

## **POLITICAL SCENARIO OF PUNJAB**

**Neetu Mahajan**

Email Id: Mahajann310@gmail.com

Research Scholar of History, Guru Kashi University, Punjab (India)

Assistant Professor of History, S.R Govt College for Women, Asr

**Dr. Daljit Kaur**

Assistant Professor of History, Guru Kashi University, Punjab (India)

### **Abstract**

The political developments in the Punjab during the British period have been a subject of constant interest for long. The year 1928 is as important in the history of India's freedom movement as the year 1920. It was in 1920 that Mahatma Gandhi had launched an all-India movement in which almost all the religious communities and political groups had participated in great numbers. In 1918, two Rowlatt Bills were introduced in the Imperial Legislative Council. A committee under the chairmanship of Justice Rowlatt was appointed to report on seditious activities and make recommendations for the Legislation. The Bill provided for detention without trial up to two years. Meanwhile, the British published the report on the proposed reforms on the constitutional set up of India. It proposed the enlargement of the Provincial and Central Councils. In the beginning, the movement received tremendous support in Gujrat and Bihar. The Punjab also did not remain behind in taking to Non-Cooperation. The Congress split on the issue of council entry between Changers and No-Changers. The Hindu Muslim relations had been deteriorating since the withdrawal of the Non- Cooperation Movement. The year 1926 was the climax in Hindu- Muslim riots. The principal of separate electorate in few municipalities was enlarged under Minto-Morley Reforms. It provided separate electorate for Muslims.

**Keywords:** Mahatma Gandhi, Rowlatt Bll, Congress, Hindu, Muslim, Non- Cooperation, separate electorate.

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The political developments in the Punjab during the British period have been a subject of constant interest for long. Many scholars have worked on Punjab politics especially during the period of 20<sup>th</sup> century. The subject continues to grip the Punjab and across the Radcliffe line. People do get nostalgic while sharing their memories of that gone by era. My desire to learn more about the events that changed the course of history in the Punjab led to the painful division of the province at the time of independence. The period from 1928 to 1947 as it was the Pakistan Resolution that exploded like a bomb on the minds of the people. The reaction to Pakistan Resolution of Muslim League came from all parties in the Punjab. (Chanad, 1994) The years 1928 to 1947 represent a significant turning point in the history of the Punjab. In 1919, as World War I came to an end, the Punjab was going through an extremely difficult time. The Rowlatt Bills, the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, and the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy all brought about disorder in the province. A demonstration of Hindu-Muslim solidarity was made, but communalism also gained ground as a result of the establishment of communal

electorates under the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms. The Khilafat Movement simultaneously alarmed Muslims throughout all of India, not just in the Punjab. The year 1947 was equally significant because it was a pivotal year for not only the Punjab but for all of India. After much difficulty, the Muslims were finally able to establish their own country in this year. As a result, the year 1947 marked the end of a great period in Muslim politics that was characterized by a hunger for power and domination that gave rise to numerous intercommunal conflicts and showdowns. (Rai, 1984)

In the meantime, the British released a report outlining changes to India's constitution that were suggested. The expansion of the Provincial and Central Councils was suggested. The implementation of a dyarchical system of government in the provinces was also advocated. It lowered the franchise qualifications and as a result one-tenth of the adult male population of India got the right to vote. The Montford Reforms also proposed to continue the system of separate representation on the plea that the Congress-League scheme of 1916 had already accepted them. (Brown, 1984) The Montague- Chelmsford Reforms Act 1919 accepted the Lucknow Pact in not only extending separate electorate to the Muslims but also fixing proportion of seats for them among the elected seats in the Provincial Councils, where they were in minority. The Sikhs were also granted the privilege on July 8, 1918, and on December 26, 1919, it was stated how many seats they would have in the Central Assembly and Punjab Council. The notification stated that 18% of the seats will go to Sikhs. Given that they made up only 13% of the Punjab's population, they were unquestionably given weight. (Bose, 1967) The Report had mixed reaction in Punjab. Almost all the political parties regarded them as inadequate and unacceptable. Around this time, Indian Muslim were agitated with the British on the treatment being meted to Turkey after the conclusion of World War I. The Muslims in India were indignant with the Allied powers for dismembering the Turkish Empire. The Khilafat Committee in support of the Khalifa was formed in March 1919. It aimed at securing just and honorable peace for Turkey. (M.Hasan, 1979) Mahatma Gandhi was sympathetic to Muslim cause and wanted an honorable settlement for the Turks. Therefore, He recommended, non-violent Non-cooperation to the Khilafat Committee. He suggested, March 19 be observed as Khilafat Day with hartals and if their demands are not met, they should start Non-cooperation. (Brown, 1984)

