Chapter III

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On 31 October 1929, the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, in a statement announced that His Majesty's Government's intention was eventually to confer Dominion Status upon India. He also added that a Round Table Conference of the representatives of British India, Indian States and British political parties would assemble in London so that adequate expression of Indian views could be obtained before the proposals for the future constitution of the country were laid before the British Parliament.

The general reception accorded to the announcement in India was at first quite encouraging. On 2 November, prominent Indian leaders like Gandhi, Motilal Nehru, Tej Bahadur Sapru, Annie Besant put their signatures to a manifesto which indicated their intention to co-operate in the settlement of Indian political problems. But when an Indian delegation consisting of Mahatma Gandhi, Sapru, Motilal Nehru and Jinnah met Irwin on 23 December to discuss the date and personnel of the Conference, it became quite evident that sharp differences of opinion existed not only between the Viceroy and Motilal and Gandhi but among the Indian leaders also. Gandhi doubted

1 Lord Irwin's Dominion Status Declaration, 31 October 1929, Halifax Collection, Microfilm copy, N.M.M.L., New Delhi.
the sincerity of British purpose and throughout the conver­
sation insisted that the Viceroy should guarantee that immediate
Dominion Status would be granted to India. When reminded of
the difficulties in the form of internal differences, the
Congress leaders pressed the right of India to Dominion Status
notwithstanding their internal differences and Motilal in
particular, completely denied the existence of any such diffi-
culty. Gandhi's contention was that "he did not want his
people to go to the Conference in their weakness while India
was disunited as she was at present and while there was vast
difference of opinion among his friends unless they knew that
the Viceroy and the British Government were with them." The
Congress refusal to recognize the need for communal unity and
its unwillingness to participate in the Conference did not
deter Jinnah and Sapru from expressing their readiness to go.
The differences over the Nehru Report were fresh in their memory
and now both of them took the initiative for composing the
differences between Hindus and Muslims. Their opinion was
that unless a generous and broad-minded view was taken of the
communal question no solution could be possible. Also they
showed a more realistic attitude as they thought it would be
most derogatory if they failed to settle their differences
before going to London or if they had to settle them with the

2 Minutes of conversation amongst Gandhi, Motilal
Nehru, Tej Bahadur Sapru, Jinnah and the Viceroy
Lord Irwin, 23 December 1929, Motilal Nehru Papers.
help of British officials in England. For Jinnah, the settlement of the Hindu-Muslim problem was a "national problem" without which there was no hope for any real advance on the part of India towards Dominion Status. Both the All India Muslim League and the All India Muslim Conference welcomed the announcement of the Viceroy. Ever since the Nehru Report, the Muslims were groaning under a fear that what the Hindus aimed at was to gain political domination over the Muslims. They, therefore, felt that in any constitution framed for India, definite guarantees must be provided for Muslims against such a possibility. The Executive Board of the All India Muslim Conference meeting in Lahore in January 1930 advised the Muslims not to close the door to negotiations. It was also made clear that no constitution would be acceptable to the Muslims unless and until adequate safeguards were provided for their rights and interests as laid down in the resolutions of the Delhi Conference held in January 1929.

Similar was the attitude of the Muslim League. Its Council meeting in New Delhi on the 9th February 1930 appreciated the Viceroy's announcement and described it as "most

3 Sapru to Purshotamdas Thakurdas, 24 November 1929, Tej Bahadur Sapru Papers, Microfilm copy, N.M.M.L.
4 Jinnah to Sapru, 14 December 1929, Sapru Papers.
timely."

Muhammad Ali, on behalf of the Khilafat Committee also expressed the same viewpoint. He wrote to Jinnah:

...As for the Mussalmans my advice to them is not to close the door of negotiation with government or any party and to examine every scheme with a view to satisfying that

(1) we are really getting freedom, or Swaraj or full responsible government, whether with or without the British connection, by whatever name people call it and that

(2) the Mussalmans are getting an adequate and effective share in the governance of India as defined in the points which you and we formulated last year.

In pursuance of his determination to achieve unity, Sapru approached various parties and groups like the All India Muslim Conference, the Nationalist Muslims, National Liberal Federation and the Hindu Mahasabha with the idea of uniting them on a common platform to bring about a settlement of the Hindu-Muslim question. Every party, with the only exception of the Hindu Mahasabha, responded favourably and showed great enthusiasm for the endeavour. The Hindu Mahasabha refused to co-operate if the communal question was going to be discussed. This time it had been encouraged to maintain this intransigence mainly because of the attitude

6  Indian Annual Register, vol. 1, 1930, p. 347.
7  Mohammad Ali to Jinnah, 16 January 1930, Ansari Papers.
8  Sapru to Jinnah, 5 January 1930, Sapru Papers.
of Congress leaders who had completely undervalued the importance of solving this problem. Moonje described Sapru's attempts as nothing except "a leap in the darkness and wanted that there should be given up until the Muslims, being disillusioned by the bureaucracy, themselves began to desire rapprochement". It is pertinent to note that Motilal had also characterized Sapru's effort as a "mistake" on his part and was sure that he would soon be disillusioned."

