Chapter V

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As a result of the Provincial Assembly elections under the Act of 1935, held in 1937, the Congress commanded a majority in the Legislative Assemblies of six - out of eleven provinces and emerged as the largest party in two other provinces. Its position in the country thus became quite strong and formidable. In contrast, the performance of the Muslim League was not at all impressive; it had won only 109 out of 482 seats contested. Besides, it also failed to win a majority of seats in any of the four Muslim-majority provinces. The

1  Total number of seats in Legislative Assembly
   Seats won by the Congress in the election

   Assam   108  35
   Bengal  250  54
   Bihar   152  95
   Bombay  175  88
   C.P.    112  71
   Madras  215  159
   N.W.F.P. 50  19
   Orissa  60  36
   Punjab  175  18
   Sind    60  8
   U.P.    228  133

Return showing the Results of Elections in India, 1937 (Cmd. 5589)

2  Provinces  Total No.of seats allotted to Muslims in the Legis. Assby. of 1937
   Seats won by the Muslim League in the election

   Assam   34  9
   Bengal  117  39
   Bihar   39  -
   Bombay  29  20
   C.P.    14  -
   Madras  28  10
   N.W.F.P. 36  -
   Orissa  4  -
   Punjab  84  -
   Sind    33  3
   U.P.    64  27
   Ibid.  -  -


results created despair among the League's leaders as all their calculations had proved wrong. They had contested the elections with the hope that as a result of the Communal Award, they would be able to have full sway over the majority Provinces, but now this hope was dashed to the ground.

The only redeeming feature for the Muslim League was that the performance of Congress in the Muslim majority areas was also not impressive. The results of the election showed that excepting the North-West Frontier Province, it was not popular with the Muslim masses. Jawaharlal Nehru, President of the Congress at that time, admitted that the latter had failed in its efforts to secure Muslim seats. After the elections, he remarked: "Only in regard to the Muslim seats did we lack success... We failed because we had long neglected working among Muslim masses and we could not reach them in time." But on the whole the Congress leaders were thrilled at the results. The failure of Muslim League to win enough seats was interpreted as the vindication of the Congress policy towards the communal problem.

The Congress now started an intensive effort to establish contact with the Muslim masses. Nehru issued a circular to all Provincial Congress Committees to pay special attention to the enrolment of Muslim members. Each Provincial Congress Committee was asked to appoint a special committee to

3 Times of India, 3 March 1937.
increase Congress contact with the masses - rural and urban. The office of the All India Congress Committee started a special department and orders were issued to district and local authorities to issue notices in Urdu in all areas where there was a sizeable Urdu reading population. The Congress also adopted a very rigid attitude towards the Muslim League. Nehru openly expressed doubt about the capability of the League to function on a political plane since it was, according to him, only a religious body and stressed that "the time has gone when religious groups as such can take part in the political and economic struggle. That may have been so in medieval time: it is inconceivable today". He also refused to consider the Muslim League as the representative organization of the Muslims. In a letter to Khaliquzzaman, he wrote:

...Why should I accept it as the representative of the Muslims of India when I know it represents a handful of Muslims at the top who deliberately seek refuge in the name of religion to avoid discussing mass problems. I have a certain measure of intelligence and I have studied political, economic and social problems for a quarter of a century now.... Am I to insult my intelligence by talking baby-talk of an age gone by? ... Do you not see that this policy which the Muslim League has faltered is a policy more injurious to the Muslims of India than anything that a majority could do would be?  

4 Circular No. 22, 28 July 1937, issued by Jawaharlal Nehru, the Congress President, Rajendra Prasad Papers.
5 Times of India, 23 April 1937.
6 Nehru to Khaliquzzaman, 7 July 1937, Nehru Papers.
The attitude of the Congress, particularly that of Nehru was not unjustifiable. It was not inconsistent with the results of the elections and taking into consideration the disorganized and weak condition of the Muslim League. The Ahrars, the Muslims inside the Congress and Jamiat-ul-Ulema were co-operating with the Congress. The youth of Aligarh University were exasperated with the League. In the Punjab, the Unionist Party and the Ahrars were quite strong. In Sind and North West Frontier Province, the League was quite insignificant. In Bihar, the majority of the Muslim seats had been captured by Independents and in Bengal Fazlul Huq's Krishak Praja Party was supreme. Only in U.P. and Bombay the League had some standing.

The Congress victory coupled with the Congress decision to contact the Muslim masses over his head seriously alarmed Jinnah. The immediate reaction to its electoral defeat on the part of the League was the realization of its own disunity and lack of organization. Jinnah set his mind on remedying those two shortcomings. He started making efforts to consolidate the League. The realization dawned upon him that it did not represent the entire Muslim community and was "a preserved conclave of titled and conservative people." In an appeal to Muslims, he said:

For the upliftment and advancement of Musalmans and working for their welfare much work remains to be done in the political, economic and social

7 Times of India, 27 April 1937.
spheres of life by establishing different centres in India for supplying up-to-date information and knowledge and establishing relief centres to aid and assist Muslims in different parts of India. Need was also felt for an independent press for which donations were made by a few Muslims of U.P. for the advancement of Muslim cause and interests. A plan for mass-contact among Muslims was also chalked out. At the meeting of the U.P. Muslim League Parliamentary Board held at the residence of Raja of Mahmudabad, it was decided that all the twenty-seven members of the Muslim League elected to the U.P. Legislative Assembly would raise Rs.100 for their respective constituencies, and that each member of the Working Committee of the Board was to pay Rs.500 for the purpose of carrying propaganda among the Muslim masses.

