministry must be made to go no matter what cost to Muslim League', declared Shaukat Hayat Khan and threatened that they would put out 15 million Muslims to break law. This was followed by demonstrations on 28 February. All the important League leaders in Lahore including Mamdot, Iftikharuddin, Firoz Khan Noon and Mumtaz Daulatana had to be arrested under the Ordinance and sent outside Lahore for detention.⁴⁶ Henceforth League leaders made no secret of what they aimed at. *The Free Press Journal* of 7 February appeared with Ghaznafar Ali Khan's boast 'Mohammad bin Kassim and Mahmud of Ghazni invaded India with armies composed of only a few thousands and yet were able to overpower lakhs of Hindus; God willing, a few lakhs of Muslims will yet overwhelm crores of Hindus.'⁴⁷

This was followed by Liaqat Ali's statement in *Dawn* (14 February) that he expected the Punjab Ministry to fall as a result of the League campaign. The Punjab demonstrations, he ranted, were an indication of what the League could do on an all India scale if it became necessary although 'I can't guarantee that it would remain always non-violent'.⁴⁸

The demonstrations gradually turned increasingly 'mischievous and violent'. Attempts were made to hoist the Muslim League flag in the place of the Union Jack in courts and private houses in several districts like Lahore, Amritsar, Rawalpindi, Gujarat and Jullunder. At Amritsar police casualties numbered about 55 including one dead and three seriously injured while casualties among demonstrators numbered 110 including one dead and three seriously injured.⁴⁹

League agitation to topple the Khizr ministry sent shockwaves of alarm in the Sikh camp. Sardar Baldev Singh could visualize in it the preparations for 'a widespread anti-Hindu and anti-Sikh movement'.⁵⁰ Master Tara Singh made a press statement calling for a 'Sikh Army' under his command.⁵¹ Gopi Chand Bhargava had also addressed a letter to the Premier threatening to act on his own unless the government took some strong action. They were convinced that the civil liberties issue raised by the League was nothing but a move 'to seize power for the Muslim community'.⁵²

Khizr found the situation much too tense to continue in power. To add to the woe of the coalition government came the 20 February announcement of the British intention to pull out by June 1948. The imminence of a power vacuum made Pakistan more of a reality and it seemed that the days of an all-party provincial administration on non-communal lines were over. While the Muslim League celebrated 2 March as Victory Day, Khizr decided to resign and bring the Muslim League face to face with the groundswell of Sikh and Hindu feeling.⁵³

The Unionists having cleared the dock, Khan Iftikhar Husain Khan of Mamdot, the leader of the Muslim League wanted to form government, with the backing of 91 (84 Muslims and 7 minorities) out of 175 members. But he could not count on a majority in the assembly without some non-Muslim support. The Congress would not cooperate with the Muslim League without some assurance for equality. Sardar Swaran Singh too wanted a definite commitment from the Muslim League about the future of the Sikhs before coming to an understanding. 'The Sikhs had no intention of being treated as serfs under Muslim masters and they were strong enough to defend themselves,' he declared.⁵⁴ However, the League leaders bluntly refused to discuss the future of the Sikhs or to give any assurance to them.⁵⁵ As the Governor felt that 'no one community can rule the Punjab with its present boundaries except by conquest',⁵⁶ he decided to go into Section 93 and assume charge himself on 4 March.⁵⁷

Communal Clashes

Khizr's resignation led to great jubilation in League circles while the non-Muslims were correspondingly exasperated. On the evening of 2 March there was a large meeting in Lahore of Congress and Panthic Sikhs and violent speeches were made. During the morning there were processions of students, most of whom were Hindus. They clashed with the police and later raided police stations damaging property and injuring about 30 policemen, of whom two died later. When police opened fire, two demonstrators were also wounded. This was followed by large-scale rioting in Lahore from the morning of 4 March. The subsequent escalation of violence included incendiarism, stabbing, demolition of mosques and bombing and were termed 'a communal war of succession' by the Governor. There were riotings in Lahore, Amritsar, Multan, Rawalpindi, Jullunder and

Sialkot and lesser disturbances at Ludhiana, Kamoke in the Gujranwala district and Hoshiarpur and Khushab in the Shahpur district. In Jullunder 3000 Hindus and Sikhs held a meeting on 5 March and a procession carrying *kirpans* and swords marched shouting provocative slogans like *jo mangega Pakistan us ko milega qabristan*. In Lahore there were heavy casualties but not any extraordinary destruction of property. Amritsar saw a lot of incendiarism and heavy casualties, specially affecting the Muslims.⁵⁸

The worst affected were the two Muslim-dominated districts of Multan and Rawalpindi. Multan had 4 million Muslims and 3 million non-Muslims and Rawalpindi had 9 million Muslims and 2 million non-Muslims according to the 1941 census. They had been the special strongholds of the Muslim League. Multan had a long history of peasant grievances. A.J.V. Arthur, who had been the Deputy Commissioner of Multan in the crucial years 1946-7, testified to the oppression by the Hindu landlords of their Muslim tenants and even the molesting of their womenfolk.⁵⁹ In the Haveli Project, Nili Bar and Makhdum Murid Hassan the peasants were being deprived by the lessees of the fair share of the crop (one-half), they were also made to cultivate one acre per square free on behalf of the lessees (*bathraji*), had to pay an excessive share of the crop to the lessees for *zamindari kharch* (which amounted to even 5 seers per maund) and finally the crops were being divided in the lessee's place (Deras) and not in the fields. Economic hardships thus added a new dimension to the communal cleavage and the Muslim League found ready recruits among village teachers, poor maulavis, students, peasants and small zamindars. The sympathy of the local populace and the police force prompted the district administration to adopt a somewhat passive attitude. The situation was still tense after the Muslim League agitation of January-February when Hindu and Sikh demonstrators being fired upon by the police in Lahore on 4 March reached Multan. Hindus and Sikhs held a meeting in the evening and a Sikh leader exhorted them to celebrate Holi with blood. This was to be followed by a procession on the next afternoon. Later the timing was changed and Hindu and Sikh students of the Emerson College and the DAV High School took out a procession at about 11 a.m. The shouting of 'Qaid-i-Azam Murdabad' was found intolerable by Muslim on-lookers and they attacked the procession. Thereafter the situation went out of control and there were cases of stabbing, incendiarism, arson and attempt to set a temple on fire. The administration reacted

in the usual way with curfews, police and military patrols and order under Section 144 from 6 p.m. to 7 a.m. Troops were on holiday celebrating Holi, so it took some time to organize them. A strong force was located at the Flour Mills to protect the city grain supply and a military patrol fired on persons looting a grain shop. During night trouble spread to the villages and there were many loss of Hindu lives and damage to Hindu buildings. At Traggar a crowd of 3,000 Muslims had attacked the village and had killed the inhabitants and destroyed their houses and shops. The picture was the same in all the tahsils – Lodhran, Shujabad and Multan.⁶⁰

While in Multan Hindu casualties were the greatest in Rawalpindi, incendiarism was somewhat less than in Multan but murders were more numerous. Taxila, Murree and Gujar Khan area seemed to be the worst affected. There were planned raids by a party of Muslims in cars and lorries on the property of the well-known draper Kirpa Ram. Several large buildings including three hotels were burnt. There were five companies of troops in or near Murree but they did not do anything to stop the rioters. Attacks were made on the *Frontier Mail* at Taxila. Villagers were seen moving about with lathis, spears, axes, agricultural implements and in some cases firearms.⁶¹ There was extreme savagery and ‘a general massacre of a most beastly kind’.⁶² Cruelty and treachery were common. General Messervy saw a child in the hospital with both hands cut off. Some were murdered while attending ‘peace committees’, others after promises of good treatment. White flags were sometimes put up by Muslims on own properties and men from outside were invited to destroy the rest. There were also cases of the abduction of women after their husbands were murdered. Cases of forcible conversion were heard in village Bachial tahsil and police station Gujar Khan.⁶³ To escape humiliation young girls were often killed by their own families and Gurdwaras set on fire.⁶⁴