In the beginning, the movement received tremendous support in Gujrat and Bihar. The Punjab also did not remain behind in taking to Non-cooperation. The focus of the movement was on students leaving schools and colleges, lawyers giving up practice, and boycott of foreign cloth. Many leading lawyers gave up their lucrative practice. The boycott of foreign clothing was the program's most effective component. From Rs. 102 crores in 1920–1921 to Rs. 57 crores in 1921–1922, the import of clothing dropped dramatically. Boycott of liquor resulted in the reduction of income from excise. (Sarkar, 1983) The Khilafat Committee asked the Muslims to leave the Army. Mahatma Gandhi finally decided on no-revenue campaign at Barodli but that along with Non-cooperation Movement had to be called off on February 12, 1922 following the burning alive of twenty-two policemen in Chaura Chauri in U.P. (Chandra, 1988) The withdraw of the movement was followed by arrest Mahatma Gandhi in March 1, 1922. (Indian Quarterly Register Vol. 1., 1927) The emphasis now shifted to electoral politics. The Congress split on the issue of council entry between Changers and No Changers. The boycott of councils should end, according to Pandit Motilal Nehru and C.R. Das, in order to maintain the movement against colonial rule. (Mic)C.R. Das, president of the Congress to form Swaraj Party on January 1, 1923. (Tribune, 1924) General elections were held in 1923. Swarajists participated in these elections and won a majority in Bengal and Central provinces. They also won considerable how many seats there are in the

Central Assembly. The election results were, however felt to be failure of the party. (Brown, 1984) The Hindu Muslim relations had been deteriorating since the withdrawal of the Non-Co-operation Movement. An ugly turn because of the separate electorate. On issues of cow-killing and music before mosque, several Hindu-Muslim riots took place all over the country. From 1924 onwards communal relations ever further worsened. The year 1926 was the climax in Hindu-Muslim riots. In a serious of Calcutta riots between April and July, 138 persons were killed. In the same year there were disturbances in Dacca, Patna, Rawalpindi, and Delhi. In U.P. alone there were 91 communal outbursts. (Sarkar, 1983)

The British Government's appointment of the all-white Statutory Commission at the end of 1927 served as the movement's impetus for a new phase, popularly known as the Simon Commission, after its chairman to provide recommendations that will form the cornerstone of India's future constitutional development. Nationalists of all stripes opted to boycott the Commission in protest at the absence of Indians from it and at its underlying premise that the British Parliament would decide India's political future in Britain. On February 3, 1928, the Commission arrived in Bombay to a complete hartal and a sizable black flag rally. A sea of black flags, enormous protests, and screams of "Go Back Simon" greeted the Commission as it travelled around India seeking testimony. Numerous conferences and combined gatherings of top political figures were held. The worst occurrence occurred in Lahore, where Lala Lajpat Rai was struck by lathies and died on November 17, 1928, as a result of his wounds. Bhagat Singh and his companions had avenged a hit death. (Nehru Report (All Parties Conference 1928), 1975 A.D) Indian politicians also tried to answer to the Simon Commission's challenge by coming out with a different plan for constitutional amendments. The group created a Swaraj constitution that provided specific recommendations for the representation of various communities in various provinces based on shared electorates. The Nehru Report was the first major effort by Indians to draft a constitutional framework for the country. The principal of separate electorate had been introduced in few municipalities of Punjab as early as 1880s. It provided separate electorate for Muslims and gave a new direction to the Punjab politics. The educated Hindus and Sikhs of the Punjab felt cheated as the principle of protecting minorities was not applied to non-Muslim minorities in the Punjab. (Amandeep, 1991) The Muslims of the Punjab were also not satisfied with the Reforms. The Reforms had excluded the Punjab from the system of separate electorate because the Muslims were majority in the province. So, when the elections were held in December 1912, the Muslim Candidates especially professional men fared badly. The Punjab Provincial League urged the provincial government to establish separate electorate on communal basis. (Sohal, 2005) The birth of the Congress was the product of the nationalist consciousness that initially grew in the presidency towns in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Punjab Provincial Committee of the Indian National Congress had been founded as early as. (Rai, 1984)