Jinnah's influence was also at a low ebb. After his first meeting with the Indian leaders, Linlithgow had gathered the impression that Jinnah did not command the full allegiance of his followers. Jinnah himself had complained to him that the government did not pay sufficient attention to the Muslims and also mentioned the risk of Muslims being driven into the 'arms' of Congress because of the weak position of the League. After the acceptance of office by the Congress Ministers, a

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8 Times of India, 5 June 1937.
9 Ibid., 27 July 1937.
growing number of Muslims, thinking that Congress Ministries would be in a position to help them, shifted their allegiance from the Muslim League to the Congress. Given the weak and disorganized condition of the League, the defections inside its own rank further undermined its position in the eyes of the Congress. This was the background of the Congress-League coalition talks.

The coalition issue in U.P. has been the subject of much controversy and it has been repeatedly alleged that the decision of the Congress to back out from its promise to form coalition ministries was a fateful decision which led to the demand for partition. While there is no doubt that the failure to have a coalition ministry in U.P. had a major impact on the evolution of Muslim attitude towards the Congress, but evidence from the unpublished sources does not indicate the existence of any prior agreement about the formation of coalition ministries. However, it is a fact that at the time of the elections, the relations between the League and the Congress were quite cordial and there was a general hope that they might work together after the elections also. The League election board had some old Congressmen on it and the most powerful worker on behalf of the League was Maulana Husain Ahmad who had always been sympathetic towards the Congress. The

election campaign was more a tussle against the Agriculturist Party of big zamindars headed by Nawab of Chhatari than a confrontation between the League and the Congress. During his tours even Nehru had sometimes supported the League candidates. The Jamiat-ul-Ulema leaders also supported them.

After the elections, however, the anti-Congress group in the League became dominant: the President of U.P. League Parliamentary Board joined the Interim Ministry. Many members of the Parliamentary Board had resigned in disgust; chief among them were Maulana Husain Ahmad and Hafiz Ibrahim. Towards the end of June Khaliquzzaman, the U.P. Muslim League leader, approached the Congress with the idea of forming coalition ministries. Before that in March their Parliamentary Board had offered co-operation to the U.P. Congress Party on the basis of its Wardha programme and had also expressed its readiness to abide by the discipline of the Congress. The idea conveyed by Khaliquzzaman to Nehru was that he was working for a close co-operation with the Congress. When Nehru objected to his close association with the League leaders who, he felt, had joined hands with British imperialism, Khaliquzzaman replied that he had associated himself with League with the intention of routing out the influence of the reactionary group. He also informed Nehru that he was "torn between two loyalties." At the same time he complained against

the Congress policy of contact with the masses which he felt had further contributed towards stiffening the opposition of reactionaries.

Towards the end of June, overtures were made by him and Nawab Ismail Khan to the Congress with the idea of securing ministries for themselves. Already in April Harry Haig, the Governor of U.P. who had some inkling of these developments had informed Linlithgow about Khaliquzzaman's flirtation with the Congress. He had also mentioned about Govind Ballabh Pant telling him that the Congress had offered two seats in the cabinet to the Muslims. Khaliquzzaman who was Chairman of the U.P. Parliamentary Board, had also invited Pant to perform the hoisting of the Congress flag over the Municipal Office in Lucknow. In a subsequent meeting with Maulana Azad held in Lucknow, Khaliquzzaman went to the extent of expressing his readiness to give him a 'blank cheque' provided he was prepared to include himself and Nawab Ismail Khan in the ministry. The Congress leaders got attracted by the idea of the whole Muslim League ceasing to exist as a separate political group and being practically absorbed by the Congress. The Congress could not resist the temptation of liquidating the League, as is clear from Nehru's letter to Rajendra Prasad:

13 Ibid., 21 July 1937.
14 Haig to Linlithgow, 23 April 1937, Linlithgow Papers.
15 Nehru to Rajendra Prasad, 21 July 1937, Nehru Papers.
...the alternative was worth having if it could be secured. This was the winding up of the Muslim League group in the U.P. and its absorption with Congress. This would have a great effect not only in U.P. but all over India and outside. This would mean a free field for over work without the communal troubles. This would knock over the British Government which relied so much on these troubles.

Maulana Azad contends that the effort to have a Congress-League coalition failed because of Nehru's insistence that the League should not be given more than one seat in the Ministry. This seems to be an over-simplification because the negotiations did not break down over the number of Muslim Leaguers to be taken. Maulana Azad seems to have relied on his memory when he asserts that the refusal of Nehru torpedoed the negotiations. The fact is that the latter was prepared to include both Khaliquzzaman and Nawab Ismail Khan provided they agreed to the conditions put before them.

No doubt, Nehru feared reaction among the Congress Muslims in particular who were going to be excluded from office in preference to those who might appear as just opportunists. Eventually it was decided to offer 'stringent conditions' to the Muslim League group and to include two of their leaders in the Ministry only if they accepted those conditions. The conditions laid down were that the March resolution of the Working Committee on Congress policy in the

16 Ibid.
legislatures was to be accepted fully. The Muslim League was to be wound up including the U.P. Parliamentary Board. All the Muslim League members of Legislative Assembly were to become full members of the Congress Party and to abide by the discipline of the party. In the bye-elections the League could not put up a separate candidate. Khaliquzzaman had agreed to all the conditions except two: the winding up of the League's Parliamentary Board and desisting from setting up separate candidates at the bye-elections. In his autobiography, Khaliquzzaman has tried to exonerate himself from the lure of a minister's post and has instead put the blame on Maulana Husain Ahmad by saying that the latter was 'preparing' ground for a coalition with the Congress and for securing ministership in the Cabinet. But he has exposed himself by also enclosing a letter from Maulana Ahmad Said, the Secretary of the Jamiat-ul-Ulema. An excerpt from this letter speaks for itself:

17 The Working Committee at its meeting held in Wardha on 1st of March 1937 had stipulated that any member of a Provincial Assembly, not elected on behalf of the Congress but willing to take the Congress pledge and abide by Congress principles and discipline, might be taken into the Congress Party in that Legislature. *Indian Annual Register, 1937*, vol. 1, p. 176.