At this juncture even the Muslim Congressmen like Ansari, Shuaib Qureshi and Khaliquzzaman expressed their disapproval of the attitude of the Congress towards the communal problem. Ansari had had some disagreement with Motilal at the time of the consideration of the Nehru report also, but had never come out openly against him. Now the disagreement came to the surface and he openly expressed his dissent from the policy and programme of the Congress on the Hindu-Muslim question. He found the Congress policy adopted at the Lahore session in 1929 so distasteful that he retired from the Congress executive. He also regretted that the Congress should have

9 B. R. Moonje to Sapru, 26 January 1930, Sapru Papers.

10 Motilal to Ansari, 17 February 1930, Ansari Papers.

11 There it was decided that "in view of the lapse of the Nehru Report, it is unnecessary to declare the policy of the Congress regarding communal question, the Congress believing that is an independent India, communal questions can only be solved on strictly national lines". Indian National Congress Resolutions, 1929, p. 60.
utilized the offer made by the Viceroy to its fullest advantage and blamed it for mishandling the situation. In a letter

...I have not the slightest doubt that if had stuck to it /the stand of the Madras Congress 1927 on the Hindu-Muslim problem/ we would have gradually overcome the opposition of the Hindu Mahasabha and Hindu-Muslim unity would have been an accomplished fact by now. But, we wanted to be more just and fair ... we lost at Lucknow and Calcutta what we had gained at Madras.... It was the Hindu Mahasabha which completely did the work of destruction. 12

Indeed, it was a misjudgement of the Congress to have completely neglected the solution of the communal problem at this time. Having failed to achieve unity at the time of the All Parties Conference in 1928, it had given up even a pretence of dealing with it. Motilal Nehru was not prepared to subscribe to the views held by the Muslims and the Liberals as to why they had so far failed to achieve unity and the direction in which further efforts should be made. He contended that the path which the Congress had till then followed had been fundamentally wrong and that Hindu-Muslim unity could not be achieved by preaching it but "would be accomplished without either of them realizing that they were working for it. This could only be done on an economic basis and in the course of the fight for freedom from the usurper."

12 Ansari to Gandhi, 13 February 1930, Ansari Papers.
...I have definitely come to hold the opinion that no amount of formulae based upon mutual concessions which those making them have no right to make will bring us any nearer Hindu-Muslim unity than we are at present... As a result of past experience and anxious thought I have now reached the conclusion that the lines upon which we worked were fundamentally wrong.... The fact is that we have been appealing to the wrong court all these years.13

Motilal's views were contradicted by Gandhi. The latter expressed his sympathy with the Muslim viewpoint and stressed that independence could not be achieved without the Muslims and other minorities being satisfied with their position. His views on this question were in complete accord with those of Ansari and Sapru. But it is a pity that he did not do anything at that stage to tackle the communal question as he also felt that it had to be approached "...not at present by adjustment of the political power but by one or the other acting on the square under all circumstances." 14 His failure in this respect further contributed towards the alienation of Muslims from the Congress as this confirmed their view that the Congress was not interested in satisfying the Muslims. In desperation Khaliquzzaman wrote to Ansari:

"...The reply of Mahatmaji was no doubt felt by everyone of us to be disappointing. In fact it has set everyone thinking. Uptil now

13 Motilal to Ansari, 17 February 1930, Ansari Papers.
we thought that Hindu Muslim unity was the pillar over which the super-structure of the constitution of free India was to be laid but from Mahatmaj's letter one can infer that while recognizing the utility of such a unity he does not consider it *sine qua non* for the fight for Independence.15

Whatever, that may be, as a result of the efforts of those desirous of settling the communal problem, an All Parties Conference was convened by Sapru in New Delhi in the month of February 1930. Those present included Annie Besant, Jinnah, Maharaja of Mahmudabad, Sir Ali Imam, Sultan Ahmed, Mohammad Ali, Sikandar Hyat Khan, Yaqub Hasan, Zulfiqar Ali Khan, Nawab Mohammed Ismail, A. H. Ghaznavi, C. P. Ramaswami Aiyer, Col. Gidney and Col. Crawform. Sapru fully approved of the idea that the Muslims should be given ample safeguards for their representation in the central and provincial legislatures. A manifesto was issued where it was envisaged that if the various communities were to go separately there would be very little chance of achieving anything worth the name. Therefore it was felt imperative to call a consultative meeting in March to consider those safeguards for the minorities without which no real constitutional progress could be possible.

The consultative meeting discussed and accepted in

15 Khaliquzzaman to Ansari, 1 March 1930, Ansari Papers.

16 A Note by Sapru on All Parties Conference, 30 February 1930, Sapru Papers.
principle the demands of the Muslims and other minorities for safeguards that were to be provided for the protection of their religion, education and culture. As regards representation in the legislature, Mohammad Ali came out with a novel suggestion that there should be joint electorates subject to the following conditions:

(a) There should be reservation of seats for Muslims both in provinces where they were in a minority and those where they were in a majority on population basis.

(b) There should be no right given to minorities to contest additional seats. (Here Mohammad Ali differed from his colleagues)

(c) Everywhere a Hindu candidate must obtain a minimum number of Muslim votes and similarly a Muslim candidate must obtain a minimum number of Hindu votes. The details and the method were not discussed.

The refusal of the Mahasabha to co-operate with Sapru and Jinnah did not deter them from approaching the former in order to enlist its support for the agreement which had been arrived at at the March meeting. But the Mahasabha changed its stand now. This was because it apprehended that the Liberals might give in to Muslim demands in their anxiety to win them over. In reply to an invitation from Sapru to

17 Ibid.
attend the conference, scheduled to be held in May 1930, Moonje gave an offensive reply. He told Sapru that there was no possibility of the members of the Mahasabha joining the conference and in the same letter quoted the wire he had sent to Gandhi, imploring him, not to promise concessions to Muslims which were "incompatible with nationalism". He made it clear that any agreement which might be arrived at with the Muslims would not be binding upon the representatives of the Hindu Mahasabha. This attitude of the Hindu Mahasabha was enough to show what it was going to do at the Round Table Conference.

