CHAPTER NINE
THE LIBERALS' RELATIONS WITH OTHER PARTIES
AND INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THEM

When the Moderates, or as they preferred to call themselves, the Liberals, seceded from the Congress in 1918 and organised themselves into a separate party on the issue of the acceptance of the Montagu-Chelmsford Report* published in July 1918, their relationship with the Congressmen and Muslim League was no doubt strained to a great extent. But the Liberals tried from the beginning to justify their own standpoint and show to the Congressmen the path of sanity and moderation. Men like Sivaswami Aiyar and Srinivas Sastri had stayed with the Congress long beyond men like Banerjea and Chintamani in the forlorn hope of moderating the Congress demand. Sastri attended the special Congress of August 1918 at Bombay. The result was that within a year, while they were in England in connection with the sitting of the Joint Select Committee, it was found that differences of opinion among these various groups were reduced to lowest point. In England the Liberal and other delegations worked in close cooperation with one another. All were for giving the Reforms a fair trial. Motilal Nehru was also known to have appreciated to some extent some of the features of the Government of India Bill.

2. Ibid.
3. Leader, 30 March 1919.
But with the inauguration of the Non-cooperation movement by Gandhi the Liberals found themselves in a tight corner. As the Non-cooperation movement spread with amazing intensity, the Liberals had to keep themselves away from the main stream of national life. They could not identify themselves with the movement. They knew that the conversion of the Congress to the Non-cooperation movement was due to the Government's blunders and the internal momentum of Indian nationalism. Though the relationship with the Congress was strained to the extreme and the Liberals became subject to a campaign of vilification from the Congress camp, they, in their turn, while warning the Congress against the danger of sailing in uncharted waters, tried to arrange a Round Table Conference with the object of arriving at a settlement between the Viceroy and Gandhi. This, however, did not materialize. In 1922 they cooperated with Mehsviya and Jinnah in convening a conference in Bombay, though the conference broke down owing to Gandhi's intransigent attitude.

In 1923 a section of Congressmen under the name of Swarajya Party decided to contest the elections and enter the Councils. Though the Liberals saw that gradually their policy

7. See Ch. 1, p. 59.
10. Leader, 18 January 1922.
11. Ibid., 25 January 1922.
was being adopted by the Congress inside the Central Legislative Assembly and the various Provincial Councils, they could not unite with the Congress in 1924. When Gandhi invited them to take part in a conference to find out 'whether it is possible to bring together on the Congress platform all parties for joint work on a common constructive programme conducive to national growth', Sastri pointed out the difficulties against the Liberals' joining. As he wrote to Gandhi, the altered Congress creed, the Swarajya Party's supremacy in Congress politics, suspension without abandonment of Non-cooperation and Civil Disobedience, Gandhi's recent support to Gaya resolution repudiating national debt from 1923, Khaddar uniform and yarn franchise - stood in the way of common understanding. Sastri requested Gandhi to prepare a resolution which would satisfy all parties on the Swaraj demand and protest against repression.

Though the Liberals and Congressmen did not formally join, there was much that was common in the Liberal policy and the Swarajist policy in the Council from 1924 onwards. Outside the Council they began to act in collaboration in many committees. For example, in 1925 Motilal Nehru participated in the Skeen Committee of which a Liberal like P. C. Sethna was a member.

13. Sastri to Gandhi, 18 November 1924, Gandhi Papers, op. cit.
14. Ibid.
In 1925 there was one issue where the Liberals and Congressmen were essentially at one - the Muddiman Report as related to the question of responsible Government. Then came Lord Birkenhead's challenge to the Indians to produce a constitution of their own - a challenge, which came as a betrayal. Lord Reading repeated that challenge in August of the same year. The Liberals and Congressmen came closer to each other outside the Council.

By 1926 Motilal Nehru was inviting Sastri to participate in the National Union. When the composition of the Simon Commission was announced in July 1927 the Congressmen and Liberals joined in declaring a boycott. But there was one difference. The Liberals were opposed to the proposal of boycott of British goods which was accepted by the Congress. In the All Parties Conference, and the Nehru Committee which followed, the Liberals worked with the Congressmen in full co-operation for drafting a constitution that would be acceptable to all parties and for an amicable settlement of the communal problem.

18. Motilal Nehru to Sastri, 2 September 1926, Sastri Papers, op. cit.
"In any effort that you make for the settlement of communal differences", Sapru wrote to Motilal, "you will have my unstinted support". He also proposed to give a separate note on the minorities and said that united action of various parties was more necessary than ever.