18 Nehru to Rajendra Prasad, 21 July 1937.

...do let me know how far it is true that if seats for yourself and Nawab Ismail Khan could be found in the cabinet, a settlement might have been possible with the Congress, and the Congress was ready to give one seat but you were not prepared to leave Nawab Ismail Khan behind and there was no room for him. Therefore an agreement could not be reached. Is it also true that Rafi Ahmad Qidwai to whom you had offered full help and did not put up a candidate against him proved disloyal to you? 20

It is to be noted here that Khaliquzzaman had started negotiations with the Congress without any direction from the Muslim League. He had, of course, hoped that his party would accept his lead. However, when Jinnah came to know of Khaliquzzaman's overtures to the Congress, he did not spare any effort to frustrate them. Jinnah succeeded in exerting his influence and did not let Khaliquzzaman enter into any bargain with the Congress. At the meeting of the Muslim League Parliamentary Board at Lucknow in May, he reiterated that the League would not tolerate any policy of merging with the Congress.

Something similar to U.P. had happened in Bombay also. The information as given by K. M. Munshi reveals that Jinnah had offered to co-operate with the Congress provided the two persons nominated by him were included in the cabinet. It was suggested to Jinnah that his nominees would have to accept the Congress discipline so long as they were ministers.

20 Ahmad Said to Khaliquzzaman, ibid.
21 Leader, 17 May 1937.
and also accept the principle of joint responsibility. Jinnah insisted that his nominees would not be amenable to the discipline of the Congress and they would not even accept the doctrine of joint responsibility. Jinnah was determined not to yield to Congress dictates and saw in the Congress attempt to annihilate the League a portent of the treatment the Muslims would receive at the hands of the Hindus in the future. It was clear to him that the Congress was not prepared to associate the Muslim League in the administration of the country unless it merged itself with it.

Jinnah issued a rejoinder to Khaliquzzaman not to pursue with his efforts to conciliate the Congress. He wrote: "... it would be useless for any individual or individuals to effectively carry the Muslims behind them if any settlement is arrived at with a particular group". He described the coalition talk in U.P. as the Congress attempt to create disruption in the League's ranks. He indeed felt that the Congress was not keen for a settlement and was only making attempts to split the League. The Bundelkhand bye-election held in June 1937 had served as a morale booster for the League as it had defeated the Congress candidate.

The Muslim League had won this elections by carrying on a communal propaganda. An atmosphere of hatred against

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22 Oral History Transcript of K. M. Munshi's interview, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

23 Times of India, 26 June 1937.
the Congress was created by raising the slogan 'Islam in danger'. In fact it had been a 'trial of strength' between the Congress and League. Nehru had taken a personal interest in this election as he felt that "...a victory ... in this election would indeed be a triumph for the Congress and our cause" and also a "point of honour". At the annual session of the League held in Lucknow, the Congress was severely criticized. The Chairman of the Reception Committee, Raja of Mahmudabad, struck a note of grief at the Congress attitude and said:

...A delicate political situation has been created in our own country. The majority community refused to recognize even the existence of the Muslim community as such and it refused to work in co-operation with our leaders for national advancement.25

In his presidential address, Jinnah spoke very bitterly against the Congress; because of its "demand for unconditional surrender and attempts to liquidate the League" and exhorted the Muslims to organize themselves and be united:

...They [Muslims] must realize that the time has come when they should concentrate and devote their energies to self-organization and

24 An appeal to the electorate of Bundelkhand" in Urdu by Shaukat Ali, All India Congress Committee File, 1938.

In another bye-election in the Punjab held in May 1938, a Muslim League candidate, Shaikh Muhammad Sadiq with the support of Unionist Party defeated Saifuddin Kitchlew who stood as the Congress candidate and also Chaudhuri Afzal Haq, the Ahrar candidate.

the full development of their power to the exclusion of every other consideration.... We must develop power and strength till the Mussalmans are fully organized and have acquired that power and strength which must come from the solidarity and the unity of the people.

No settlement with the majority is possible as no Hindu leader speaking with any authority shows any concern or genuine desire for it. An honouring settlement can only be achieved between equals; and unless the two parties learn respect and fear each other, there is no solid ground for any settlement. Offers of peace by the weaker party always mean a confession of weakness and an invitation to aggression. Appeals to patriotism, justice and fairplay and for goodwill fall flat.26

What Jinnah had in mind was that sufficient pressure brought upon Congress by a solid Muslim front might result in Congress adopting a more reasonable attitude towards them.

Jinnah also changed his stand on the question of federation. Earlier it was condemned as not being democratic - now his plea was that it was detrimental to the interest of Muslims. He urged the British government to refrain from its enforcement as he considered the scheme to be detrimental to the interests of the people of India generally and to those of the Muslims particularly. Instead of pleading for Hindu-Muslim unity as he often used to do at the League sessions, now he started insisting that League should be treated as its equal by the Congress. Jinnah's main concern

26 Ibid., pp. 165-6.
was that it should be conceded as the sole Muslim organization.

Other Muslim leaders were no less worried about the political future of their community. Iqbal had also exhorted Jinnah to expedite the work of organization "more vigorously than ever" and stated that they "should not rest till Muslim governments are established in the five provinces and reforms are granted to Baluchistan." It was for the first time at the Lucknow session that the League became a mass organization and opened its membership to all Muslims who had attained the age of eighteen. It changed its creed and decided to demand full independence. It also chalked out a programme for revitalizing the organization. The greatest achievement for the League at this session was that its lead came to be acknowledged by the Muslim majority provinces also. Sikander Hyat Khan, Premier of the Punjab, entered into a pact with Jinnah whereby he pledged to follow his lead in all-India matters. Similarly Fazlul Huq of Bengal also acknowledged Jinnah's leadership. This gave a new position of strength to the League.