Villagers from surrounding areas poured into the city, Pathans and others from Hazara threatened. In Lyallpur, Sikhs and Hindus carrying lathis and axes collected 10,000 strong men in the Gurdwara on 5 March and were addressed by the District Commander of the *Akal Fauj*. On 13 March armed Pathans crossed the Indus to join in the loot and clashed with the military and the police. On 12 March 500 armed Pathans marched to the town of Mianwali having heard the rumour that a *jatha* of 500 Sikhs had arrived there. Feelings also ran high in the North-West Frontier Province and there was reprisal in

Dera Ismail Khan and Bannu where Mahsuds and Powindas from the tribal areas infiltrated and took part in inflicting casualties on Hindus and Sikhs and setting fire to villages.⁶⁵

Various explanations have been offered as to how the communal situation took such a serious turn. Many saw it as the fallout of a Muslim plot to capture the provincial government, 'probably with the object of staking a claim for Pakistan'.⁶⁶ The Governor noted the sense of 'complacency' in Muslim League leaders about rural massacres when they came to see him on 20 March to request fresh elections.⁶⁷ Army Generals in-charge of suppressing the communal outbreak in the Rawalpindi Division also spoke of 'signs of organisation and conspiracy'.⁶⁸ The propaganda in connection with the Direct Action Plan had also been subjecting Muslims to a constant brain washing and regimentation on religious lines. It had therefore been possible to assemble the gathering of rioters by the circulation of chits written in Urdu which informed the recipients that a large Sikh *jatha* was arriving at such a place and that all Muslims should assemble to resist it.⁶⁹

Aftermath of the Clashes

The gory incidents of Multan and Rawalpindi began to point to partition as the only long-term solution of the problem of the province. But the British still hoped that some kind of an understanding between the Sikhs and the Muslims might still save the province from partition.⁷⁰ Accordingly a Peace Committee was formed on the initiative of Sardar Ujjal Singh and Giani Kartar Singh with Mamdot, Firoz Khan Noon, Daulatana, Shaukat Hayat Khan, Bhim Sen Sachar, Gopi Chand Bhargava, Singha (the Speaker) Sardar Swaran Singh (who had earlier replaced Sardar Baldev Singh in the Ministry when Baldev joined the Cabinet as the Defence Minister) and Gibbon (Anglo-Indian MLA) on 7 March 1947. However, the most thorny issue preventing agreement was Lahore with its Muslim majority but land-ownership and other business and economic interests largely in non-Muslim hands. Lahore was also the cradle of the Sikh 'holy land' Nankana Sahib, the birth place of Guru Nanak.⁷¹ Sardar Baldev Singh had already told Abell that Sikh-Muslim agreement would flounder on this issue and partition appeared to be the only solution.⁷²

Events in the Punjab also caused widespread concern in Congress circles and on 8 March 1947 the Congress Working Committee

decided to accept partition of the country on principle and suggested the division of the Punjab into two parts 'so that the predominantly Muslim part can be separated from the predominantly non-Muslim part'. Nehru, who had succeeded Azad as Congress president informed the Viceroy that 'the Sikhs are also agreeable to it and indeed, desire it'.⁷³

The savagery of the riots had virtually pre-empted the possibility of any understanding between the Sikhs and the Muslim League. Sardar Baldev Singh was convinced that if the Muslim League was allowed to form the government in the Punjab with support from the Sikhs, they would start dictating their terms. The Sikhs would certainly not be willing to expose themselves to such humiliation. League attitude had been made amply clear by the encouragement provided to the rioters by the Muslim members of the interim government. The only way out of the crisis seemed to him to be the partition of the province.⁷⁴ Sardar Swaran Singh, who was 'a very sensible and temperate man', also began to despair of an amicable solution after his personal visit to Rawalpindi. Sikhs were henceforth overwhelmed with 'a terrible sense of wrong and oppression'.⁷⁵

The dark hours of a common crisis and a common threat brought the Sikhs close to each other. For the Congress the Sikhs were a very useful and effective ally in the Punjab for promoting their cause. A combination of the Sikhs with the Muslims would shut out all Congress influence in the Punjab. It was impossible for the Congress Hindus to stand up to the Muslim League by themselves. The Congress therefore found it extremely important to take the Sikhs in its fold.⁷⁶ Several members of Indian Central Legislature from Punjab like Pandit Thakur Das Bhargava, Raizada Hans Raj, Diwan Chaman Lal, Sardar Mangal Singh, Sardar Sampuran Singh, Sardar Surjit Singh Majithia, Sardar Bahadur Captain Harinder Singh, Chaudhury Sri Chand, Sardar Sobha Singh, Sir Buta Singh and Flight Lieutenant Rup Chand approached Nehru and asked for partition.⁷⁷

By this time the British were also coming round to the view that understanding on a provincial level would not endure for long unless such an understanding could be part of an all-India agreement.⁷⁸ Therefore when Ghaznafar Ali approached the Governor for fresh elections and the formation of a new government, the Governor did not agree. Even if the League succeeded in securing a technical majority, one party rule would not be accepted. 'Sikhs in particular would rebel and use force; and the Ministry would be unable to hold

a session of the Assembly. The constitution has broken down in the Punjab because the Muslims on the one hand and non-Muslims on the other hand desire to rule alone, and their ambition cannot be achieved by peaceful means. A Muslim Ministry now would mean instant civil war.⁷⁹

The Sikhs were also aware of the gravity of the situation and making their own preparations. Intelligence records mentioned 'a Sikh plot significantly articulated by the beginning of 1947'.⁸⁰ An unsigned pamphlet in Gurmukhi giving grossly exaggerated account of events in Rawalpindi Division were distributed by Giani Kartar Singh to Akali Jathedars and secretaries from all over the Punjab and Punjab States to rouse feelings against the Muslims.⁸¹ The Chief Secretary's Fortnightly Review mentioned the raising of the Akal Fauj. Master Tara Singh led a band of 280 Sikhs (the number could have been much larger but for the disturbances going on in Amritsar at that time) on Vaisakhi day to take a vow in the *Akal Takht* that they would not go home as long as their community needed them. They were called *shahidi jathas*. They were subsequently dispersed in each district in small groups of 25 trying to build up the Akal Fauj.⁸² Loyalty to the Panth ensured enlistment in large numbers in spite of the preoccupations with the harvest in Hoshiarpur, Ludhiana, Gurdaspur, Lyallpur and Multan districts. Thirteen new branches were founded in nine districts and volunteers were to be raised from village, *zail* and *thana* levels. Soon its membership shot up to 950. Their uniform was to consist of a dark blue *pugree* with a yellow under-*pugree*, Khaki *kachhas* (shorts), and a footlong *kirpan*. Amritsar saw the formation of a new volunteer corps of hand picked men (already numbering from three to four hundred), the Shahidi Dal, under the direction of Jathedar Mohan Singh to combat Muslim 'aggression' in the district. A SGPC Fauzi Guard, which was to attain a strength of 750, consisting of ex-military personnel, Akalis and INA officers has also been formed in Amritsar. Two hundred Sikhs were recruited already and sent to various Gurdwaras for protecting people. They had to take an oath of loyalty before joining their respective duties.⁸³

Common enmity to the idea of Pakistan persuaded the Sikhs to make common cause with the RSS. The Sangh had been advised to cooperate with the Arya Vir Dal and the Sikhs. Acting on this cue the Sangh inducted a number of Sikhs in Hoshiarpur in their organization. They practised physical exercises, *gatka* and lathi

fighting. They tried to spread their appeal among the Sikhs by celebrating Guru Gobind's birth anniversary in Taran Taran on 8 January 1947. The Chief Secretary's report confirmed that RSS membership had shot up to 47,000. They had opened eight new branches in Multan and Ambala and arms were pouring in from Rawalpindi, Hoshiarpur, Karnal, Hissar and Amritsar.⁸⁴

This was also the time when the Sikh Students' Federation became active. The General Committee of the All India SSF met at Amritsar. Giani Kartar Singh and Master Tara Singh made use of the occasion to spread the message of the Akalis among the Sikh students.