The outcome of the meeting held in May was not unexpected, considering the intransigence shown by Moonje. When everything seemed to depend on the ability of Indians to arrive at an agreement the Hindus represented by the Congress and the Mahasabha contrived to shirk the issue. The meeting had to be adjourned indefinitely after passing a resolution that as there was no one who could represent the Hindu viewpoint as a whole, the Conference could not proceed with its work. When the question of uniform measure of autonomy for all the provinces was under discussion (which Sapru also did not favour as he had lent his whole-hearted support to Motilal in 1928 on Nehru Committee's recommendation for a unitary form of government) Jinnah raised the point as to whether the

18 Moonje to Sapru, 5 May 1930, Sapru Papers.
Hindus present there would be able to secure their acceptance by the Hindu community as a whole. Since no one came forward, the meeting was wound up with the following remark by Jinnah: "There is nobody with whom I can enter into a pact. I am prepared to take responsibility for the Muslims but where are the representative Hindus who would take such responsibility for their community."

With the Hindu-Muslim problem, thus still remaining unsettled, the first session of the Round Table Conference was commenced in London on 12 November 1930. Among the Hindus and Muslims the key men were Tej Bahadur Sapru, V. S. Srinivasa Shastri, C. P. Ramaswami Aiyer, Chimanlal Setalvad, Dewan Bahadur Ramaswami Mudaliyar, Moonje, Jayakar, Jinnah, Muhammad Shafi, Muhammad Ali, Zafrulla Khan, the Aga Khan. The Congress being engaged in the civil disobedience movement did not send any representative.

The Muslims were fully aware of the fact that their own organizations were weak; they, therefore, considered it necessary to secure all sorts of assistance from the Government. The latter was also doing its best to encourage those Muslims who were conducting a campaign against the civil disobedience movement. For the Muslims, the numerical strength of those representing their community did not carry much meaning. What

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19 The Evening News of India, 7 July 1930, enclosed in Press Clippings File, Jayakar Papers.
20 Indian Round Table Conference, Proceedings, 12 November 1930-19 June 1931, p. 331. (Cmd. 3778, 1931).
mattered most were the views and the ability of those Muslims. Their main concern, as expressed to the Viceroy, when he was choosing the personnel of the conference was that the delegates should be acceptable to their respective provinces and to India as a whole. Moreover, they questioned Jinnah's right to speak on behalf of the entire community as he was suspected of having one leg in the Hindu camp also. Fazl-i-Husain wrote to Hailey: "...frankly, I do not like the idea of Jinnah doing all the talking and of there being no one strong-minded enough to make a protest in case Jinnah starts upon expressing his views when those views are not acceptable to the Indian Muslims." Therefore Shafaat Ahmad Khan and Zafrulla Khan were deputed to London to counteract Jinnah. Immediately after the launching of the civil disobedience movement, Shafaat Ahmad had tried to dissuade the Muslims from joining the movement, as he felt that it would be 'suicidal' to his community. In an interview with the Viceroy at Lucknow he gave an assurance to him that Muslims would not join the movement and asserted that without Muslim support it would be a miserable failure. In keeping with the tradition prevalent since the days of Sir Syed, he observed:

...Muslims require some assurance, some guarantee that their position will not be endangered by the position and policy they have adopted at this critical juncture. They have loyalty supported the government, they have unanimously rejected the offer of the Congress.... If the government or preferably the Viceroy could make a moral gesture

21 Fazl-i-Husain to Hailey, 20 May 1930, Hailey Collection.
and at least reiterate assurance to all minority communities that their interests would be safeguarded it would be of utmost value at this juncture.²²

As soon as negotiations started at the Round Table Conference a Sub-Committee known as the Minorities Committee was formed to consider the claims of the minorities. Its chief function was to make an endeavour to find a solution for the problem of communal representation. At the outset, the Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald acting as the chairman of the above mentioned Committee appealed to the Indian delegates to settle the communal question among themselves.

It must be pointed out that though they were demanding adequate safeguards for their community the Muslims were as vociferous in their demand for self-government as were other sections of the Indian delegation. Drawing attention to the Viceroy's announcement Jinnah reminded the Prime Minister:

... India expects the translation and fulfilment of these declarations. There never was a more momentous or graver issue in the history of the two nations than the present one on which hangs the fate of nearly one-fifth of the population of the world.²³

As far as the Muslim demands were concerned, initially Muslims favoured separate electorates and in its defence Mohammad Shafi emphasized that joint electorates instead of helping the cause of nationalism would be detrimental to it. But since the Hindu members like Chimanlal Setalvad, Raja

²² Shafaat Ahmad Khan to Captain Blunden, 12 May 1930, Hailey Collection.