While trying to unite all Muslims under his leadership, Jinnah had not yet given up all hope for a settlement with the Congress. He requested Gandhi to formulate some proposals for

27 Jamil-ud-din, ed., Speeches and Writings of Mr Jinnah (Lahore, 1943), vol. 1, p. 29.

Hindu-Muslim unity. But Gandhi did not seem to be very keen to arrive at an understanding with him. He gave an unconvincing reply to Jinnah and wrote: "...What proposals can I make except to ask you on bended knees to be what I had thought you were." He told Jinnah that since he had accepted Azad as his guide, Jinnah could open conversation with him. Jinnah, of course, did not have any constructive proposal to make. He used to emphasize again and again that the matters which were agitating the Muslims were the Fourteen Points, and to demand that the Congress should withdraw all opposition to the Communal Award; the share of the Muslims in state services should be fixed by statutory enactment; Muslim personal laws and culture should be guaranteed by statute; Muslims should have religious and cultural freedom; Muslim majorities in the provinces should not be affected by any territorial adjustments; the Bande Mataram song should be given up; Urdu should be the national language of India; Muslim representation in the local bodies should be governed by the principles underlying the Communal Award, separate electorates and population strength; setting up of coalition ministries and the recognition of the Muslim League as the one authoritative and representative organization of Muslims.

29 Gandhi to Jinnah, 3 February 1938. Nehru-Jinnah Correspondence including Gandhi-Jinnah and Nehru-Nawab Ismail Correspondence (Allahabad, 1938), p. 83.

As far as withdrawal of Congress opposition to Communal Award was concerned, Nehru told Jinnah that the "Communal Award, unsatisfactory as it is holds the field for the present and till such time as may be altered by mutual agreement of the parties concerned." In his correspondence with Subhas Bose, the Congress President, Jinnah insisted that "any agreement arrived at should be based on a clear understanding of the position of Congress and League." All the time Jinnah was deliberately insisting on the most extravagant demand of the Muslim League being accepted as the only organization of Muslims since he must have gauged that Congress could not afford to accede to it. Khaliquzzaman has also mentioned that Jinnah had not yet made up his mind on any definite ideas and the basic question which was confronting the Muslims at that time was what was to be their demand now. In a tone of self-adulation, he writes:

...The question was: What should be our demand now? We had already secured our weightage and separate electorates under the Communal Award and after 1936 no demand by the Hindu community as such was made for its abrogation.... It was a piece of good luck for us that Congress fought shy of accepting the Muslim demand for the recognition of League as an authoritative and representative organization of Muslims on such a flimsy pretext while yet at the same time wooing and running after the League. If Congress had accepted the position at the time when demand was made by the League, I wonder what positive demands we could then have made.32

31 Nehru to Jinnah, 6 April 1938.
32 Khaliquzzaman, n. 19, p. 178.
On the other hand, the Congress leaders, particularly Nehru, adopted a complacent attitude. His reply to Jinnah was quite vague. He refused to consider the demands outlined by Jinnah and told him that before taking them into consideration "the political and economic background of the free India we are working for has to be kept in mind for ultimately that is the controlling factor." He made no reference to the communal issue, but referred instead to the general international situation and to the condition of the masses:

...Another matter has assumed an urgent and vital significance and this is the exceedingly critical international situation and the probability of war. This must therefore be considered the governing factor of the situation and almost everything else becomes of secondary importance for all our efforts and petty arguments will be of little avail, if the very foundation is upset.

...I have carefully looked through the various matters to which you have drawn attention in your letter and its enclosure and I find that there is nothing in them which refers to or touches the economic demands of the masses or affects the all-important question of poverty and unemployment. 33

Nehru was not prepared to consider the League's demand for statutory guarantees because it involved changes of the constitution, while his main concern was to do away with the then existing constitution. What he was prepared to do was to commit that in a future constitution of India, certain guarantee would be added. About coalition ministries he added that a ministry must have a definite political and economic programme and policy. 34

33 Nehru to Jinnah, April 6, 1938, Nehru Papers.
34 Ibid.
Jinnah was repelled by the "militant spirit" and "arrogance" showed by Nehru. It was obvious to him that the Congress had decided not to recognize the Muslim League as a force to be reckoned with. Apart from Jinnah, other Muslims like Syed Mahmud and Maulana Azad were also growing critical of Congress attitude towards Muslims. Syed Mahmud, who had

35 Jinnah to Nehru, April 12, 1938, Nehru Papers.

36 Syed Mahmud had been a close associate of Nehru in political matters. But after the installation of Congress ministries, they started drifting away from each other because Syed Mahmud had some misgivings regarding the working of the ministries. What was most unpalatable to Nehru was a remark made by Syed Mahmud in a letter where he had said, "What is little understood and never learnt in India is facing facts." He had also desired that the minorities should be given such powers by the constitution that they could throw out the government of the day. Nehru's replies to Syed Mahmud's letters show that he was not prepared to change his views. He openly said, "There is nothing strange for me to differ from others. In some ways I differ from every one of my colleagues... It has dawned upon me that both on the political question and the communal question, our approaches are entirely different and in fact somewhat hostile to each other... I hold strong views and I am not likely to give them up." Nehru to Syed Mahmud, 12 October 1940, Nehru Papers.

