CONCLUSION

Hindu-Muslim unity had been the major thrust of all the social and political campaigns of Gandhi since his entry into Indian public life. This followed from his philosophy of religion, his view of man and his ideal of nationalism. For him, it was not only a spiritual and ethical pursuit but also a political necessity as without it no non-violent mass movement could succeed in ousting the British from India.

Consequently, immediately after his return to India in 1915, he dedicated himself heart and soul to the cause of communal unity. The Khilafat issue offered an excellent opportunity to him and for some time he was successful in creating an atmosphere of unprecedented harmony between the two communities.¹ But unfortunately, this situation did not last long for several reasons, some of which were beyond his control and could not be foreseen by any farsighted person. Nevertheless, it did prove that the two communities were capable of rising above mutual distrust and differences if the leadership of both the communities could find a common cause.

The period 1922–37 is important in the annals of Indian history as during this period certain developments

¹ Supra, pp. 18–20.
took place which shaped the future course of events.
Various attempts were made to forge unity between the two communities through Unity Conferences, Round Table Conferences, correspondence and talks between the representatives of the Congress and the League. But these proved futile and the mutual distrust and differences went on multiplying to the extent that Jinnah, who was once considered as an ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity, became an advocate of two-nation theory which posed a serious challenge to Gandhi's view of religion. For, it was hardly conceivable to him that religion could stand as a permanent barrier between the two communities and a change in religion could alter national identity. He clung fast to his faith that religion was not a divisive force as all religions were different roads converging on the same point. He, therefore, viewed it as an untruth and sought to resist it till his death.

However, he was not opposed to the realisation of cultural and economic aspirations of the Muslim masses, nor was he against the fulfilment of genuine political demands of the Muslim elite. He was fully aware that at the root of Muslim separatism was the fear among the Muslim elite that they could not hope to get their due share of power in any Hindu dominated political system. For Gandhi, such apprehensions were the result of ignorance, a sort of illusion.

3. Supra, pp. 73-74; p. 162.
4. Supra, pp. 79-83.
But for Muslim elite, they were real and so could not be dispelled simply by words. Only some concrete steps ensuring cultural identity and due share of political power to the Muslims in independent India alone could remove such fears. He, therefore, went a long way in meeting the political aspirations of the Muslim elite, especially when freedom appeared to be in sight. He offered to the Muslims the right of self-determination provided it was confined only to meeting their genuine political, economic and cultural aspirations. This did not signify, from his point of view, any erosion of his concept of nationalism which rested on the principle of unity in diversity and democracy. This outlook was at the root of his own formula which he offered at the end of his talks with Jinnah in 1944 and his identification with C. Rajagopalachari formula or his blessings to Sapru Committee proposals and Desai-Liaquat Pact.

But Jinnah's own political compulsions such as the threat to his leadership from the leaders of his own party or from non-League political parties, especially in the Muslim majority areas, the mass hysteria that he had raised round the goal or slogan of Pakistan and the sympathies of a section of the British bureaucracy with his demands, hardened his attitude that made all efforts of Gandhi towards compromise futile.

However, Gandhi never thought that partition based on Jinnah's two-nation theory was inevitable. He, therefore, made every possible move to avert it. But the innumerable difficulties confronting him transcended his powers and resources. His own life style, his commitment to non-violence and purity of means not only restricted his moves but also left enough room for an astute politician like Jinnah to take advantage of his position. Following his principle of non-violence, he could rely only on persuasion for carrying the Muslims with him. He summed up his position in the following words:

"... I know of no non-violent method of compelling the obedience of eight crores of Muslims to the will of the rest of India, however, powerful a majority the rest may represent. The Muslims must have the same right to self-determination that the rest of India has. We are at present a joint family. Any member may claim a division...."

The Congress, under his leadership, was thus left only with one course to avert partition and that was to negotiate with Jinnah.

However, mere appeals to the League leadership were not sufficient to bring them round to the Congress point of view for an amicable settlement. For, the demand for partition was a political move and its edges could be blunted only by a clever handling of the political situation, though not necessarily by surrendering the principles of non-violence and purity of means. Had the Congress abandoned its

ideological stances and made the Muslims, especially those of the Muslim minority provinces realise the difficulties that they would face as a result of partition, the Muslim leadership might have given a second thought before lending their support to Jinnah. Azad did think of a move in this direction when he bluntly told the Cabinet Delegation that the creation of Pakistan on the basis of two-nation theory would render the Muslims in India to the position of aliens. But due to lack of support from the Congress leadership, it could not yield the desired results.