²³ Indian Round Table Conference, n. 20, p. 145.
Narendranath, A. P. Patro, who were in full agreement with the other demands of the Muslims, insisted on joint electorates, the latter modified their original position in regard to separate electorates. At the fourth meeting of the Minorities Sub-Committee, Shafi announced that Muslims were prepared to accept joint electorates "in deference to the wishes of the sister communities and to the appeals that have been made to us." Great pressure was exerted upon Jinnah, Aga Khan and Shafi by the some other Muslim leaders not to give up separate electorates. Fazl-i-Husain issued a number of instructions to the Muslim delegates urging them not to compromise with the Hindus as he was scared of losing the confidence of the British. Feroz Khan Noon also informed the Aga Khan that the Punjab Muslims would never give up separate electorates. But Jinnah, Shafi and the Aga Khan remained firm as they had decided to take full responsibility for the decision. They were, however, prepared to give up separate electorates only on certain conditions. These conditions as enumerated by Shafi were that the rights enjoyed by Muslims in the minority provinces should be continued and in the Punjab and Bengal they should have joint electorates on population basis and the reservation of seats should be based on

24 Indian Round Table Conference, First Session, Proceedings of the Minorities Committee, p. 56.
Mohammad Ali's scheme. That scheme was devised at the time of the All Parties Conference in February but the details were worked out later on. According to it, a candidate was not to be declared elected unless he secured at least 40 per cent of the votes cast of his own community and at least 5 per cent of the votes cast by other communities wherever he belonged to a minority of 10 or less per cent and 10 per cent where he belonged to a large minority or majority. These conditions prescribed by the Muslim leaders were not new, but were the repetition of those agreed by the Congress in 1927, except for the novel idea suggested by Mohammed Ali whereby he wanted to ensure that other communities should also have some say in the election of a Muslim candidate.

Thus the Muslim attitude at the Conference reveals that the crux of the whole problem was not joint electorates or separate electorates but the reservation of seats in the Muslim majority provinces. The argument of the Muslim leaders was that while the Hindus enjoyed power and influence in eight provinces, at least in four provinces Muslims should have the same position. Shafi described the demand of his community as the recognition of the just rights of the Mussulmans in these four provinces, of their representation as majority in the majority of provinces. ...That will be all automatic

27 Indian Round Table Conference, n. 20, p. 94.
guarantee to good treatment." Muhammad Ali in his memorandum circulated to the delegates also expressed the same desire more forcefully:

... The Mussalmans desire - and this is the crux of their 14 points and not separate electorates - that there should be federal government so that the central unitary government with a permanent Hindu majority should not override them everywhere; ... that in the provinces of the Punjab and Bengal where they have small majorities in population which are unorganized and greatly controlled by Banyas and the Sikhs and the Hindu landlords as in Bengal, these majorities should be reserved ... the Mussalmans should be allowed to have their majority in all these four provinces as the Hindus have everywhere else.29

Muhammad Iqbal's presidential address at the twenty-first session of the All-India Muslim League at Allahabad on 29 December 1930 asking for the amalgamation of the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan which had given rise to so much misgivings among the Hindu Mahasabha delegates, can also be explained as conveying the same meaning - the desire of Muslims to have a solid block in the North where they could enjoy their majority rights.

Taking their cue from the Hindu Mahasabha, the Sikhs in the Punjab further complicated the entire situation by

28 Indian Round Table Conference, Proceedings of the Minorities Committee, p. 95.

29 "Last Words of Maulana Mohammad Ali", Maulana M. Ali's last letter to the Prime Minister of England, for publication and circulation to the members of the Round Table Conference, 1 January 1930, All India Congress Committee Files, N.M.M.L.

putting forward their rival claims. They constituted eleven per cent of the population in the Punjab and they were quite vocal in their demand that their special interests should be protected. They insisted on protection being provided to them on lines similar to those given to the Muslim minorities in other provinces. They refused to agree to a system of representation designed for the protection of the majority community. They held that their existing share of about 19 per cent seats in the Punjab was "too low in view of their historic, military and economic importance," and demanded that this be raised to 30 per cent. This could be secured only after making deductions from the quota of Muslim seats.

In Bengal the difficulty was created by the over-representation of Europeans, although their numerical strength did not entitle them to more than a seat or two. The need for proportional representation was explained by Fazl-ul-Huq by pointing out to the elections held in such bodies like municipalities and district boards where there were no separate electorates. He stressed that no Muslim could succeed in winning a single seat by means of an election without any reservation. Apart from this a Muslim could be elected only

31 Memorandum submitted by two Sikh delegates Sardar Ujjal Singh and Sardar Sampuran Singh at the first Round Table Conference, n.d., File No. 412, Jayakar Papers.
in two ways - either by becoming a member of the Hindu Maha-
sabha or by giving a written agreement that he would follow
his Hindu colleagues on every issue.

Once again the Hindu-Muslim settlement was within the
reach of Indian leaders and they would have been able to
present a united front to the government, had the Hindu Maha-
sabha been prepared to accommodate the Muslim wishes. But,
Moonje had come to attend the Conference fully armed with the
determination to maintain his opposition to the Muslim demands
until the end. Strict instructions were sent to him by his
partymen to be a diehard Hindu. He was asked to concede one-
third seats to the Muslims in the central legislature only on
the condition that along with provincial autonomy there was
provision for a strong central government with residuary
powers.

Other delegates like C. Y. Chintamani, Chimanal
Setalvad and Sardar Ujjal Singh challenged Moonje's right to
speak on behalf of the entire Muslim community. Setalvad
emphatically countered Moonje's arguments by saying that "the
Hindu delegates should not be taken as represented by the

32 Indian Round Table Conference, Proceedings of the
Minorities Committee, p. 117.

33 Moonje to Jayakar, 8 September 1930, Jayakar
Papers.

34 "An Appeal to the Hindu delegates of the Round
Table Conference", n.d., Jayakar Papers.
views that Dr Moonje has expressed in the meeting or any other organization in India." He stressed the need for devising adequate safeguards to make the minorities feel safe and satisfied and insisted that there should be reservation of seats either wholly or in some modified form (referring to Mohammad Ali's scheme) so that they would be able to secure their due protection in the legislation. Chintamani also told the Hindu delegates that the "abolition of separate electorates and the substitution therefore of joint electorates is so great a national advantage that the advocates of this change may in justice be called upon to pay a price for that change." Sapru, Setalvad and Sastri had approached Jinnah and the Aga Khan and had offered them a majority of 51 per cent in the Punjab. But the Sikhs refused to fall in line. Even Raja Narendra Nath had privately told Chintamani that although he had no objection to that proposal, he was not prepared to take responsibility for this view, and publicly take a stand opposing the Hindu Mahasabha's approach. Thus the Hindu-Muslim negotiations broke down.