37 In a letter written on 15 August 1938 to Rajendra Prasad, Azad made a critical evaluation of the Congress policy on the communal question. Making a retrospective analysis of the communal question since 1928, he concluded that the Congress had delayed the solution of the Hindu-Muslim question. That was the main reason why it had taken such a complicated turn at that moment. His contention was that if "we had settled the matter at that time /in 1928 Jinnah was asking for reservation of seats in Punjab and Bengal in case Adult franchise was not established/, the whole misunderstanding between the Congress and Muslims would have disappeared for ever." Azad to Rajendra Prasad, 15 August 1938, Urdu, Rajendra Prasad Papers.
been a very close friend of Nehru, was drifting away from him so far as their approach to communal question was concerned. The immediate cause for resentment on the part of Syed Mahmud was the Nagpur session of Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad held on 24 April 1936, where Congress conceded to Hindu equal status with Urdu. This had upset Syed Mahmud so much that he had decided to retire from the political life. In desperation he wrote that if this Hindi-Urdu controversy was not solved, there would not be any chance of united action between the Hindus and Muslims. He was particularly disturbed by Gandhi's speech where he had used the word "Hindi yani Hindustani" to be the national language of India. The explanation given by Nehru was that a large number of people from South India had attended the session and they apprehended that attempts were being made on behalf of Hindustani to overshadow them. Gandhi's attempt was to "win over those reluctant and suspicious writers from the South and the West to the ideal of Hindustani as a common language for India." Nehru also explained that Hindi itself meant use of both scripts. While the explanation offered by Nehru can partially explain the use of the word 'Hindi' by Gandhi, yet a letter written by the latter in August 1937 leads one to doubt the correctness of the justification given by Nehru. Gandhi had written to Nehru:

38 Syed Mahmud to Rajendra Prasad, 24 April 1936, Urdu, Rajendra Prasad Papers.
39 Nehru to Syed Mahmud, 24 September 1936, Rajendra Prasad Papers.
...You should not hesitate to express the hope that as Hindus and Muslims are one day bound to be one at heart, they will also, who speak Hindustani adopt one script, i.e. Devanagari, because of its being more scientific and being akin to the great provincial scripts of the languages descended from Sanskrit.

...I take it that my endorsement of your suggestion does not mean that I must ask the Hindi Samellan to give up the use of the word 'Hindi'.

While Azad regretted that the question of the script should not have been taken up for discussion, Zakir Husain pleaded to Rajendra Prasad to "grant the advocates of Urdu what they wanted for in the interests of a united Indian people you can never give them too much." But the Congress leaders failed to realize the seriousness of the growing ill-will among the Muslims on the language and other questions. Nehru had told Syed Mahmud that he was unable to get excited about the communal problem as it seemed to him an unreal affair. For him "the vital factor in the world is the fierce tussle that is going on between progress and reaction." His own way of looking at things was completely different from others. "The vital factor is the problem of poverty and unemployment" and everything else was 'subsidiary' to it. He was also sure that this was the "right way" and regretted that this attitude was "strangely lacking in most other people especially in those who talk and write so much about Hindi and Urdu."

40 Gandhi to Nehru, 3 August 1937, Nehru Papers.
41 Zakir Husain to Rajendra Prasad, 24 August 1937, Rajendra Prasad Papers.
42 Nehru to Syed Mahmud, 24 September 1936, Syed Mahmud Papers.
Because of this attitude Muslim uneasiness and distrust of the Congress continued to grow. The Muslim League, in its bitterness, tried its best to fan the flames of discontent by publicising the alleged insolent behaviour of Congress Ministries. Most of the complaints related to forcing Muslim school children to sing Bande Mataram, the Hindu-Urdu controversy, unpleasant incidents outside Mosques and efforts made by Congress to prevent Muslim representatives from being elected to local bodies. A committee was appointed by the Council of the All India Muslim League to make an enquiry into the grievances of Muslims in the various Congress governed provinces. The report presented by the Committee known as Pirpur Report confirmed these charges against the Congress ministries. The Pirpur Report pointed out:

...Whatever may be the underlying principle of Congress nationalism and whatever may be the justification for the foregoing incidents - the fact remains that the average Hindu is inclined to associate Swaraj with Ramraj and Congress Government with Hindu government. The Muslims feel that notwithstanding the non-communal professions of the Congress and the desire of a few Congress leaders to follow a truly national policy, a vast majority of the Congress members are Hindus who look forward, after many centuries of British and Muslim rule to the establishment of purely Hindu raj.44

43 Report of the Enquiry Committee appointed by the Council of the All India Muslim League to enquire into Muslim Grievances in Congress Provinces, 15 November 1938 (Pirpur Report) (Delhi, 1938), p. 7.

A sub-committee was also appointed by the Working Committee of Provincial Muslim League of Bihar to make an enquiry into the grievances and hardships of the Muslims at the hands of the Congress government, including cases of injustice towards Muslims during Hindu-Muslim confrontation on the occasion of the Bakr-Id, Muharram or Hindu festivals. The Report published is known as Shareef Report. This report alleged the Muslims in Bihar were living in a state of constant fear of attack upon their life and property in different parts of the province.