Nehru and Sapru jointly went to Patna to placate the Moslems and to have a conference with Ali Imam. The Liberal effort in producing a constitution was congratulated by Gandhi. Motilal Nehru also proposed a friendly discussion to 'collectively clarify our ideas during the course of the next summer and arrive at some agreement as to the lines of future constitution. He also wanted to include the names of Jayakar, Sapru, Sankaran Nair, Patel, Setalvad, Chintamani, Joshi and others'.

It was true that this new Indian unity was not a stable compound and soon disintegrated.

The Liberals could work with the Congress under Motilal Nehru and Gandhi. It was only when the Congress policy came to be dominated by Jawaharlal Nehru that the Liberals began to find themselves sometimes in a difficult position. The Liberal policy did not appeal to Jawaharlal. "I believe", he wrote,

21. Same to same, ibid.
22. Motilal Nehru to M. A. Jinnah, 2 August 1929, ibid.
23. D. G. Tandulkar, op. cit., p. 221.
24. Motilal Nehru to Sivaswami Aiyar, 2 June 1929.
after the signing of the Delhi pact in November 1929, "that in our attempts to soothe and retain a few estimable gentlemen we have ... practically turned out of our camp many others who were more worth having. I believed that we have fallen into a dangerous trap out of which it will be no easy matter to escape." 26

It was due to Jawaharlal's intransigent attitude that the conference with the Viceroy in December 1929 proved to be abortive. 27 Sapru and Jinnah had argued with Motilal to no avail. The failure of the Liberal efforts at mediation between the Congress and the Government during July-September 1930 was to be ascribed 28 to the same reason.

Though the Liberals had to go to the Round Table Conference in London alone without Congress blessings, they always urged 29 Gandhi to attend the Conference, and requested him to explore every avenue of peace and work in cooperation. "One who thinks of India's welfare from my standpoint," wrote Sastri to Gandhi, "cannot conceive of a greater gain to the cause at present than your hearty cooperation in the work of reconstruction." 31

29. Sastri to Gandhi, 22 August, 1931, Gandhi Papers, op. cit.
30. Same to same, 9 December 1931, ibid.
31. Ibid.
As a result of this persuasion the Congress was ultimately represented by Gandhi in the Second Round Table Conference. But the Hindu-Muslim differences proved to be the chief stumbling block which even Gandhi failed to remove. Despite the best effort that the Liberals made to secure Congress cooperation, the Congress held themselves aloof from the later stages of constitution making that led to the passing of the Government of India Act in 1935. But when the Act was passed the Congressmen came forward to take part in the elections and formed ministries in provinces and the Liberals retired from the scene.

With regard to the Moslems the Liberals admitted that there was a hopeless division in the country between Hindus and Mohammedans inspite of the much advertised Hindu-Muhammedan unity. But they could not see their way to laying all the blame on the Government. The Liberals believed that there was as much of communalism among the Hindus as among the Mohammedans. They therefore apportioned the blame among Hindus, Muslims and Government alike.

The Liberals held that there were mainly three causes which divided the Mohammedans from Hindus - political, economic and religious. As regards the political causes, what the Mohammedans wanted was adequate representations in the Councils, and the Liberals were prepared to concede it. If it were necessary to go further to meet their legitimate demands, they would not hesitate to do so.

32. Leader, 12 October, 1927. Also Bengalee, 12 October 1927.
33. Sapru to Sastri, 17 October 1922, Sastri Papers, op. cit.
34. Ibid.
As regards the second, economic causes, these ultimately resolved themselves into the question of representation in the public service. They were prepared to support a declaration of rights to that effect. The Liberals believed in recruitment by merit but they thought that, in the present circumstances, Muhammedans would not agree to it. The Liberals were prepared to concede that some amount of efficiency would have to be sacrificed for the sake of cooperation until the Muhammedans were able to hold their own in competition with the Hindus. The Liberals were entirely for the protection of the rights of minorities and thought that none should be penalised so far as appointments or promotions or things of that kind were concerned merely because he belonged to a particular caste or creed.

Then comes the third cause - the religious differences. The Liberals did not share the prejudices of most of their co-religionists with regard to cow-killing and other matters. But the Hindus everywhere in India generally possessed a strong feeling on these subjects. It was not likely that Muhammedans would willingly give up the slaughter of cows and they thought that it would be a mistake on the part of the Hindus to make such a demand. For this purpose a commonly agreed regulation should be enforced.