But although the Sikhs were trying to coordinate their preparations with the Hindus yet they were not satisfied with the way all-India leadership was to use Punjab matters as a 'pawn in all-India negotiations'.⁸⁵ Many of them were beginning to be increasingly sceptical about whether any partition of the Punjab which Congress might arrange would suit their interests. They were afraid of getting swamped in a new state of Hindustan, where they would be vastly outnumbered by the Hindus. 'The root cause of the tension was the fear of domination' as Malcolm Lyall Darling could sense by talking to the people in the Lyallpur colony. 'The Hindus will "take away our land" was said to us,' wrote Darling of his conversation with a Lyallpur youth, 'we all want freedom, but we don't want to exchange slavery to the English for slavery to the Hindu.'⁸⁶

The real aim of the Sikhs was to rule Punjab. At a meeting of 4,000 people organized by the city and district Akali *jathas* in Amritsar on 27 February Master Tara Singh demanded that the British should return the Punjab to the Sikhs from whom they had received it on trust. From February the Shiromani Akali Dal propaganda party consisting of Giani Kartar Singh, Amar Singh Dosanjh, Sumer Singh of Lyallpur and Giani Vir Singh of the Sikh Missionary College, Amritsar, began its tour of Rawalpindi and Gujar Khan calling upon Sikhs to unite under the Shiromani Akali Dal since there was nothing to expect from the Congress or the Muslim League. A similar propaganda was carried out in Jhelum, Gujarat, Lyallpur and Montgomery by Giani Kartar Singh between 8 and 17 February. The gathering at the Amavas fair at Taran Taran was also used as an occasion for spreading the message of the Akalis. On 30 January at a meeting of the Panthic Pratinidhi Board at Amritsar, Baldev Singh, Swaran Singh, Tara Singh, Kartar Singh and Udham Singh Nagoke discussed the question of setting up a Hindu-Sikh province in those

districts of the Punjab where the Muslims were in a minority. This was later communicated to the Viceroy on 18 April during his interview with Master Tara Singh, Giani Kartar Singh and Sardar Baldev Singh. They wanted the British to return the paramountcy of the States so that they could have the freedom to join a Sikh confederacy.⁸⁷ A few days before the resignation of the Khizr Ministry, Master Tara Singh spoke of the inevitability of 'civil war' in an interview to the New York Representative. Giani Kartar Singh harked back to the glorious days of Sikh rule – 'one hundred years from today our yellow flags were flying on the Fort of Lahore. The same flag shall fly again.' Their minimum demand was a boundary on the river Chenab where most of the land was owned by the Sikhs although the majority of the people were Muslim because it included their sacred places, Nankana Sahib and Sacha Sauda and the rich canal colonies, notably Lyallpur. Sardar Baldev Singh wrote to the Viceroy on 27 April to have property and not mere numerical majority as the basis of partition.⁸⁸

In the meanwhile, Ashutosh Lahiri, the General Secretary of the All India Hindu Mahasabha and Keshab Chandra Sen persuaded wealthy Hindus to donate money for equipping regiments of the Akal Fauj. In Amritsar Hindu speakers headed by Keshab Chandra Sen and Sikh speakers headed by Ishar Singh Majhail, Udham Singh Nagoke and Sohan Singh Jalal Usman made a historical appeal to an audience estimated at over 20,000 to unite to oppose Pakistan. This was followed by the formation of the joint 'Sikh-Hindu Anti-Pakistan Front'. Jathedar Mohan Singh addressed a crowd of 15,000 at the annual Hola Mohalla fair at Anandpur (Hoshiarpur district) between 5 and 8 March. On 13 March, a circular was issued by the Shiromani Akali Dal to *jathedars* requiring all district branches to keep Akali *jathas* of 100 members ready to march on Lahore. At a *diwan* on Amavas day in Amritsar, Sardar Sanmukh Singh appealed to the INA to join the Akali Sena, and 400 Sikhs of the INA were enlisted. Sikhs in Lyallpur approached ex-military and ex-INA men for instruction in the preparation of bombs.⁸⁹

The Akali Dal also launched upon a fund-raising drive and Rs. 50 lakh fund was inaugurated by Master Tara Singh. An appeal for generous contributions to this fund was also published in the Sikh newspaper *Ajit*.⁹⁰ Rs. 12,000 was collected from Lyallpur alone. Master Tara Singh collected Rs. 1½ lakh in Calcutta from Marwari businessmen. By May Rs. 50 lakh fund had been oversubscribed.⁹¹

These funds were devoted to procuring arms and transport for the Akal Fauj. The new sect – the Nihang Sikhs – also acquired popularity at this time probably because they had the custom of carrying longer *kirpans* on religious grounds and many Hindus sought conversion to Sikhism and many Sikhs to the Nihang sect for availing of this opportunity. In Lyallpur where the Akali propaganda was particularly strong, Sikhs in rural areas armed themselves with spears and *kirpans* were procured for Akal Fauj volunteers. *Kirpan* factories had been opened in Amritsar and blacksmiths worked feverishly to produce all kinds of arms. Neighbouring states like Faridkot, Kapurthala, Patiala, Nabha, Jind, Bikaner, Bilaspur and Nalagarh – all became suppliers of arms. Gurdwaras sometimes housed small factories and became storage depots for arms.⁹² Even the Viceroy anticipated an attack from the Sikhs on the main irrigation centres in order to bring the entire province to its mercy.⁹³

Fight for Lahore

Ultimately the territory between the Ravi and the Sutlej became the main object of dispute. On 21 March Nehru came up with his proposal for zonal autonomy and two separate ministries for the East and West of Punjab was proposed by the Congress. This, however, was strongly opposed by the League and it expressed its determination not to ‘yield an inch of the proper share of the Musalmans of the Punjab’.⁹⁴ The Governor, Sir Evan Jenkins could foresee trouble in this situation:

This shows why the partition of the Punjab would mean civil war. The Sikhs haven’t a majority in any one district. They want on religious grounds like the Muslims – to take over and dominate areas in which they are in a minority. The Bari Doab – the area between the Ravi and the Beas comprising Gurdaspur, Amritsar, Lahore and Montgomery – would become a battleground, and Baldev Singh evidently wants to go well west of the Ravi. This won’t work.⁹⁵

Numerically speaking, the Sikhs had no case. As Liaquat Ali pointed out in an interview with Mielville, ‘there was not a single district in which the Sikhs were in the majority’.⁹⁶ But the Sikhs tried to downplay the importance of mere numerical strength. Giani Kartar Singh, Sardar Harnam Singh and Sardar Ujjal Singh made a representation to Lord Ismay drawing attention to the pattern of landownership of the areas to be partitioned and the presence of religious shrines in particular. ‘The main burden of their representation,’ as Lord Ismay

put it was 'the question of the Lahore Division and particularly the Lahore city.'⁹⁷ It was obvious that it would never be possible to have a mutually agreed partition as the Sikhs would never get reconciled over the surrender of the cis-Ravi districts of the Lahore Division and the Montgomery district of the Multan Division and possibly even the Sheikhupura district across the Ravi.⁹⁸ There was a Hindu-Sikh Convention at Delhi (reported on 3 May in newspapers) which demanded the whole of the Ambala, Jullunder and Lahore Divisions and one colony district from the Multan Division.⁹⁹ During an interview with Lord Ismay in Delhi Sardar Harnam Singh offered a detailed plan for the exchange of the population of Sheikhupura with the Sikh population of Lyallpur and Montgomery. And outside the Lahore city, the Lahore district was substantially Sikh. 'Any attempt to divide the Lahore Division,' they argued, 'would lead to an immediate explosion.'¹⁰⁰ This was followed up by a cable by Sardar Baldev Singh, Master Tara Singh and Sardar Swaran Singh to the Earl of Listowel demanding the frontier along the Chenab with provisions for exchange of population and property.¹⁰¹ But this attempt to claim Lahore, 'the capital designate of Pakistan' was not to the liking of the Viceroy.¹⁰² He informed the Maharaja of Patiala point blank that world opinion would not tolerate the placing of a Muslim majority under Sikh/Hindu/Congress domination merely on account of ownership of land and on religious grounds. The Government's determination to resist Sikh attempts to seize the territory between the Ravi and the Sutlej was made explicit by ordering Major General Bruce, the Acting General Officer Commanding and Lt. General Sir Arthur Smith, the Acting Commander-in-Chief to move additional forces into the Punjab along the disputed territory between the Ravi and the Sutlej.¹⁰³ The final rap on the knuckle came from the Earl of Listowel who, while admitting the historical position of the Sikhs as the former rulers of the Punjab, their position as one of the great martial races of India and their contribution out of proportion to their numbers to the economic wealth of the country, pointed out that the Sikhs were merely a handful (6 million) in a vast country of 400 million and even in the Punjab they constituted a miniscule 4 million among 28 million. That was the reason why the Sikhs were not conceded the right to a communal veto in the Constituent Assembly. For the same reason it was impossible to carve out a separate state for them as was being done for the Muslims. 'On any democratic basis, therefore, they must definitely be regarded as a minority (and not even as a 'major' minority). Owing to the fact that in no single

district of the Punjab do they constitute a majority of the population, it is out of the question to meet the claims by setting up a separate Sikh state.¹⁰⁴