The common complaint of Muslims in all the Congress-ruled provinces was that the Muslims were much worse off than they were under the previous government. Pointing out the communal tendencies of the Congress regime in Central Provinces and Berar, the Pirpur report mentioned that Central Provinces Congress Committee had issued instructions that while a Hindu could enlist himself as a member of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Congress at one and the same time, no Muslim could become a member both of the Muslim League and the Congress. This has been corroborated by Maulana Azad also. In a letter written to Rajendra Prasad he referred to the discriminatory action of the Congress and contended that it was not only a complaint


46 Pirpur Report, n. 43, p. 49.
of the other groups but also of Congress Muslims. If the latter could not have any connection with the Muslim League why was it tolerated that a member of the Hindu Mahasabha was simultaneously a member of Congress also? He requested him to remove the complaints of Muslims which had perturbed Muslim nationalists also and implored him to take some immediate decisive action to remedy the situation. Fazlul Haq had made a statement that the Muslims were being oppressed in Bihar and particularly in Bhagalpur. Azad also requested Rajendra Prasad that Bhagalpur affairs should not be allowed to get worse and asked him to take some action personally as appeals had been sent by Congress Muslims also. Syed Mahmud fiercely criticized the working of the Congress ministries and asserted that "such belief was not the effect of propaganda alone". In a very frank letter to Nehru he wrote: "...let me tell you in general terms that the Congress has failed to properly and effectively govern particularly in this province [Bihar] where it has definitely misgoverned." He also criticized the Congress Ministries as being full of provincialism, caste prejudices and revivalism.

Similar account of Congress misgovernment in U.P. was given by Sapru to Inglis (special correspondent of The Times)

47 Azad to Rajendra Prasad (Urdu), 8 December 1937, Rajendra Prasad Papers.

48 Syed Mahmud to Nehru, 4 December 1938, Syed Mahmud Papers.
on 7 March 1940. According to him it was evident that altemative government was impossible and therefore it led to "much demoralisation of public life and great deal of arrogance on the part of Congress ministries" which was the main cause for the dissatisfaction with their conduct and policy among non-Congress elements. He also wrote that Congressmen openly interfered with the magistrates and judges and he cited some cases of such interference which came up before the Allahabad High Court. He did not accuse Congress of having committed atrocities on minorities but expressed the view that "there is no doubt that the rank and file of the Congressmen in the district alienated the Muslim sentiment... and gave rise to the impression that the Congress government could do anything." 49

Sultan Ahmed also used very harsh words against the Congress ministers and his letter shows the disgust of Muslims with the Congress. He wrote in a letter:

... So far I had blamed the Mussalmans, for their hotheadness, impracticable suggestions and unreasonable demands but after having seen the working of the Congress ministries in at least two or three provinces I am veering round to the view that the apprehension of Muslims is justified. The meanness to which some of the Congress people stoop when power has been given to them has been an eye-opener to me. Their tall talk of nationalism is a perfect humbug and I find that in the chair of authority they are quite guilty of bias, bigotry, inequalities and meanness which are absolutely astounding. 50

49 Sapru to Inglis, 7 March 1940, Sapru Papers.
50 Sultan Ahmed to his friend (name of the person not known), 26 October 1938, Rajendra Prasad Papers.
The growing discontent among the Muslims was fully exploited by the League leaders to extend their influence.

At the annual session of the League held on 26-29 December 1938, Jinnah vehemently criticized the Congress. He felt that the Congress High Command wanted the Muslims to be "a mere understudy of the Congress, mere foot pages of the Congress leaders, to be used, governed and brought under the heels when they had served the purpose of the Congress." He made it obvious that he did not want any settlement with the Congress. As a matter of pride he declared: "I want to make it plain to all concerned that we Muslims want no gift, the Muslims want no concessions." His outburst made it clear that now he had no qualms about gaining the support of the British as he stated that the Muslim League would be "the ally of even the devil if need be in the interests of Muslims."

The address was marked by the absence of any reference to the need for Hindu-Muslim unity. His line of action had changed. His belief was that "in politics one has to play one's game as on the chess board." While the Muslim League did its utmost to magnify the highhandedness of the majority community, the Congress tried to minimise them or pretended to disbelieve them and did nothing to assuage the Muslim fears.

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52 Ibid., p. 309.
The response of Rajendra Prasad for instance, to the Muslim League's propaganda was one of complete indifference. He wrote: "...So far as I am concerned the Congress ministry has done nothing to the prejudice of Musalmans." The gravity of the situation dawned upon them quite late. Nehru had put an end to mass contact committee and a minorities committee consisting of leading Congress Muslims and Hindus was formed. In 1939 Nehru wrote to Rajendra Prasad:

...There is no doubt that we have been unable to check the growth of communalism and anti-Congress feeling among the Muslim masses... One of the most remarkable signs of the times is the ferment amongst the Muslims in India both the intelligentsia and the masses.54

Rajendra Prasad had also written to Nehru in the same vein:
"...For the last two or three years I have been feeling very much the want of some provisions which could ensure adequate representation of the Muslims in the Congress Committee." 55

This awakening among the Congress leaders had come quite late. The cumulative effect of the aggravation of Muslim fears and uneasiness was the growth of opposition in the Muslim League to the idea of an all-India Federation. By the end of the year 1938, the Muslim League leaders were united in their determination not to let

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53 Rajendra Prasad to Sultan Ahmad, 2 February 1938, Rajendra Prasad Papers.

54 Nehru to Rajendra Prasad, 18 October 1939, Nehru Papers.

55 Rajendra Prasad to Nehru, 11 July 1939, Nehru Papers.
the Muslims be dominated by Hindus in a future central government. They began to feel that the Congress demand for complete independence was detrimental to Muslim interests as it would place the Hindus permanently in power at the Centre. The League leaders now began to look for some alternative scheme.