The Sikh League was set up in 1919. It supported the Congress Programme of struggle for national freedom while at the same time defending interests of the Sikhs in relation to representation in legislatures and services. For Punjab Legislative Council the government had proposed 14 percent representation for Sikhs. The Sikh League demanded 33 percent and the government finally conceded them 19 percent share. (Singh, 1984) The Sikhs under Akali leadership responded quickly to the Resolution. Political attention was mainly focused on the question of *hartal* on February 3rd, 1928, the day of the Statuary Commission's arrival in India. An All-Parties Sikh Conference was convened at Amritsar on 30 January, 1928 to consider the Sikh attitude towards the Commission. (Gulati, 1974) Among the prominent Akalis present were Baba Kharak Singh, President of

the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee, and Mangal Singh, General Secretary of the Central Sikh League. They decided that the Sikhs should boycott the Commission as advised by the Indian National Congress and repeated the Sikh demands for a one third share in the Legislatures and appealed to Sikhs to boycott the Commission was scheduled to land in Bombay. The Central Sikh League and Shiromani Akali Dal decided to boycott the Commission and to advise the Sikhs to join the *hartal* called by the conference. (Gulati, 1974) At the arrival of Simon Commission, Congress decided to boycott it. Similarly, All India Hindu Mahasabha resolved to boycott the Commission. On the other side, the Hindu Mahasabha in Punjab, led by Raja Narendra Nath, decided to cooperate with the Commission. (Tuteja, 1984) The key to the success of All-Parties Conference, February 1928, was in the hands of Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League. The former had made it difficult for the conference to hammer out an agreed solution by adopting a rigid attitude on the question of reservation of seats in a province for the majority community. (Chanad, 1994) The Report of the Nehru Committee had, in the meantime, been published in August 1928. Although the committee disfavored the reservation of seats for any community in Bengal and the Punjab, it suggested the formation of a joint electorate, with reservation of seats for the minorities based on population, together with the right to contest for additional seats. The report met with a mixed reaction, while Jinnah was disappointed at the turn of events, the opinion of Sikh leaders was sharply divided. Sardar Mangal Singh and Amar Singh Jhabbal for instance, were favorably inclined, but Master Tara Singh.

The Indian National Congress proposed separating the Punjab and opposed the mandatory grouping of provinces, as is seen from their resolution, which ran:- " there must be no compulsion of any province or a part of province by another province. The Congress cannot be a party to any such compulsion or imposition against the will of the people concerned.... the rights of the Sikhs in the Punjab should not be jeopardized. In the event of any compulsion a province or a part of a province has the right to take such action as may be deemed necessary." This severely incensed the Muslim League, which swiftly and forcefully denounced this resolution, stating that "these qualifying clauses confer the right of veto within a section on a province and what is more absurd on a part of province and on the Sikhs in the Punjab."

The major events in those ten crucial years were the Mountbatten Viceroyalty and the partition in 1947, the Mountbatten Resolution and the August Offer in 1940, the Cripps Mission and the Quit India movement in 1942, the Shimla Conference in 1945, the Cabinet Mission and the Interim Government in 1946, and the Congress rule in the provinces from 1937 to 1939. The next chapters each describe one of the events in considerable detail.

The saddest and most significant event in the history of India was its split. Even for a country that had already seen many sad tragedies, the events that followed partition were incredibly brutal. Whole communities were displaced during India's partition, and unimaginable brutality was left in its wake. A chaotic two-way migration of Muslims from India to Pakistan and Hindus and Sikhs from Pakistan to India was brought on by communal murders. In what ended up being the biggest forced migration the world has ever known; an estimated 15 million people were displaced. It has been claimed that as many as 2 million people died as a result of the terrible events leading up to the division. (Singh I. T., 2009)

The religious social separation between Hindus and Muslims was not the primary driver of partition. She emphasises how peacefully the two cultures had coexisted in the past. The Congress, under the leadership of Nehru and Patel, made the drive for it. 'Jinnah's ultimate ambition was to get a seat at the centre,' she writes.