The Sikhs, however, were adamant. They were so emotionally charged that it was impossible to make them see reason. Thus all arguments fell flat on them 'like water off a duck's back'.¹⁰⁵ Master Tara Singh was shocked that the Muslim League did not offer an apology for Rawalpindi. He therefore decided that the Sikhs must settle their scores on their own. There thus followed a renewed spate of riots in Amritsar.¹⁰⁶ The Sikhs tried an offensive in areas where they were in the majority. In these ventures they were often backed by the Hindu big business. Most of the Sikh States were also involved in these efforts. Patiala was supplying arms and ammunitions as well as explosives and Patiala soldiers were said to have been involved in the Amritsar riots. Kapurthala lent finance and provided shelter to Sikh refugees. Alwar, Dholpur, Bikaner and Bharatpur all had promised arms and ammunitions.¹⁰⁷ Sikhs also attacked Muslim villages in Gurgaon. The trouble was mainly between the Meos, who were Muslims and various other Hindu tribes like Ahirs. Troops had to fire on rioters in Chiniot, Jhang. There were also some incidents in Lyallpur.¹⁰⁸ Liaquat Ali complained that mobs of 20,000 to 30,000 carrying .303 rifles and other modern and crude weapons besieged one Muslim village after another.¹⁰⁹

Lahore was the main battleground, where the Muslims were trying to burn down Hindus and Sikhs out of greater Lahore and were therefore concentrating on incendiary. Buildings were being set on fire by using incendiary missiles like fire balls or bottle bombs through windows from rooftops. Fire control in the walled city was difficult as the streets were narrow, water supply inadequate and streets were blocked with rubble.¹¹⁰

The partition plan was announced by the Viceroy on 3 June and the task of deciding the actual line of demarcation was entrusted to a Boundary Commission constituted on 26 June. The question of partition was put to vote in the Punjab Assembly on June 23; 91 members wanted a new separate Constituent Assembly if the province remained united. Twenty minutes later, 72 members for Eastern Punjab, meeting in separate session, rejected by 50 votes to 22, a motion by the Muslim League leader Khan of Mamdot that the province should remain united. Later East Punjab members decided to join the existing Constituent Assembly.¹¹¹ Under the terms

of the award of the Boundary Commission, the Sikhs could not attain the Chenab as the western boundary of Eastern Punjab but they were Gurdaspur and Batala tahsils of the Gurdaspur district with a Muslim majority of 52 and 55.06 per cent respectively. A part of the Lahore district, the Ajnala tahsil of the Amritsar district with a 60 per cent Muslim majority and contiguous to the district of Lahore. The tahsils of Zira and Ferozepur also went to Eastern Punjab. This prompted Liaqat Ali Khan to call the award 'a political and not a judicial one' while Jinnah found it 'unjust, incomprehensible and even perverse'.

The Sikhs looked upon the Boundary Award as 'a threat to split their community under the British plan for India'. Most of India's 57,00,000 Sikhs, who belonged to the Punjab, wore black armbands and prayed in their Gurdwaras. Sikh leaders west of the proposed line had been urgently trying to familiarize their people (about 15,00,000 in number) in rural areas with the impending danger that faced them.¹¹² Thus the award satisfied no one and could be enforced in the face of much bloodshed accompanying the transfers of population and property which it entailed.

The Boundary Award and partition saw the burial of the Sikh hopes for a 'Sikhistan' where Sikhs could dominate, not through the mere counting of heads but through the quality of their achievements, their mastery of the economic wealth of the province, their contributions to the prosperity of the land and their important role in taking the country forward against enemy attacks through their rare martial qualities. But the Sikhs did not give up their claim without a fierce resistance. Their adamant attitude brought the avalanche of the Muslim Direct Action in Multan and Rawalpindi. And yet it was not possible to bend the Sikh will to secure the Chenab frontier. The British hoped all the while to prevent the partition of their favourite source of army recruits by cajoling and coaxing the Sikhs into an understanding with the Muslim League. The League tried to intimidate them into submission. But the ferocity of the riots, instead of cowing down the Sikhs, roused them to a fierce resistance. The partition of the province was therefore left as the only option.

Notes

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2. Note by Wavell, 28 June 1946, in *The Transfer of Power*, vol. VII, p. 1075.
3. Baldev Singh to Jenkins, 3 July 1946, in Enclosure to the Governor's Letter to the Viceroy of 4 July 1946, in Lionel Carter (ed.), *Punjab Politics, January 1944-March 1947*, pp. 242-3.
4. Pethick Lawrence to Wavell, 24 July 1946, in *The Transfer of Power*, vol. VIII, p. 116.
5. Jenkins to Wavell, 4 July 1946, in *The Transfer of Power*, vol. VIII, p. 5.
6. Note by Wavell, 28 June 1946, in *The Transfer of Power*, vol. VII, p. 1075.
7. Jenkins to Wavell, 4 July 1946, in *The Transfer of Power*, vol. VIII, p. 5.
8. 'Sikhs and the Long-Term Plan', by A Sikh in *The Hindustan Times*, 1 July 1946 in IOR documents in Microfilm Records, NAI, New Delhi.
9. Baldev Singh to Jenkins, 2 July 1946, in Carter (ed.), *Punjab Politics*, op. cit., pp. 240-1.
10. Wavell to Jenkins, 8 July 1946 in *The Transfer of Power*, vol. VIII, p. 17.
11. Raja of Faridkot's interview with Giani Kartar Singh, 3 July 1946 in IOR documents in Microfilm Records, NAI, New Delhi.
12. Secretary of State's speech, 18 July 1946 in IOR records in Microfilm Records, NAI, New Delhi.
13. *Hindustan Times*, 11 July 1946 in IOR records in Microfilm Records, NAI, New Delhi.
14. Penderel Moon, *Divide and Quit*, p. 56; Nehru's Press Conference of 10 July 1946 in Document 16 of *The Transfer of Power*, vol. VIII, p. 25.
15. R/3/1/135, ff 6-7 in *The Transfer of Power*, vol. VIII, p. 135.
16. *Hindustan Times*, 11 July 1946 in Home Pol., File no. 17/1/194(9), NAI, New Delhi.
17. *Dawn*, 20 August 1946 in Home Pol., File no. 17/1/194(9), NAI, New Delhi.
18. Moon, *Divide and Quit*, op. cit., pp. 58-9.
19. *Hindustan Times*, 20 October 1946 in Home Pol., File no. 17/1/194(9), NAI, New Delhi.
20. *Dawn*, Delhi, 22 September 1946 in *ibid.*
21. *Hindustan Times*, 20 October 1946 in *ibid.*
22. Intelligence Bureau report, 27 June 1946 in IOR documents, Microfilm Records, NAI.
23. Jenkins to Wavell, 4 July 1946 in *The Transfer of Power*, vol. VIII, p. 5.
24. Menon to Turnbull, 13 July 1946 in *ibid.*, p. 48; Jenkins to Wavell, 15 July 1946 in *The Transfer of Power*, vol. VIII, p. 5.
25. Jenkins to Wavell, 18 July 1946 in *ibid.*, p. 80.
26. *Ibid.*, 3 August 1946 in *ibid.*, p. 179.
27. *Ibid.*, 15 July 1946 in *ibid.*, p. 59.
28. Wavell to Pethick Lawrence, 19 July 1946 in *ibid.*, p. 87.