Sikander Hyat Khan formulated a scheme which would secure the Muslims against Hindu domination. In an interview with the Governor of Punjab Henry Craik he explained the reasons for the Muslim objections to Federation. He apprehended that the tendency would be for the "party in power at the Centre to intervene in all provincial matters." Although recruitment to the armed forces might be a reserved subject, he felt that the Congress ministry would exert its influence in regard to that question. He visualized a situation where the position of the Muslims would be affected as the Congress would "work steadily against the reservation of the existing large share of recruitment for the martial classes of Punjab."

Sikander's next worry was that the Congress ministry would insist on the establishment of a convention through which the Governor-General would be bound to accept the advice of a ministry even in regard to reserved subjects. The safeguard prescribed by him was the "establishment of a Central Executive so constituted as to reflect the opinion of those elements who

are not prepared to surrender completely to the Congress or purely Hindu policy". He concluded by saying that His Majesty's Government would be committing a mistake by pressing for the introduction of federation in the near future. He asked the government to give an assurance to the Muslims that the government would not do anything which would be detrimental to Muslim interests.

He had evolved an alternative scheme of a federation of zones in place of a federation of provinces and the states which will be discussed in the next chapter. It will suffice to point out here that his chief concern was to secure a Centre in which both the Legislature and the Executive would represent the different federating units, i.e., each federal unit would have an equal share of representation both in the Legislature and in the ministry. For this purpose he had divided the whole of India into seven units or zones.

It should be noted that the alternative scheme to Federation was actually adopted by Sir Sikandar at the Lucknow session of the League held in October 1937. He had submitted his scheme to the Viceroy before the session but the latter dissuaded him from placing it in public. Similarly certain Muslims in the Punjab were giving serious consideration to the movement started at the time of Lucknow session for a Federation of the North-West comprising of the Punjab, Sind, the N.W.F.P. and the Punjab States.

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57 Note of an interview between Linlithgow and G. D. Birla at New Delhi on 1 February 1938, Enclosure 1 to Letter dated 7 February 1938, Linlithgow Papers.
In the month of March 1939, Khaliquzzaman and Abdur Rahman Siddiqi met Zetland in London where they also discussed with him the position of the Muslim community in India in the event of a scheme of federation coming into existence. At the outset they told him of the Muslim decision not to acquiesce to its introduction. Zetland had tried to probe their mind to find out if they had any alternative suggestion to put forward. What they proposed to him was the establishment of three or four federations of provinces and states which would be co-ordinated by a small central body. The whole object of their scheme was also to give the Muslims as great a measure of control at the Centre as the Hindus. When they enumerated the details, Zetland felt that they were also aiming at a federation of Muslim provinces and states in the North West India, a further federation of Bengal and Assam and a federation of Bihar and Orissa in the east. This was the reason why he had informed Linlithgow about his apprehension that Muslims might create hurdles in the way of federation (which proved to be correct). He wrote: "...What they told me confirms to some extent the views which I expressed to you not very long ago to the effect that we should probably have greater difficulty in bringing the Muslims into the federation than the Congress." He also realized "the difficulties of bringing the federation into existence" which according to him were "gaining in magnitude."

58 Zetland to Linlithgow, 20 March 1939, Linlithgow Papers.
Jinnah was no less dissatisfied with the federal idea. It was evident that he would turn to the Viceroy to redress his grievances. Already in a meeting with Brabourne he and Sikander Hyat Khan had expressed their apprehension that the government and the Congress were working for an early federation and had given the assurance that the Muslims would stand by the government through "thick and thin" if their demand was conceded. Jinnah had ended up with the suggestion that they "keep the centre as it is now", that they should "make friends with the Muslims" by "protecting" them in the Congress provinces and if they did that the Muslims would 59 protect them at the Centre.

The Viceroy was not less anxious to support Jinnah as he saw in the Muslim League opposition an effective barrier against the Congress. That he also held Jinnah in high esteem is evident from his remark that "it would be the greatest mistake in any way to discount the importance of expression of opinion that the government should redress Muslim grievances particularly from a man of the standing of Jinnah and we must give full weight to them." 60

Linlithgow did his best to mollify the Muslims as he harboured the misconceived notion that by supporting the Muslims he would mitigate their hostility to the scheme. He

59 Brabourne to Linlithgow, 19 August 1938, Brabourne Collection, India Office Library, London.

60 Linlithgow to Zetland, 28 March 1939, Linlithgow Papers.
was convinced that an all-India Federation was the only practicable line of constitutional advance and a corollary to provincial autonomy. This was the time when he was looking forward to the early implementation of the federal scheme.

He had written to Zetland:

...We cannot for a moment contemplate substantial modification - much less the jettisoning of the federal plan on account of Muslim fear. Indeed the fact is that no conceivable amendment of the scheme would meet Muslim objection which are directed against qualities which belong inevitably to any conceivable scheme of federation. The moment we weaken in our resolution to push federation through we shall find ourselves without a policy and without a future. Our prestige is deeply involved. If we fail we shall incur the contempt of all parties and (whatever the surface signs) we shall disappoint the greatest majority of politically minded Indians.61

He did not consider Muslim League that formidable a party as to prevent the attainment of federation or to make it unworkable. When he offered his hand of friendship to Jinnah, he did not foresee that this would be at the cost of his federation scheme. In his own way he felt that by enlisting the support of Jinnah, he would make him act according to his own dictates and guide him in the direction he desired. His contention was that only the achievement of Federation would help to alleviate the tensions. He wrote:

"I shall be very greatly mistaken if we do not find that the two communities will work much more closely together with

61 Ibid., 28 March 1939.
the degree of responsibility at the Centre which Federation involves and with the Centre based to so large an extent directly or indirectly on popular election; and thus when the Hindu-Muslim problem would be transferred to the Central Government, the chance in leaders bearing greater influence on their community in independent province is a real one."