(Jalal, 1994) Instead of dividing India, Jinnah's Pakistan envisioned a united Pakistan and India that could stand strong against a common foe. In 1928, the majority of leading Muslim leaders in India were willing to give up their claim to establishing a distinct state; this was not a cry for pan-Islam; neither was Muslim India being pitted against Hindustan. Rather, it was a secular vision of a polity with real political choice and safeguards if their other demands were met, electorate. (Kaura, 1942)

The Lahore, 1940, approval of the Pakistan Resolution. Evidently, he believed he could use it against the Congress as a useful tool. Her fundamental contention, that the Congress' treatment of Muslims was largely to blame for their alienation from the nationalist cause and what led them to have separatist impulses, is true. Her study, however, is lacking because it ends at 1940 and skips over the important years leading up to the partition in 1947. A historian from Pakistan dates the start of the Hindu-Muslim rift to the period between 1906 and 1911. Bengal was divided into two regions in 1905 by Viceroy of India Lord Curzon: East Bengal, which had a Muslim majority, and West Bengal, which had a Hindu majority. Aziz claims that the Bengali Hindus feared losing their monopoly on trade, business, and administrative positions as a result of division. They therefore started an anti-British agitation. Muslims perceived the Hindu uprising against the partition of Bengal as an effort on the part of the Hindus to uphold their dominance over Muslims. (K.K.Aziz, 2009) The 1935 Act encouraged Muslims to unite along communal lines for political purposes. Churchill promised the Muslims in the 1940 August Offer that they would have a veto over any future political agreements that they disapproved of. According to Moore, this enraged the Congress. According to Moore, Jinnah's status as the sole representative of Indian Muslims was elevated by British policy. The British right, in particular Churchill, tolerated Jinnah but saw Gandhi as an old man who was nasty and malicious. Some Congress officials believed that a strong centre was necessary for the post-Independence social and economic advances, and that Jinnah's removal was the only way to achieve it. The British played no part in fostering hostility between Hindus and Muslims. He even contends that the continuation of British control in India had a calming influence on the two feuding factions. (Coupland, 1942) The partition of India was not honestly attempted to be avoided by Mountbatten. He claimed that Mountbatten was eager to complete the split as soon as possible so he could resume his naval career in England. Wolpert claims that Mountbatten disregarded Gandhi's suggestion to ask Jinnah to form a government. According to him, there was no other plan that could have prevented partition. Jinnah was despised by Mountbatten, who even labelled him a maniac. On the other hand, he greatly admired Nehru and believed that he was the ideal candidate to lead India. According to Wolpert, the British Empire began to feel the burden of India by the year 1947. The British Cabinet was therefore eager to free itself from the Indian albatross. The British people's enthusiasm for keeping their former "Jewel on the Crown" had quickly diminished due to the mounting weight of the British pound's debt. Wolpert accuses Mountbatten of rushing through the difficult process of dividing a nation with a 400 million population in a matter of months without sufficient forethought. The quick split resulted in unimaginable levels and magnitudes of murder, damage, and mayhem. The explanation above indicates that there are three quite different ways of understanding the divide. Indian nationalist historians come to the conclusion that Pakistan would not have been without Jinnah. They claim that the British fostered Muslim separatism in India and that Britain's "divide and rule" strategy was a major factor in the division of India. However, nationalist historians from Pakistan contend that the division was unavoidable due to the irreconcilable differences between Muslims and Hindus in terms of belief, culture, and manner of life. They contest the idea that British schemes led to Muslim

secession. Some British historians have claimed that British policy should not be held responsible for the partition of India.

## **II. CONCLUSION**

The Simon Commission's entrance in India in 1928 altered the country's political landscape. Once more, it had united disparate political viewpoints on a single platform. The Congress, the Hindu Mahasabha, the Liberals, and a faction of the Muslim League led by Jinnah all boycotted the Commission because it didn't include a single Indian. Several political factions opposed it in Punjab as well, with the exception of Muhammad Shafi and pro-British elements. Reviewing the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms and recommending additional Lord Birkenhead Reforms was the Commission's goal. For a long time, the Secretary of State for India had said that because Indians from many cases, sects, and communities could never come to an understanding, they were unable to create a constitution for themselves. An All-Parties Conference was held in order to contest this British assumption. This Conference was organised with the intention of creating an inclusive constitution for India. Nearly all of the significant political parties in the nation were invited for this.