29. Jenkins to Wavell, 15 July 1946, in *ibid.*, p. 59.
30. *Ibid.*, 3 August 1946, in *ibid.*, p. 179.
31. Intelligence Bureau Report, 8 July 1946 in IOR records, in Microfilm Records, NAI, New Delhi.
32. Intelligence Bureau Report, 27 June 1946 in IOR records, in Microfilm Records, NAI, New Delhi.
33. Jenkins to Wavell, 31 August 1946, in Wavell Papers, Political Series, June-December 1946, pp. 158-64; *The Transfer of Power*, vol. VIII, p. 371.
34. The Viceroy to the Secretary of State, 25 July 1946 in Microfilm Records, NAI, New Delhi.
35. Master Tara Singh to Wavell, 30 October 1946 in Wavell Papers, Political Series, June-December 1946, pp. 295-6; *The Transfer of Power*, vol. VIII, p. 838.
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37. *Dawn*, 21 October 1946 in *ibid.*
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39. Moon, *Divide and Quit*.
40. *Statesman*, 19 January 1946.
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42. Memo. by the Governor of Punjab on the main criticism against the Punjab Government for its handling of the current disturbances in Appendix IV to the Viceroy's Personal Report No. 17 dated 16 August 1947 in IOR records, London.
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44. Jenkins to Pethick Lawrence, 8 February 1947 in *ibid.*, p. 654; also see Ian Talbot, 'Freedom's Cry: The Popular Dimension', in *The Pakistan Movement and Partition Experience in North-West India* (Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1996), pp. 35-8.
45. Wavell Papers, Official Correspondence: India, January 1946-March 1947, p. 224, in *The Transfer of Power*, vol. IX, p. 561.
46. Jenkins to Lord Pethick Lawrence, 29 January 1947, in *ibid.*, p. 571.
47. Sardar Patel to Wavell, 14 February 1947, in *ibid.*, p. 710.
48. *Ibid.*
49. Jenkins to Lord Pethick Lawrence, 25 February 1947, in *ibid.*, pp. 814-16.
50. Sardar Baldev Singh to Wavell, 6 February 1947, in *ibid.*, p. 626.
51. Jenkins to Wavell, 12 February 1947, in *ibid.*, p. 680.
52. *Ibid.*
53. Jenkins to Wavell, 3 March 1947, in *ibid.*, pp. 829-34.

54. Jenkins to Wavell, 15 February 1947, in *ibid.*, p. 720.
55. *Ibid.*
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57. Jenkins to Wavell, 17 March 1947 in IOR records, London.
58. Arthur Papers in File no. 2 in the Centre for South Asian Studies, Cambridge.
59. Fortnightly Report, First Half of June 1946 Home Pol. 18/6/46 Pol. (I) in NAI, New Delhi.
60. Jenkins to Wavell, 9 March 1947 in NAI Microfilm, no. 3414.
61. Jenkins to Wavell, 17 March 1947 in NAI Microfilm, no. 3477.
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63. Interview of Simret Singh of Thamali village by Urvashi Butalia and Sudesh Vaid in Mushirul Hasan (ed.), *India Partitioned*, vol. 2, Rahi Books, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 137-44.
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66. Inward telegram, Governor to Viceroy repeated to Secretary of State, 20 March 1947 in IOR, London.
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68. Jenkins to Wavell, 17 March 1947 in Viceroy's Personal Report, no. 17 in IOR, London.
69. Lord Pethick Lawrence to Wavell, 5 March 1947, in *The Transfer of Power*, vol. IX, pp. 872-3.
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71. Wavell to Pethick Lawrence, 6 March 1947, in *ibid.*, p. 875.
72. Pandit Nehru to Field Marshall Viscount Wavell, 9 March 1947, in *ibid.*, pp. 897 and 906-7.
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74. Note by Jenkins, 29 March 1947, in *The Transfer of Power*, vol. X, p. 45.
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76. Members of Indian Central Legislature from Punjab to Pandit Nehru, 2 April 1947, in *ibid.*, p. 88.
77. Lord Pethick Lawrence to Mountbatten, 3 April 1947, in *ibid.*, pp. 103-7.
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83. *Ibid.*
84. *Ibid.*
85. Malcolm Lyall Darling, *At Freedom's Door* (Indian Branch, Geoffrey Cumberledge, Oxford University Press, London, 1949), p. 302.
86. Interview between Mountbatten, Master Tara Singh, Giani Kartar Singh and Sardar Baldev Singh in *The Transfer of Power*, vol. X, pp. 320-4.
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96. Lord Ismay to Mountbatten, 30 April 1947, in *ibid.*, p. 490.
97. Jenkins to Mountbatten, 30 April 1947, in *ibid.*, p. 506.
98. *Ibid.*, 3 May 1947, in *ibid.*, p. 593-8.
99. Sardar Harnam Singh's interview with Lord Ismay in Delhi in *ibid.*, pp. 593-8.
100. Cables by Sardar Baldev Singh, Master Tara Singh and Sardar Swaran Singh to the Earl of Listowel, 7 May 1947, in *ibid.*, p. 660.
101. Viceroy's Personal Report, no. 5, 1 May 1947, in *ibid.*, pp. 533-47.
102. *Ibid.*, no. 6, 8 May 1947, in *ibid.*, pp. 681-91.
103. Earl of Listowel to Mountbatten, 9 May 1947, in *ibid.*, pp. 710-13.
104. *Ibid.*
105. Note by Jenkins, 19 May 1947, in *ibid.*, p. 893-4.
106. Abbott to Captain Brockman, 21 May 1947, in *ibid.*, p. 942.
107. Sir E. Jenkins to Sir J. Colville, 28 May 1947, in Nicholas Mansergh (editor-in-chief), Penderel Moon (editor), assisted by David M. Blake and Lionel Carter, *The Transfer of Power*, vol. XI, p. 1009.

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Conclusion

THE PARTITION OF the Punjab was in the first and the last analysis the work of the Sikhs. It was the strength of the Akali arms which had wrested at least the territories of Sikh predominance in the heartland of the province from being swamped under Pakistan. Ever since Iqbal had raised the bogey of a compact union of Muslim provinces on the north-west of the country, for which the Cambridge student Chaudhuri Rahmat Ali coined the name 'Pakistan', the Sikhs had also been talking about an independent unit for themselves changing its designation many times from 'Khalistan' to 'Azad Punjab' to 'Sikhistan'. Unlike their Muslim brethren they were not favoured with natural majorities, so the Sikhs kept on altering the plans for the exact boundaries of this dream homeland. In 1931 Ujjal Singh and Sampuran Singh, the delegates to the Round Table Conferences in London, could not conceive of anything more than the districts of East Punjab and probably also the canal settlements of the Sikhs. The demand had been included among the Seventeen Demands presented by Master Tara Singh to Mahatma Gandhi on the eve of his departure for London to attend the Second Round Table Conference.

By 1940 Dr. V.S. Bhatti of Ludhiana in his 40 page brochure *Khalistan* had broadened the concept to include the Sikh States of Nabha, Patiala, Faridkot, Kapurthala, Kalsia and the non-Sikh (but largely inhabited by Sikhs) Maler Kotla, lying between the Jumna and the Sutlej and also the Simla group of hill states besides the districts of Ludhiana, Jullunder, Kullu, Ambala, Ferozepur, Lahore, Amritsar, Lyallpur, Gujranwala, Sheikhpura, Montgomery, Hissar, Rohtak, Karnal and Delhi. This new state was to extend from the river Chenab on the west and to the Jumna on the east, from 'Jumna to Jamrud', as it was euphemistically said at that time. But this was probably presented more as a counterpoise to Jinnah's 'Pakistan' or 'Jinnistan' as Penderel Moon jocularly termed it as there were no cut and dried plan for it at the time of the Lahore Resolution. Basking

in the security of British rule, neither of the two parties understood the necessity of charting out the exact path to their goals. Both plans were still in the realm of ideology and no one had thought of the hazards of seeking a path to reach those ideals.