Linlithgow had also met Gandhi when the latter had put forward various concessions which the Congress might be prepared to make on the Hindu-Muslim question. The Viceroy had conveyed those proposals to Sultan Ahmed, Firoz Khan Noon, Nawab of Chhatari and Nazimuddin to let them know what concessions Gandhi was prepared to make in return for arrangement with the League. They were as follows:

(1) Population proportion or else weightage in minority provinces for appointments in all branches of the services. A corresponding arrangement to be made in respect of provinces in which the Hindus were in a minority.

(2) A committee to be set up consisting of equal numbers of Hindu and Muslim philologists to prepare a dictionary of Hindustani and to meet the difficulties which had arisen over the Hindi-Urdu question. If the Muslims attached importance to the retention of Urdu, he would be ready to agree to the amount spent in the case of Muslims on education in Hindu-majority provinces to be handed over to a Muslim committee to be used by a Muslim body entirely outside the Ministry of Education, on the understanding that a similar arrangement

62 Ibid., 25 March 1939.
would be introduced in respect of Hindus in provinces in which they were in a minority.

But nothing concrete came out of Gandhi's proposals. The Muslim League was now more keen on securing Linlithgow's support than on gaining concessions from the Congress, Jinnah had approached the Viceroy on the assumption that the government was not yet contemplating to withdraw from India. On 28 February 1939 when he had talks with Linlithgow he laid more emphasis on the fact that in any federal scheme, the government should ensure an adequate equipoise between the Hindu and Muslim votes. In order to secure that, he told Linlithgow that he had in mind the 'manipulation' of territorial votes and the adjustment of territorial divisions. He felt that his scheme was better than Sikander's. It is significant to note here the conversation Linlithgow had with Jinnah on this point in the words of the former:

...I thought I would take him a little further and ask him whether in his judgement the equipoise to which he referred could be maintained in the event of our leaving the country. He admitted coyly that it might possibly prove very difficult in that event; and I asked him whether he wanted us to stay. He again admitted with some reluctance that it looked very much as though that was the position that was going to emerge.64

63 Note of an interview between Gandhi and Linlithgow, Enclosure 2 to the letter dated 23 January 1939, Linlithgow Papers.

64 Linlithgow to Zetland, 28 February 1939, Linlithgow Papers.
Linlithgow was not willing to discuss that contingency with Jinnah and asked him whether he was seriously contemplating that he should go back to Parliament "after ten years of endeavouring with the help of Indians" and after two years' experience of provincial autonomy "to suggest that in the Provinces the scheme devised and admitted of being worked ... was all mere nonsense and that something completely different on the lines which Jinnah now indicated would have to be devised." That was what Jinnah wanted him to do because he felt that "so long as there was any shadow of authority in exercise by His Majesty's Government" the government should be landed with every possible responsibility by Hindus and Muslims alike."

Jinnah also conveyed to Linlithgow that the country was not 'competent' to run a democracy and that he and others who had been advocates of this system of government had misjudged "the capacity of India to run such a system." They also had been carried away by their "patriotic and nationalist" feelings and he felt in the light of the practical experience that it would work to the detriment of Muslim interests. Jinnah also added that the Muslims did not have a fair treatment in the Congress majority provinces.

Linlithgow was quite sympathetic towards the Muslim

65 Ibid., 28 February 1939.

66 Linlithgow to Zetland, 28 March 1939, Linlithgow Papers.
grievances but he did not give much importance to any of the schemes that had been put forward by the Muslims nor was he "unduly perturbed" because he did not feel that "any of the schemes that have so far been ventilated have the least chance of surviving critical examination." He did not consider them worth consideration and felt that it was just a "formless apprehension" which was so evident among the Muslims throughout India. He was also convinced that Jinnah was not the only person who was voicing opposition to the federal scheme. He had granted interviews to other Muslims like Muhammad Yamin Khan, Muhammad Yakub, Ziauddin Ahmad, all of whom had put forward the same grievance that the arrogant Hindu majority was bent upon undermining their position.

But Linlithgow along with Zetland was also not prepared to brush aside the fears entertained by the Muslims against the Congress government. Zetland had informed Linlithgow after having been apprised of the widening gulf between the Hindus and Muslims that due weight should be given to the Muslims as they lacked an "adequate mouth-piece". He wrote, "...the deep-seated dislike and fear of Hindu domination on the part of 90 million Muslims is a thing which we cannot possibly brush aside." Speaking at the Empire Day Banquet in London, he

67 Linlithgow to Zetland, 12 April 1939, Linlithgow Papers.
68 Zetland to Linlithgow, 19 May 1939, Linlithgow Papers.
made reference to Hindu-Muslim differences and though he held the two communities responsible for reconciling communal differences, he exhorted the Congress to accede to the Muslim demands and placate them. He said:

"...I have no hesitation in saying that on this issue the present generation of Indians has it within its power to make or to mar future of their country. Only if minorities in the country be they princes or Moslems feel assured that they collaborate as equal partners in a common enterprise without a haunting fear of finding their civic rights constantly overborne or disregarded, can we hope for sure and steady progress towards the goal whether or not this condition is to be fulfilled must depend in the main on the attitude of Hindus towards minorities. Much is at stake, is it too much to ask that leaders of Congress as politically organized representing broadly speaking Hindu India should take this aspect of the matter seriously into account."

Much was indeed at stake. For the failure of the Congress leadership to work out a settlement with the Muslim League in the new context (provincial autonomy and federation) had led the latter to search for an alternative scheme under which Muslims might be able to shape their destiny without any fear of interference from the Hindu majority. This was to result very soon in the emergence of the demand for India's partition.

69 Zetland to Linlithgow, 24 May 1939, Linlithgow Papers.