The Government of India's despatch, published in the same year, had alluded to the low economic position of the Muslims and to their voting strength being lower than their

35 Indian Round Table Conference, Proceedings of the Minorities Committee, p. 108.
36 Ibid., p. 114.
37 Sapru to Raina, 22 December 1930, Sapru Papers.
numerical strength, and had devised a scheme to meet the Muslim demands. According to it, in the new provincial council in the Punjab the Muslims were to be given a majority of two over the Hindus and Sikhs combined and a proportion of 49 per cent of the House as a whole. But it failed to satisfy either party.

The first Round Table Conference thus ended without a settlement of the communal problem. Winding it up on 19 January 1931 the British Prime Minister observed that he had no intention of imposing his will on the communities through an award as he felt that the conditions were not conducive to that. Instead he exhorted both the Hindus and the Muslims to settle their differences by themselves. He said: "...the British Government has no desire to use your disagreement for any ulterior motives.... We sitting here cannot impose pains and penalties. We sitting here can declare rights and hand over to you the political power to see that those rights are enforced and respected." The Muslims were quite dissatisfied with the Prime Minister's statement and they felt that His Majesty's Government had gone "out of their way" to meet Hindu aspirations and had neglected their demand for safeguards. The Working


Committee of the All India Muslim Conference at its meeting on 7 February 1931 recorded its disappointment at the failure of the Conference to find "equitable and just settlement" of the Hindu-Muslim question. Once again it warned that no constitutional structure would appeal to Muslims which did not safeguard their rights and interests.

The Muslim apprehensions were really unfounded. A perusal of the Prime Minister's secret note on Hindu-Muslim representation reveals that he had decided to concede the Muslim demands. The weightage enjoyed by the Muslims in minority provinces was to continue. There was provision also for Muslim majority in the Punjab and Bengal. Only on the question of separate electorates, he did not commit himself at that stage. Instead he said that Muslims should give a trial to joint electorates with reserved seats or to a small proportion of open electorates in some provinces.

The new Viceroy, Lord Willingdon, had a strong bias against the Congress and he did not want to take the risk of alienating the Muslims and thus strengthening the Congress ranks. An idea of his thinking can be had from the following

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40 "Note on Hindu-Muslim Representation", copy of Prime Minister's Draft, Secret, Round Table Conference, 1930-31, Hailey Collection.

41 Aziz, n. 5, pp. 68-69.
telegram sent by him immediately after coming to India to the Secretary of State, Samuel Hoare:

It is of course of first importance that no ground should be given for suspicion, however illfounded, that Moslems may not in the sequel be fairly treated, or that they may be outmanoeuvred. There have been clear indications of hardening of Muslim opinion in India, and if they believe that Government will not ultimately protect their interests a situation of utmost gravity would be created here. A belief of this kind would at once deprive us of Muslim support. Further they might be driven to make the best terms they could with Congress and join the civil disobedience movement.42

The Muslim League did indeed try to seek rapprochement with Gandhi. Mohammad Shafi appealed to Gandhi to pay more attention to bridging the gulf between the two communities. Gandhi also was more keen than ever in his desire to reach a communal settlement. The wrecking of the first Round Table Conference because of Hindu-Muslim antagonism had deeply convinced him that it was useless to proceed with the work of framing the Constitution without a prior agreement between the two communities. He assured the Muslims that, in case he could arrive at a settlement with the government, the settlement of the communal question would engage his first attention. As a result of the Gandhi-Irwin truce, the Congress withdrew the civil disobedience movement and agreed to go to the Round Table Conference on the basis of Federation as an essential part of the Constitution.

42 Willingdon to Samuel Hoare, 7 January 1931, Templewood Collection, India Office Library, London.

43 Bombay Chronicle, 24 February 1931.
In a speech at Jamiat-ul-Ulema Conference, Gandhi talked about the need for an early solution of the communal question and his preparedness to agree to the Muslim demands. He said: "... as a Congressman and as a Hindu, I say that I wish to give the Muslims what they want. I do not wish to act like a Bania. I wish to leave everything to the honour of the Muslims. I would like you to put down whatever you want on a blank sheet of paper and I shall agree to it."

Now when Gandhi was prepared to agree to all the Muslim demands, the Nationalist Muslims started agitating against separate electorates. A. M. Khwaja wrote a very strong letter to Gandhi imploring him not to accede to the demand for separate electorates and 'betray' Muslims. He also pointed out that it was only the demand of the Muslims from minority provinces like U.P. and Bihar whose main concern was to safeguard the weightage enjoyed by them.