The first Indian Federal Constitution to be drafted entirely by Indians presented several challenges for the group responsible for drafting the Constitution. It had to deal with communal, political, economic, and economic issues as well as geographical differences. On May 19, 1928, the All-Parties Conference convened in Bombay, and on August 10, 1928, the Nehru Report, which contained their recommendations, was released. The Nehru Report sparked a crisis in Punjab as well as in all of India. Hindu Mahasabha felt delighted if at all India level Muslim league was dissatisfied. Sikhs in Punjab had a strong protest against the Nehru Report. The Nehru Report did not advocate for any Punjabi Hindu or Sikh reservations. Because it would reduce the proportion of Hindu minorities, Sikhs were not granted reservations. However, the Nehru Report acknowledged ignoring Sikhs. The Central Sikh League's opposition to the Nehru Report carried on to the National Convention that the Indian National Congress called for. When their amendment to the Nehru Report was ruled out of order, the General Secretary of the League, Mehtab Singh, and almost all the Central Sikh League delegates, with the exception of Mangal Singh, staged a walkout. There was a significant backlash against the Award in Punjab among the non-Muslim community. The Sikhs strongly disapproved of the Award. It was deemed to be a "Scrap of paper" that should be interred with the Simon and Nehru Reports. Additionally, a portion of the Congress in Punjab rejected the Award. There were disagreements inside the Punjab Congress as a result of the All-India Congress Committee's decision to neither accept nor reject the Award. Later attempts to reach a consensus were attempted at the cabinet level. The Mountbatten Plan was opposed by the Sikh Press because it undermined the foundation of Sikh solidarity and unity. The Punjabi divide line then caught the media's attention. Sikh interests were focused on capturing Lahore, but the Punjabi press was unable to influence the rulers. Nobody was paying attention to any advise as the situation became increasingly complex and changeable. When the violence and pandemonium reached their peak, the press, especially the Punjabi press, seemed to lose its voice. It is unfortunate that the Punjabi newspapers from the final months before independence and partition are not available to shed light on the pressing problems, but the cautions and alternate solutions offered in the earlier publications may be viewed as the shadows of events to come.

## **REFERENCES**

Michiko 7.

- Amandeep. (1991). *Politics of Lala Laj Pat Rai, Baba Kharak Singh and Dr. Saif-Ud-Din Kitchlew*. Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University.
- Bose, S. C. (1967). *The Indian Struggle 1920-1942*. London: Asia Publishing House.
- Brown, J. (1984). *Modern India: The Origin of an Democracy*. Oxford Unversity.
- Chanad, T. (1994). *History of the Freedom Movement in India, Vol. II*. New Delhi: Publications Division.
- Chandra, B. (1988). *India's Struggle for Independence 1857-1947*. New Delhi: Penguin.
- Coupland, R. (1942). *The Cripps Mission*. London: Oxford University.
- Gulati, K. (1974). *The Akalis: Past and Present*. New Delhi: Ashajanak Publication.
- (1927). *Indian Quarterly Register Vol. 1*.
- Jalal, A. (1994). *The sole Spokesman: Jinnah the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- K.K.Aziz. (2009). *The Making of Pakistan: A study in Nationalism*. Lahore: Sang-E-Meel.
- Kaura, U. (1942). *Muslims and Indian Nationalism: The Emergence of the Demand for India's Partition 1928-40*. Columbia: South Asia.
- M.Hasan. (1979). *Nationalism and Communal politics in India 1916-1928*. New Delhi: South Asia Books.
- (1975 A.D). *Nehru Report (All Parties Conference 1928)*. New Delhi: Michiko & Panjathan.
- Rai, S. (1984). *Legislative and Freedom Struggle in the Punjab 1897-1947*. New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research.
- Sarkar, S. (1983). *Modern India 1885-1947*. Delhi: Macmillan.
- Singh, H. (1984). *Punjab Peasant in Freedom Struggle, Vol. II*. New Delhi: People's Publishing House.
- Singh, I. T. (2009). *The Partition of India*. New Yark: Cambridge University.
- Sohal, S. (2005). *The making of middle Classes in the Punjab 1849-1947*. Jalandhar: ABS Publications.
- Tribune, T. (1924). *August*.
- Tuteja, K. (1984). *Sikh Politics 1920-1940*. Kurukshetra: Vishal Publication.