But as the situation worsened during the dark days of anticipations of a Japanese invasion of India and the 'Quit India' rebellion of Mahatma Gandhi to throw the British out, Sir Stafford Cripps, Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons, flew down to India in March 1942 and started making concrete proposals whereby dissident provinces could actually leave the Indian Union by a majority vote in the Legislature. Cripps' declaration that '(the British Government) could not contemplate transfer of their present responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any system of government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life' came as a light at the end of the tunnel to Jinnah. While he could rejoice that India was not to come totally under Congress domination, for the Sikhs it spelt the doom. They could see the writing on the wall and Pakistan began to shape up with a grim reality.

In sheer self-defence the Sikhs now started talking about an *Azad Punjab*. By this time it was clear that unlike the Muslims they would not be able to claim it on the basis of demography. They therefore suggested that the territories should be so adjusted as to have an equal percentage of Hindus and Muslims (40 per cent each) and some Sikhs (20 per cent) to mediate between the two. There would thus be an ideal situation where no one community will be able to dominate another. Initially it had thought of the river Ravi as the western demarcation line. But as this threatened to leave out the Canal settlements of the Sikhs and their important religious shrines, it was resolved that 'in determining the limits, population, property, land revenue, cultural traditions and historical associations must be duly pondered'. However, the idea was not favoured by many of the Sikhs themselves who feared to be left beyond the suggested demarcation lines.

The idea of a 'Sikhistan' was revived once again with the acceptance of the C.R. Formula by Gandhi as a basis of talks with Jinnah for a united movement against the British in May 1944. This formula had revived the Cripps' proposals in a new *avatar*. The Sikhs were apprehensive that as during the Lucknow Pact, the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, the Communal Award and the Pakistan Resolution the Congress

was once again going to ditch the Sikhs in the interest of an all-India settlement with the Muslims. Pakistan now seemed a distinct possibility on the horizon and the Sikhs understood that they would have to fend for themselves. They therefore started pressing their claims for Khalistan once again.

The elections of 1945-6 showed clearly which way the wind was blowing. Throughout the stay of the Cabinet Mission in India the Sikhs held repeated meetings with the Secretary of State demanding some communal safeguard for the Sikhs in the Group B constitution. But they learnt to their dismay that neither the Hindus nor the Muslims were ready to make room for them by reducing themselves to minorities. The Hindus could not accept anything less than 25 per cent; the Muslims would certainly not agree to be reduced to a minority in a province which they had conceived of as the cornerstone of the future 'Pakistan'.

The Sikhs were therefore driven to secret manoeuvres like hatching a conspiracy for a forcible seizure of the territories that they valued most – their canal colonies and their sacred shrines, which lay in the heart of the planned 'Pakistan'. Arms were manufactured in large quantities in the Sikh States and secretly entered Punjab and the Maharaja of Faridkot was approached for funds for mobilizing *shahidi jathas*. The announcement of British plans on 20 February to quit, intensified these preparations to a fever pitch. Muslim historians sometimes argue that the provocations for the March 1947 riots actually came from the Sikhs. On 8 March 1947 Congress suggested partition as the only option after Multan and Rawalpindi were washed with blood. As on earlier occasions during Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience, they knew that partition could not be pushed through by the Hindus alone. It needed the brute force of the Sikhs to wrench concessions from the Boundary Commission which came in the wake of the partition plan of 3 June. The Sikh struggle for the Chenab frontier in defiance of the Boundary Award cost another 'ocean of blood'. Emotional as the Sikhs had been they failed to understand that they were fighting a lost cause against the united strength of the British, anxious to make a settlement and pack up, the Muslims, who would not like to yield an inch more than what they must (why should they?) and the Congress, which always needed help from this small minority but left them to suffer their fate under the inexorable logic of demographic calculations. The failure of the Sikh leadership had been their inability to comprehend the changed

realities of the day. In spite of all their demographic weaknesses the Sikhs had so far been sustained through the backing of British officialdom. The imperatives of withdrawal from their former role of imperialists had deprived the British of this power of intervention. The changed equations of the times had no room for weightage, quota or official backing. The Sikhs were unable to reconcile themselves to the new situation. As the former ruling race of Punjab they kept on harking back to the tales of their past glories and felt betrayed by their erstwhile allies, the British and the Congress.

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Index

- Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights 175
- Agrarian disturbances of 1907 56-7
- Ahmad, Maulana Bashir 100
- Aitchison, Sir Charles 40
- Aitchison Commission 44
- Ajit* 203
- Akal Fauj* 198
- Akali* 115
- Akali-Congress electoral alliance 85-6
- Akali High Command 25
- Akali Jathas 180
- Akal Takht* 201
- Akhand Bharat* 22
- Akhand Hindustan Conference 120-1
- Alexander, A.V. 169
- Ali, Chaudhuri Rahmat 103, 213
- Ali, Maulana Shaukat 100
- All India Akali Conference 115-16
- All India Congress Committee 95, 106
- All India Sikh League 20, 105
- All-India Sikh Youth League 176
- amanat* 132
- American Presbyterian mission 37
- amrit* 33, 34
- Arora 44, 67
- Arthur, A.J.V. 197
- Arya Samaj 11
- Arya Samaj movement 38-40
- Arya Vir Dal 201
- August Offer 105
- Azad, Maulana 98, 110
- Azad Punjab* 214
- Azad Punjab scheme 22, 114-18; impracticability of 118-21
- Bagla bhagats* 88
- Bande Mataram* 100
- Banga, Indu 110
- Bedi, Baba Khem Singh 41, 43
- Bedi, Jagjit Singh 21, 109
- Bell, Sir William 42
- Bhargava, Gopi Chand 195
- Bhatia, Sardar Pritam Singh 121
- Bhatti, V.S. 19, 132, 213
- Bombay Provincial Muslim League Conference 99
- Bose, Subhas Chandra 90
- Boundary Award 207, 215
- Boundary Commission 206-7
- Brahmo Samaj 38
- British Empire 25
- British Indian Army 13
- British War Cabinet Committee 106
- Buranjis* 12
- Cabinet Mission 23-4; Plan 189; proposals 167-81
- Canal colonies agitation (1907) 14
- Census Commissioner Yealts 170
- Central Akali Dal 22, 119, 120, 176
- Chakravarty, Dipesh 12
- Chand, Chaudhuri Lal 67
- Chaudhury, Ram Bhaj Dutt 62
- Chenab Frontier 25
- Civil Disobedience movement 16-17, 19, 76-7, 215
- Cleveland, C.R. 13
- Communal Award 17-18, 82-3, 96; change in Congress stand on 85-6
- communal clashes 196-9; aftermath of 199-204; Multan Hindu casualties 198; in Muslim-dominated districts 197
- Communal electorates, introduction of 59
- Congress: dialogue with Jinnah 22;

- proposal to partition Punjab 24-5;
 Working Committee 17
 Congress Parliamentary Party 22
 Congress Working Committee 190
 Constituent Assembly 172, 173
 Constitutional Assembly 189
 Corbett, Geoffrey 17
 Coxe, William 190
 Cripps, Sir Stafford 20, 106-8, 114,
 115, 168, 169, 214
 Cripps Offer 106-8, 114, 116
 Cust, Robert 37
- Dal Khalsa 52
 Darling, Malcolm Lyall 202
 Daulatana, Mumtaz 195
Dawn 195
 Dayanand, Swami 39
 Defence Advisory Committee 116
 Dera Gazi Khan 194
 Dera Ismail Khan 199
 Desai, Bhulabhai 22, 167
 Desai-Liaqat Agreement 145-6; Sikh
 response to 146-8
dharm nash 34
diwan 191
 Diwan, Khalsa 13, 14, 16, 18, 53,
 54, 55, 56, 59, 60, 84
 Dominion Status 19, 95
 Dutt, Pandit Guru 39
- Eastern Times* 87, 88
 Edwardes, Herbert 37
- Fateh* 119
 Fazl-i-Husain 15, 16, 67, 68, 75, 77,
 81, 84, 86, 87
Free Press Journal, The 195
Frontier Mail 198
- Gandhi, Mahatma 15, 20, 22, 23,
 64, 95, 99, 104, 106, 110, 130,
 132, 214
 Gandhi-Irwin Pact 17, 79, 80
 George, Lloyd 60
- Ghadar* 14, 64
Ghallughara 104
ghorcharabs 36
 Gill, Narinjan Singh 176, 179, 180,
 190, 192
 Gill, Tara 179
 Glancy, Sir Bertrand 109
 Gokhale, G.K. 14
 Government of India Act: of 1919
 61; of 1935, 116
Granthophobia 39
 Griffin, Sir Lepel 40
 Gupta, Dipankar 19
Gur Darshan Shastar 41
 Gurdwara reform movement 12, 15,
 63-6
 Gurdwaras Management Act of 1925
 96
Gur Granth Kosh 43
Gur Twarikh Gur Khalsa 43
 Guru Amar Das 32
 Guru Angad 32
 Guru Arjan Dev 34, 176
 Guru Gobind Singh 13, 33, 37, 52,
 176
Guru Granth Sahib 13, 31, 35, 41
Guru ka Khalsa 33
Guru Khalsa Raj 132
 Guru Nanak 31-4
 Guru Singh Sabha 120
 Guru Tegh Bahadur 36
- Habib, Irfan 34
 Hailey, Sir Malcolm 65
 Haque, Azizul 127
 Haque, Fazlul 19, 59, 100, 102,
 103
Harijan 104, 106, 177
 Hindu Charitable Endowments Act
 109
 Hindu Mahasabha 22, 107, 120
Hindustan Standard 176, 177
Hindustan Times 187
Hukammamas 140
Hum Hindu Nahin 46