Efforts were also made by the Nationalist Muslims to influence the Muslims belonging to the All India Muslim League and All India Muslim Conference not to insist on separate electorates. At the All India National Muslim Conference held in Lucknow on 18 April 1931, negotiations were started with the Muslim League in order to pave the way for a settlement conducive "to the best interests of the country and community

44 Times of India, 3 March 1931.
45 A. M. Khwaja to Gandhi, 21 March 1931, A. M. Khwaja Papers, N.M.M.L.
Emphasizing that there was not much difference (with only one exception) in their viewpoints, Ansari reiterated the view that the anxiety of Muslims to secure certain safeguards and guarantees for their community in the future constitution of India was genuine and assured the anti-Congress Muslims that pro-Congress Muslims would do their best to secure all those demands. Mohammad Shafi reciprocated these sentiments by suggesting the convening of a Muslim Round Table Conference to "formulate unanimous demands of the Muslims" to be submitted to Gandhi. A Conference was held in Simla on 18 April 1931, those attending being Ali Imam and Ansari as the President and Secretary of the Muslim Nationalist Party; Jinnah representing the All India Muslim League; the Aga Khan, Shaukat Ali and Shafi Daudi representing the All India Muslim Conference; Kifayatullah, President of the Jamiat-ul-Ulema; Abdul Rahim, Mohammad Iqbal, Abdul Qayum, A. H. Ghuznawi and Abdulla Haroon representing major Muslim Provinces.

However, the discussions could not make much headway and it was left to the Nawab of Bhopal to make another attempt. It seems that the All India Muslim League had conveyed to the Nationalist Muslim Party that it was prepared to accept joint electorates if a referendum of the Muslims of a province made it

46 Leader, 20 April 1931.
47 Ibid.
clear that such was the wish of the majority among them.

In a joint meeting at Bhopal, the following formula was placed for the consideration of the Nationalist Muslim Party by Mohammad Shafi on behalf of his colleagues:

(a) Joint electorates to be introduced at the end of ten years with adult franchise, provided that if the majority of the Muslim members in any legislature, federal or provincial, agree to accept the joint electorates at any time before the expiry of ten years, separate electorates would be abolished.

(b) The first election under the new constitution to be on the basis of separate electorates, with a referendum on the question of joint versus separate electorates at the beginning of the fifth year of the first legislature.

Similarly on behalf of Nationalist Muslim Party, Sherwani placed the following formula for the consideration of those representing the All India Muslim Conference:

(a) Joint electorates to be adopted for the first ten years - on the expiry of which period, a referendum should be held on the question.

(b) In the first legislature 50 per cent of the Muslim members to be elected by joint electorates and 50 per cent by separate electorates. In the second two-thirds to be elected by joint electorate and one-third by separate electorate and thereafter by joint electorate and adult suffrage. 49

49 "Formulae regarding Muslim representation Proposed and Discussed at an Informal Meeting Held Under the Chairmanship of Nawab of Bhopal", n.d., S. A. Breivi Papers, N.M.M.L.
The two parties dispersed to ascertain the views of their respective committees. When they met again on 29 May, the All India Muslim Conference stuck to its guns and put its own formula. Its leaders argued that the first elections under the new constitution should be held on the basis of separate electorates and joint electorates should be introduced if before the expiry of the life of any legislature, a majority of the elected members demanded that a referendum should be taken on the question of joint versus separate electorates or if ten per cent of the Muslim electorates of any province desired.

This formula was unacceptable to the Nationalist Muslims as it was inconsistent with the resolutions of the All-India Nationalist Muslim Conference held at Lucknow. The prospects of Gandhi arriving at a settlement with the Muslims became remote after the failure of the Muslim themselves to compose their differences.

Gandhi was reluctant to attend the Round Table Conference in the absence of an agreement on the Hindu-Muslim question. He said: "...If we cannot set our house in order... I cannot speak with one voice." He also felt that he was not in a position to put forth the national demand as he did not have the support of the entire nation. He was realistic enough to admit that the Congress was too weak to seize power from unwilling hands "in the artificial surrounding of the Round Table Conference without the solid backing of Muslims." He
was, however, overruled by the Congress Working Committee which did not consider it advisable to postpone attending the Conference because of the failure to obtain a command settlement. The decision of Gandhi was interpreted as "playing into the hands of the enemy" and exposing the communities to "unnecessary misrepresentation". It was height of optimism on the part of the Working Committee of the Congress to entertain the hope of getting a Swaraj Constitution at the Round Table Conference without securing the support of the Muslims when Willingdon had set his mind on satisfying the Muslims by conceding their demands.

Having accepted the resolution, it was incumbent upon Gandhi to implement it fully. However, even when he agreed to attend the Round Table Conference he repeatedly insisted that his views were more safe and "more truly in consonance with the Lahore resolution on communal question". He also expressed his apprehensions about the proceedings of the conference and anticipated the failure of his mission. In a statement to the representatives of Al Abram, he expressed his doubts in the following words: "My expectations of the Conference are zero, if I am to base them on a survey of the horizon....