They believed that the settlement of the communal problem was preliminary to any constitutional development, that if the communal issue was settled the other issues would automatically

35. Sapru to Sivaswami Aiyar, 30 August 1929, Sivaswami Aiyar Papers, op. cit.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
resolve themselves. For this purpose a genuine effort should be made to arrive at an understanding with the Moslems. No difficulties would be too great if a settlement of the Communal issue could be arrived at. They were in favour of discussing the problem with some representative Muhammedans and the mutual arrangements arrived at to be embodied in a statute. Though for sometime it would look undemocratic, it was the only way to solve the problem and quieten criticism.

The Liberals, therefore, tried to meet the Muslims on several occasions with the object of settling the communal and other issues. In 1925 they proposed to Jinnah that Independents under Jinnah's leadership should unite with the Liberals, as there was not much difference between the two parties. B.C. Pal was also working to that end in Calcutta.

In 1928 Kunzru accepted invitation by Ansari to attend the All Parties Conference (on 17 and 18 February) to present an United front to their opponents. The Nehru Committee Report, which was the result of the joint effort of Motilal Nehru and T.B. Sapru, discarded separate electorate and provided reservation of seats for only ten years to the Moslems in provinces where they were a minority. But this was not acceptable to

38. Sapru to Sivaswami Aiyar, 8 November 1927, Sivaswami Aiyar Papers, op. cit.
39. Ibid.
40. Sapru to Sastri, 17 October 1928, Sastri Papers.
42. Sethna to Sastri, 26 November 1925. Also same to same, 8 December 1925, ibid.
44. All Parties Conference, Nehru Report, op. cit., pp.100-03.
the Moslems and led Jinnah to present his famous fourteen points.

Not to be thrown off by this rebuff, during the early
months of 1930 Sapru wrote to Muhammad Ali to take part in a
conference of all those who wanted a satisfactory settlement
of the communal issue. He also invited Shafi Daudi, Sir Muhammad
Shafi and Mr. Jinnah to take part in the conference of 26 and 27
February at Delhi. But the Hindu - Moslem differences prevent-
ed an agreement being reached on this occasion also.

The chief issue at the Round Table Conference was that of
a communal settlement. The Liberals were essentially non-
communal in outlook and were basically opposed to separate elec-
torate and weightage, i.e. special representation of minorities
in excess of population ratio, yet they were willing to accept
these things if necessary to a communal settlement. During the
sessions of Round Table Conference in London they were inclind
to give minority claims as fair a hearing as possible. They
were willing to sacrifice some degree of Hindu supremacy in
order to keep the communal problems from continuing to be an
obstacle to general constitutional advance. In the Round Table
Conferences the Liberals and most other delegates wanted to keep
the communal issue subordinate to central responsibility where-
as the Moslems and other minority representatives tended to make

45. Sapru to Muhammad Ali, 15 January 1930, also same to same,
21 February 1930, also same to same, 4 February 1930.
Mahammad Ali Papers, op. cit.
46. Leader, 25 February 1930.
a communal settlement in their favour a condition precedent to any new constitution. This basic conflict of interest persisted during all the sessions of the conference that were held from 1930 to 1932. The Indian Liberals were caught between the various communal extremes though they were closer on the whole to the Hindu position. In the end the British Government issued a Communal Award embodying in the main the Moslem demands which were later incorporated in the Act passed in 1935.

Thus the Liberals, Congressmen and the Moslems met now and again and discussed at times constitutional questions or some current questions or communal issues. The Liberals admitted that on the question of method of work there was during the last ten years an unfortunate difference of opinion between parties. They knew, too, that the Liberal Party and its method could not, form the very necessity of things, arouse much enthusiasm in the country whereas the Congressmen were more likely to capture the imagination of the people. They always tried to secure co-operation of other parties. "It is only when we have failed", Sapru wrote to Sastri, "in carrying them with us that we should without hesitation and regret dissociate ourselves from them. That is the last we owe to the country ..." The Liberals did not wish to run into any quarrel with the Congressmen, the Swarajists, the Muslim League or any other class of politicians

48. Sapru to Sivaswami Aiyar, 29 June 1922, Sivaswami Aiyar Papers, op. cit.
49. Sapru to Sastri, 10 November 1929, Sastri Papers, op. cit.
for the simple reason that they felt 'they had no place in a quarrel between extremists which were to be found in the Government of India or the Local Governments or extremists in public life.' They did not see any reason why each party should not reserve to itself its own method of work while all should unite in putting forward the same constitution and working for it jointly as far as possible. But the interaction of motives among various parties - the increasing Congress radicalism, Muslim obstinacy, differences among the Liberals themselves - which reacted upon one another, prevented any fruitful cooperation.

50. Sapru to Sivaswami Aiyar, 30 August, 1929, Sivaswami Aiyar Papers, op. cit.
51. Ibid.