- Hussain, Nawab Ashiq 128
- Ibrahim, Muhammad 100
- Identity movements 11-12
- Indian National Congress 14, 15, 25, 59, 62, 108, 114, 167; Akalis join, in Punjab Legislative Assembly 89-90; electoral alliance with SAD 85-6; inclusion of Muslim ministers by 100; Muslim mass contact programme of (1937) 87-8; Ramgarh session 104; resignation from ministries 95; Sikh leaders return to 139-42; success in North-West Frontier Province 101; supported by Press 168; victory in 1937 elections 99-100
- Interim government 188-90; Sikh response to 190-2; Sikhs decided not to join 180
- Istri Satsang* 43
- jathas* 65, 202, 203
- jathedars* 203
- Jat identity, emergence of 11
- Jat Sikh Association 60
- jhatka* meat 86, 110, 120, 187
- Jinnah 23-4, 119, 122, 126, 130, 169, 172, 174, 180, 189, 192, 193; Congress dialogue with 22; equations with British 98-102; visited Punjab 124-5
- Jinnah-Gandhi talks 129-30; Sikh reactions on 130-1
- Jones, Kenneth 38, 51
- Kairon, Partap Singh 190
- kesbdhari* Sikhs 12, 35
- Khalistan 131-4; demand for 17; plans for 19
- Khalistan* 213
- Khalsa Advocate* 55, 60
- Khalsa Akhbar* 41
- Khalsa Biradri* 55
- Khalsa Darbar 85
- Khalsa Defence of India League 20, 97-8
- Khalsa Dharam Shastar* 41
- Khalsa National Party 18, 21, 86, 98, 109, 110
- Khalsa Panth 13, 35-7; armed forces loyal to 37; enthusiasm for symbols of 35-6; found patron 36; *purbiah* 36
- Khalsa Samachar* 55
- Khalsa schools 43
- Khalsa Sewak* 55, 132
- Khalsa Sikh identity 12-13, 33
- Khalsa Sudhar Taru* 41
- Khan, Ghaznafar Ali 86, 126, 190
- Khan, Gujar 120, 198, 202
- Khan, Khan Abdul Ghaffar 101
- Khan, Khan Iftikhar Husain 196
- Khan, Liaqat Ali 22, 189
- Khan, Muhammad Aurangzeb 101
- Khan, Muzaffar 124
- Khan, Shaukat Hayat 124, 125, 126, 195
- Khan, Sikander Hayat 18, 19, 21, 22, 95-6, 102, 103, 104, 108-10, 118-19, 121, 124
- Khan, Umar Hayat 122
- khande ki pahul* 34, 52
- Khatris 33, 35, 44, 67, 97
- Kidwai, Rafi Ahmad 100
- kirpans* 197, 204
- Kisan Committee 88
- Komagata Maru* incident, of 1914 58, 64
- Kripalani, J.B. 90
- kul nash* 34
- Lahore Resolution 19, 21, 75-6, 103-4; Sikh reactions to 104
- Lahore Tribune* 46
- Lal, Lala Harkishen 59
- Lal, Manohar 126
- Land Alienation Act, 1900 51, 90
- langar* 35, 52

- Latif, Syed Abdul 102
 Lawrence, Sir Henry 36, 37
 Lawrence, John 36, 37
 Lawrence, Pethick 155, 169, 175, 187
 League Council 189
 Leghari, Jamal Khan 128
 Legislative Assembly 174
Lehndi Punjabi 32
 Lower Bari Doab Project 64
Loyal Gazette 61
 Lucknow Pact 60
 Lyall, Sir James 43, 44
- Macauliffe, Max Arthur 36
 MacDonald, Ramsay 82
Mahabharata 12
mahants 55, 56, 63
 Majithia, Sunder Singh 21, 54, 55, 60, 86, 104, 108
 Malaviya, Madan Mohan 100
 Mann, Gurinder Singh 33
 Mannu, Mir 83
 Martin, Freda 168
 Martin, William 37
masands 33
 Mata Jito 33
 Mazhabi Sikhs 35, 36, 42
 McLeod, Donald 37
 Menon, V.P. 175
 migration 57-8
 Montagu, Edwin 60
 Montagu-Chelmsford reforms of 1919 15, 16, 17, 61
 Monteath, David Taylor 116
 Montgomery, Robert 37
 Mookerjee, Syama Prasad 22, 131
 Moonje, B.S. 101
 Moore, R.J. 168
 Moosvi, Shireen 32
 Morley-Minto reforms of 1909 14, 58-60
 Mountbatten, Lord 25
 Muslim League 14, 18, 21-4, 59, 98-100, 179-80, 192, 200; attempts to increase influence in Punjab 121-6; in Bombay session 24; Coalition Party 22, 126; Committee of Action 126; Delhi meeting of (March 1943) 122; 1946 elections and 161-5; interim government and 192-4; League resolution 103; Lucknow session of 101; Ministry 124; National Guard 24, 128, 194-5; performance in 1945-6 elections 23; Provincial 123; Sialkot session of 125-6; Sikander Hayat Khan resigned from Working Committee of 21; Working Committee of Punjab Provincial 128
 Muslim National Guard 24
mutwalli 83
- Nagoke, Jathedar Mohan Singh 154
 Naidu, Sarojini 110
 Nankana Sahib 86
 Narang, Gokul Chand 84
 Nath, Raja Narendra 90
 National flag, Sikh colour in 77-9
Nationalist 176, 177
 Nehru, Jawaharlal 17, 82, 100, 104, 106, 110, 190, 200
 Nehru Report 73-5
 Nili Bar Project 64
 Non-Cooperation movement 15, 64, 215
 Noon, Firoz Khan 84, 195
- pahul* (baptismal) ceremony 40
 Pakistan Resolution. *See* Lahore Resolution
panj kakke (five Ks) 34, 35, 52
Panj Piyare 33
 Pant, Gobind Ballabh 100
 Panthic Board 190
 Panthic Conference 176
 Panthic Pratinidhi Board 176
Panth Prakash 43
 Patel, Ballabhbai 110, 194-5
 'Patrimonial imagination' 12