The Congress is prepared to pay the cost whatever it may be for

Thus the policy of the Congress far from satisfying Muslims of all the viewpoints and inspiring confidence in them, further alienated them as their feelings had been completely disregarded. In a public meeting of the Muslims of Calcutta, under the presidency of Maulana Abdul Majed Badauni, the All India Khilafat Committee, passed a resolution condemning the Congress Working Committee's formula on the communal problem as "more harmful and destructive than even the Nehru Report". Another resolution passed by them was that the Congress resolutions were manifestations of Hindu Raj mentality and would widen the gulf between the two communities. Shaukat Ali in his fiery outburst gave a warning to the Congress that if it was not willing to recognize Muslim demands, then they

51 Statement to Al Ahram, 6 September 1931, The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, ibid., p. 45.

52 The Congress Working Committee's formula scheme for a communal settlement laid down that joint electorates should form the basis of representation in the future constitution and that for Hindus in Sind, the Muslims in Assam and the Sikhs in the Punjab and North West Frontier Province and for Hindus and Muslims in any province where they were less than 25 per cent of the population, seats should be reserved in the Federal and Provincial Legislatures on the basis of population with the right to contest additional seats. It also agreed to the residuary powers being vested in the federating units and Sind being constituted into a separate province provided the people of Sind were prepared to bear the financial burden of the separate province. Indian Round Table Conference, Second Session, 7 September - 1 December 1931, Appendix 1, p. 57.
would ask the government to satisfy them and make peace." He also threatened a civil war if the Congress tried to force its views upon them. Before sailing for England to attend the Second Round Table Conference, Jinnah described the attitude of the Hindus as 'foolish' and said that without satisfying the Muslim demands, India could not progress. Explaining his position, he said: "I am an Indian first and a Muslim afterwards and I agree that no Indian can ever serve his country if he neglects the interests of Muslims, because it is by encouraging them that you will be able to serve your country."

When the Second Round Table Conference met in London on 7 September 1931, the difficulties before it were as formidable as they were in December last. The communal deadlock remained unresolved; there stood no chance of a communal settlement as the Muslim leaders were not prepared to modify their demands and neither the Congress nor the Hindu Mahasabha was prepared to accept them. In Britain, the Labour Government had been replaced by a coalition Government and though Ramsay MacDonald was still the Prime Minister, a strong conservative element headed by Baldwin had joined the cabinet.

All the parties had arrived in London equipped with a definite programme. The Muslims demands included separate electorates with seats in the Punjab and Bengal on a population

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53 Times of India, 5 September 1931.
54 Bombay Chronicle, 11 September 1931.
basis. The entrance of the Indian states into the federation would mean increased Hindu majority in the Federal Government. The Muslim representatives were, therefore, keen to counteract the Hindu majority by disallowing great powers to the Hindu dominated centre. They opposed weightage for the states in the central legislature and stuck to their old demand for one-third of the seats in the central legislature. The Aga Khan had told Samuel Hoare even before the conference had started that the Muslims could not consent to discuss responsibility at the centre in the Federal structure "till they know where they are." He insisted that the centre's power of interference in the provinces in case of emergency should rest with the Governor-General and not with the federal cabinet or federal legislature. He wanted the administration of law and order should be made a provincial subject and defence a Crown subject, not to be allotted to the Federal Government. He observed: "Unless the Moslem Provinces have some such protection, their position in the majority provinces will become one of absolute dependence on the Federal Government in which they will be always a smaller party."

In the Muslim delegation the real control rested with the conservative Muslim opinion in India like Shafaat Ahmad Khan and Zafrulla Khan who were in close touch with the Muslim representative to participate in the conference. But the Muslim

Conference leaders had clearly warned Willingdon that if the government contemplated the inclusion of Ali Imam and Ansari, the Muslims would be forced to reconsider their attitude towards further participation in the Round Table Conference. Their view finally prevailed.

Gandhi had brought with him the Congress scheme for communal settlement, providing for joint electorates as the basis of representation in the future constitution of India and reservation of seats for Hindus and Muslim in provinces where they were less than twenty-five per cent of the population. In the Minorities Committee, the Prime Minister once again acted as the chairman. Gandhi began by having informal talks with the various Muslim leaders like the Aga Khan and others. In these talks he accepted in his personal capacity a majority of one per cent for Muslims in the Punjab and Bengal. The main points of the agreement which were discussed between Gandhi and the Muslim leaders were:

(a) In the Punjab and Bengal a bare majority of one per cent was to be given to the Muslims in the legislatures; the question whether there would be joint electorates, with the necessary reservation of seats or separate electorates would be decided by a poll of the Muslim electors before the introduction of a new constitution.

(b) In the provinces where the Muslims were in a minority, the existing weightage of seats was to be maintained, but the question of joint or separate electorates was to be settled in the same way as in Bengal and the Punjab.
(c) In the federal legislature, the Muslim representation in both Houses was to be 26 per cent of the total number of British Indian representatives and of the quota assigned to the states, it was to be at least 7 per cent by convention with a view to Muslim representatives constituting one-third of both the Houses.

(d) Residuary powers were to vest in the federating provinces of British India.\textsuperscript{56}

Gandhi and the Muslim leaders, however, could not arrive at an agreement because the representatives of the various communities were not able to take decision on their own and were under the strict control of their constituents in India. Even Gandhi told the delegates that he did not have plenipotentiary powers and that any decision reached by him would have to be ratified by the Congress.

Various schemes had been prepared by the leaders of the different communities and it was very difficult to prepare an agreed plan on their basis. The Congress scheme was rejected by the Hindu Mahasabha. Then both Hindus and Sikhs did not agree with the Muslim demands. The common point in all the schemes was that in some provinces Hindus wanted to ensure their majority with a strong centre while in certain other Muslims wanted to dominate. No practical suggestion was made in any of these schemes by which the minority in any

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{56} Shafaat Ahmad to Nawab of Chhatari, 6 October 1931, Nawab of Chhatari Papers, N.M.M.L.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Devadas to Jawaharlal Nehru, 2 October 1931, Jawaharlal Nehru Papers.
\end{itemize}
province, to which ever community it belonged, would be in a position to influence the members of the legislature who would be returned on the votes of the majority community.

The Sikhs had suggested an alternative - either weighting of thirty per cent with no single community in majority or redistribution of the Punjab. In a memorandum Sardar Ujjal Singh and Sardar Sampuran Singh ridiculed Iqbal's suggestion made at the All-India Muslim League's Conference in December last as making "the dismemberment of India inevitable". They made it clear that the Sikhs were not prepared to accept a constitution which would relegate them to the position of an ineffective minority. For themselves they demanded a territorial rearrangement of the Punjab whereby they wanted Rawalpindi and Multan divisions minus Lyallpur and Montgomery districts, to be separated from the rest of the Punjab. There were overwhelmingly Muslim majority divisions with a population of seven million. Their suggestion was that these districts could be either formed as a separate Muslim majority province or amalgamated with North West Frontier Province.

On 2 October, Samuel Hoare wrote to Willingdon, giving him his impressions about the Conference. He wrote that the delegates were much further off than they were last year. He was convinced of the futility of expecting any resounding results.

58 “Sikhs and the New Constitution for India: Memorandum by Sardar Ujjal Singh and Sardar Sampuran Singh, 12 November 1931”, Indian Round Table Conference, Second Session, Appendix IV, p. 64.
from the Conference as there seemed little chance of a communal settlement emerging from the deliberations of the Minorities Committee. He was most anxious to avoid "an open rupture, particularly a rupture that will align Great Britain on one side and united India on the other."

By the end of November, the Viceroy was also certain that the Secretary of State would have to give the "hookum" on the minorities question and safeguards:

...I have always felt that it was quite difficult for the communities to agree among themselves and His Majesty's Government is bound to have to decide the communal question and say to them, 'you cannot settle this for yourselves, here is a scheme we lay down and this must hold good until such time as you can knock your heads together and agree'.

Gandhi had already reported the inability of the Indian delegates to find a solution of the Hindu-Muslim question. But as the spokesman of the Congress, he was still keen on broaching the question of India's constitutional status. The cause for the failure of negotiations was laid by him at the door of the government. He accused the latter of deliberately bringing the communal question to the forefront. Also he did not agree with the viewpoint before the committee by the Prime Minister that the inability to solve the communal problem was a stumbling block in the way of constitution building. His con-

59 Samuel Hoare to Willingdon, 2 October 1931, Templewood Collection.

60 Willingdon to Samuel Hoare, 13 November 1931, Templewood Collection.
tention was that the solution was to be "...the crown of the Swaraj constitution and not its foundation".

The Muslim leaders were reluctant to agree to the proposal made by Gandhi that the proceedings of the Minorities Committee should be adjourned sine die and the work of constitution making in the Federal Structure Committee should go on. The result of his endeavours to override the wishes of the Muslims was that the latter in association with other minority communities like Depressed Classes, Indian Christians, the Anglo-Indians and the British community evolved a pact embodying an agreement with regard to inter-communal problems. The chief characteristic of the Minorities Pact was that the five parties to the pact pledged themselves to support each other and separate electorates and weightage were granted to all the communities. It also conceded all the Muslim demands including the claim for a majority to be guaranteed by statute in the Punjab and Bengal.

Thus out of two hundred seats in the Bengal Legislature, Muslims received 102, thirty-five going to the depressed classes, twenty to Europeans and two to Christians. Out of a hundred seats in the Punjab legislature, fifty-one were reserved for Muslims, fourteen for Hindus, ten for Depressed Classes and

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twenty for Sikhs. Again in the lower chamber of the central legislature, Muslims were to have 100 out of 300 seats, forty-five seats were to be reserved for the Depressed Classes, ten for Sikhs and thirty-two for other minorities.

Reports became current in the Conference circles of Muslim entente with the British conservatives for the purpose of wrecking the Conference, limiting the reforms at the centre, and Muslims receiving all their demands contained in the fourteen points. A report prepared by Sir Edward Benthall, a British Indian representative to the Round Table Conference and a leader of the British commercial community and presented to the Associated Chambers of Commerce revealed the working of the minds of British statesmen and European interests in India. It revealed that the "right wing of the Government had made up its mind to break up the conference and to fight the Congress." It also made clear the fact that Europeans in India only wanted such changes which would make administration more efficient and not democratic government. He wrote on this point: "...the two things which really interested Parliament were the safety and prosperity of their own countrymen in India and their trusteeship for the masses."  The following statement in the Report is illustrative of Anglo-Muslim entente:

They promised us support and they gave it in full measure. In return they asked us that we should not forget their economic

plight in Bengal and that we should without pampering them do what we can to find places for them in European firms, so that they may have a chance to improve their material position and the general standing of their community. 64

The Prime Minister in his concluding speech at the final plenary session on 1 December reaffirmed his belief in all-India federation, but announced that owing to the absence of the settlement of the key question of how to safeguard the minorities under a responsible central government, the conference would not further proceed with the consideration of the nature of federal executive and its relationship with the legislature. As the chairman of the Minorities Committee, he offered to arbitrate on the communal problem if all parties undertook to abide by the decision. In despondency, a group headed by Madan Mohan Malaviya wrote to the Prime Minister that they would agree to it. Even Gandhi gave his assent to this proposal by informing Ramsay MacDonald that his non-signature did not imply that the Congress would resist the Prime Minister's arbitration. Thus the net result of the first and second Round Table Conference was that the communal question remained unresolved and the gulf between the two communities widened. The initiative now passed into the hands of the British Prime Minister, who came forward with his own award on that question.

64 Ibid.