- People's War* 131
- Petrie, David 37, 53
- political representation, struggle for:
agrarian disturbances of 1907
56-7; census operations, impact of
51-3; cultural unity of Punjab and
66-8; formation of unionist
government 66-8; Gurdwara
reform movement 63-6; migration
abroad and 57-8; overview 50;
Punjab Land Alienation Act of
1901 50-1; representative political
organization of Sikhs 61-3;
self-government and
representation 58-61; Tat Khalsa
and 53-6
- Prasad, Rajendra 85-6
- Privy Seal, Lord 20, 106, 214
- pro-Congress Nagoke group 134
- Provincial Muslim Students'
Federation 128
- Publication movement 43-4
- Punjab: annexation by British 44-6;
Arya Samaj movement in 38-40;
census strategies of British in
13-14; Christian mission in 37-8;
communal scene in during
partition 11; Congress proposal of
partition 24-5; cultural unity of
66-8; 1937 elections in 18;
Hindu-Sikh minority in 107;
Muslim League influence in
121-6; story of partition of 25;
support for war efforts 95-7;
Unionist victory in 86
- Punjab and Sindh Bank 54
- Punjab Colonisation of Land Act of
1893 54
- Punjab Congress Socialist Party 88
- Punjab Darpan* 61
- Punjab elections, of 1945-6 215;
Cabinet Mission Proposals
167-81; and Muslim League,
161-5; overview 158; and Sikhs
158-60; Unionists form
government 165-7
- Punjabi Bhain* 43
- Punjab Land Alienation Act 16, 51;
of 1900 62; of 1901, 50-1, 66
- Punjab Legislative Assembly 89-90,
95-6, 118; Congress whip in 133;
Sikh legislators in 97
- Punjab Legislative Council 14;
reforms in 15
- Punjab National Unionist Party
(PNUP) 86, 122, 123, 124; form
government 165-7
- Punjab Provincial Congress
Committee 17
- Punjab Zamindar Central Association
60
- purbiah* 36
- Puri, Mukand Lal 90
- Purna Swaraj* 95, 105
- Quit India movement 20, 154
- Rahman, Habibur 82-3
- Rai, Babu Navin Chandra 38
- Rai, Lala Dhanpat 59
- Rai, Lala Lajpat 14
- Rajagopalachari, Chakravarti 20;
formula 128-9; sporting offer
105-6
- Ram, Chaudhary Chhotu 67, 86, 88,
90, 122, 126
- Ramayana* 12
- Ramgarh Session, of Congress 19
- Ram Rajya* 99
- Reforms Commissioner 175
- Riar, Sukhmani 154
- Risala Sat Prakash* 46
- Roberts, Arthur 37
- Roy, Raja Rammohun 38
- Sachar, Bhim Sen 190
- SAD. *See* Shiromani Akali Dal
sahajdharis 35, 52
- Sahib, Tikka 55
- Sandhanwalia, Thakur Singh 40
- Sapru, Tej Bahadur 22, 167

- Sapru Committee 142-5
 Sarhadi, Sardar Ajit Singh 127
Satyarth Prakash 39
 Saunders, C.R. 37
 Sayed, G.M. 170
 Second Round Table Conference 17
 self-government and representation
 58-61
 Sen, Keshab Chandra 203
 Shahidganj Gurdwara agitation
 17-18, 83-5
 Shahidi Dal 85
shahidi jathas 201, 215
Shariat 66
 Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) 25, 65-6,
 86, 96, 177, 192, 202
 Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak
 Committee (SGPC) 12, 21, 65,
 86, 109, 153
 Short, Major John McLoughin 13,
 21, 168-9
Shuddhi (purification) movement
 38-9
 Sikander-Baldev Pact 21, 108-10
 Sikander-Jinnah Pact 18, 88-9, 102,
 123, 124, 126
 Sikander's Federal Scheme 102
 Sikh All Parties Committee 107, 114
 Sikh Council of Action 85
 Sikh Educational Conference 54
 Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 65
Sikh Hindu Hain 46
 Sikh identity 12, 42; evolution of 33;
 Gurdwara reform movement and
 12; Khalsa 12-13; in nineteenth
 century 31-46; redefinition of 15;
 as Sikhs 32
 Sikhism 12; criticism by Aryas 39; *vs.*
 Arya Samajists 38-40; *vs.*
 Hinduism 12, 15
 Sikhistan 214; boundaries of 170;
 failure to secure 186-207
 Sikh militancy 63
 Sikh National Educational Fund 54
 Sikhs: aim to rule Punjab 202;
 approached Simon Commission
 16; British military recruitment
 policy for 12-13; Civil
 Disobedience movement 16-17,
 76-7; collapse of unity 192-4; and
 Congress 14-15, 17-18; Congress
 insensitivity towards 19-20;
 decided not to join interim
 government 180; demands 186-8;
 1946 elections and 158-60; fear
 of 'Muslim Raj' 17; fight for
 Lahore 204-7; *keshdhari* 12;
 loyalist image of 14; martial
 12-13; *mazhabi* 35, 36;
 Muslim-dominated Unionist
 Government 15-16; against
purbias 50; quest for security
 114-34; reactions on
 Jinnah-Gandhi talks 130-1;
 reactions to Lahore Resolution
 104; representative political
 organization of 61-3; resignation
 of Congress ministries 95;
 safeguards for 175; safeguard to
 24; seventeen demands of 80-2;
 significance of Cripps Offer 20-1;
 Sikh identity as 32; Simla
 Conference and 153-4; tried to
 keep options open 126-8
Sikh Sepoy 44
 Sikh Students' Federation 202
 Sikh Studies Chairs 12
 Simla Conference 148-54; and Sikhs
 153-4; Wavell new plan 154-5
 Simon Commission 16, 72-3
 Singh, Ajit 14
 Singh, Arur 55
 Singh, Baba Gurdit 132
 Singh, Baba Kharak 65, 119, 121,
 131, 176
 Singh, Babu Labh 176
 Singh, Bakshi Gurcharan 120
 Singh, Bhagat Lakshman 38, 40, 42
 Singh, Bhai Arjan 42
 Singh, Dasaundha 109, 110
 Singh, Ditt 39, 41, 42, 54, 55
 Singh, Maharaja Dulip 38, 104, 132

- Singh, Gajjan 15
 Singh, Ganga 120
 Singh, Giani Kartar 115, 120, 127, 130, 170, 187, 202, 203
 Singh, Giani Sher 18, 65, 130, 132
 Singh, Gurumukh 40, 41, 42
 Singh, Gyani Gyan 40
 Singh, Jagjit 132
 Singh, Jathedar Mohan 203
 Singh, Jawahir 39, 42
 Singh, Jodh 54
 Singh, Jogendra 98
 Singh, Sir Joginder 21, 84, 109, 114
 Singh, Kanwar Harnam 38
 Singh, Kartar 90
 Singh, Khushwant 34, 37
 Singh, Mangal 130
 Singh, Maya 39
 Singh, Mehtab 64, 65
 Singh, Nagina 39
 Singh, Maharaja Ranjit 35, 114
 Singh, Sampuran 17, 213
 Singh, Santokh 97
 Singh, Sardar Baldev 21, 25, 108-10, 114, 120, 126, 127, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 190, 195, 200, 203
 Singh, Sardar Bikram 40
 Singh, Sardar Gurbhajan 176
 Singh, Sardar Harbans 120, 121
 Singh, Sardar Harnam 170
 Singh, Sardar Kishan 120
 Singh, Sardar Sanmukh 203
 Singh, Sardar Santokh 173
 Singh, Sardar Swaran 196, 200
 Singh, Sardar Ujjal 17, 108, 109, 114, 132, 176
 Singh, Master Tara 17, 65, 98, 104, 114, 119, 120, 126, 130, 131, 154, 170, 172, 173, 175, 176, 192, 201, 203; demand for separate Sikh unit 21-2
 Singh, Teja 40
 Singh, Trilochan 54
 Singh Sabhas 13, 40-4, 53; Amritsar groups 41-2, 54; Lahore Branch 41
 Sorensen, Reginald 190
 sporting offer, of Rajagopalachari 105-6
 Tarsikka, Ranjodh Singh 132
 Tat Khalsa 53-6
 Taylor, Reynell 37
Tazkiras 11
 Tiwana, Khizr Hayat 21, 22, 122, 123, 125, 171, 195-6
Tribune, The 46
 Tumandar, Baluch 128
Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri 32
 Udham Singh Nagoke group 179
 Unionist government: fall of 194-6; formation of 66-8, 165-7; Muslim-dominated 15-16
 United Sikh Party 21
 U.P. Sikh Conference, Lucknow (1940) 19
upadeshaks 42
 Vahiri, Avtar Singh 41
 War Advisory Council 19, 105
 Wint, Guy 168
 Young, Sir Mackworth 42
 Zaheer, Sajjad 131
zamindari kharch 197