It was all the more important because prior to 1946, Jinnah did not have the whole-hearted support of the Muslim leadership even in some of the Muslim majority areas. Sikander, in the Punjab, and Fazl-ul-Huq, in Bengal, could have posed a challenge to Jinnah's leadership had the Congress taken care to bring them into their fold. It was important because Sikander, the Premier of the Punjab, and after his death in 1942, Khizr Hayat Khan, who headed the ruling Unionist Party, did not subscribe to Jinnah's conception of Pakistan. But Sikander's alignment with the British bureaucracy in the Punjab, which he could ignore only at the risk


9. Linlithgow Papers, Microfilm 128, No. 15, Quarterly Report (February 1, 1941-April 30, 1941) prepared by Secretary to Governor-General, N.A.I., New Delhi. Also Penderel Moon, Divide and Quit, op.cit., p. 20 Also The Tribune, March 12, 1941. Also Supra, p. 134.
of losing power, stood in the way of the Congress-Unionist rapprochement. The Punjab Congress leadership could be instrumental in building up a bridge between Sikander and the all-India Congress leadership but they failed to do so, though a limited understanding between the two was not impossible as the Unionist Party and the Congress did form a coalition ministry after the election of 1945-46. But it was too late as the League by that time had acquired tremendous influence over the Muslim voters in the Punjab. Besides, there were several other Muslim political parties and groups in the Punjab such as the Ahrars and the Khaksars who would not toe the line of Jinnah over the issue of Pakistan. Similarly in Bengal, the Congress did not lend its support to Fazl-ul-Haq which ultimately alienated the latter. Thus, it is possible that if the Congress had more time and more astute leaders, especially in the Muslim majority provinces, the forces against Pakistan amongst the Muslims could be consolidated compelling the League to arrive at some kind of understanding with Gandhi and the Congress.

Again, Gandhi's limited maneuverability was to be applied on a much larger plane as he was to carry with him all sections of Hindu society, both inside and outside the Congress, and a vast section of the Muslim, both Leaguers and non-Leaguers. Further, Gandhi was fighting at two fronts.

10. Supra, pp. 44-45.
One, against the League's demand for the partition of the country and the other, against the British for the freedom of the country. This situation provided ample opportunities to the League leader to seek the support of the British for the attainment of his goal.

It is true that the British were not in favour of partition on the basis of Jinnah's two-nation theory. But on the commencement of World War II, they were left with no choice but to humour Jinnah in order to build him up as a counterpoise to the Congress which had refused to cooperate with them in their war efforts. This gave opportunity to Jinnah to consolidate his position among the Muslim masses as the field was clear for him on account of imprisonment of the Congress leaders following their direct clash with the British. As a result, Jinnah had a landslide victory in 1945-46 elections. The Muslim League formed ministries in Bengal and Sind and came out as the largest single party in the Punjab. It won all the Muslim seats in Assam and considerably improved its position in North-West Frontier Province. This was a feather in Jinnah's cap who emerged as an unquestioned leader of the Muslims and the League gained the position of being their (Muslims) sole representative. The election results contributed a great deal towards the realisation of Jinnah's goal.

An additional opportunity was provided by Prime Minister Attlee's Statement of February 20, 1947. Jinnah interpreted it as the acceptance of Pakistan in principle. The League leader, of course, was not wrong in drawing such conclusions, for, the British authorities were thinking in similar terms. Abell, Private Secretary to the Viceroy, wrote to Harris, Private Secretary to the Secretary of State:

"... It would appear that H.M.G. still fight shy of saying clear things clearly. They might as well have stated categorically that agreements would be entered into with the Congress for the Hindu majority areas and with the Muslim League for the Muslim majority areas. If paragraph 13* has any meaning this is the only manner in which agreement for the transfer of power can be successfully negotiated."

The Letter of Instructions to Lord Mountbatten, reinforced Jinnah's contention and he resorted to 'Direct Action' which unnerved the Hindus, the Muslims and the British alike and almost clinched the issue of partition of the country.

The British Government was divided over the question of grant of independence to India. The unfavourable attitude of the Conservative Party towards it is amply evidenced by the acts and utterences of Linlithgow, Amery, Wavell and

15. Ibid., pp. 972-974.

*Paragraph 13: His Majesty's Government will negotiate agreements in regard to matters arising out of the transfer of power with the representatives of those to whom they propose to transfer power. (Nicholas Mansergh, op.cit., vol. IX, p. 775).
Churchill. Though British approach underwent a considerable change after the installation of the Labour Government in England, it was perhaps too late for them to undo the damage done by their predecessors. The recognition of Jinnah's intransigence which wrecked the Simla Conference proved a hurdle in arriving at an amicable settlement of the communal problem. The British, in fact, did not show any firmness in their opposition to Pakistan. This offered enough encouragement or leeway to British officers in India holding sympathies with the League to extend their help and cooperation to it in the creation of Pakistan. The continuous presence of the British, therefore, was a source of strength to the Muslims. Consequently, they relied more on the British for the fulfilment of their demands than on the Congress leaders for any political settlement. Gandhi, thus, was driven to the conclusion that presence of the third party was an obstacle in the way of any communal settlement. He was sure that the elimination of the British from the Indian politics would pave the way for an amicable settlement between the two communities.

With this end in view, he impressed upon Jinnah to arrive at a mutually agreed solution without the help of the British. He had unlimited faith in the inherent

17. Supra, p. 125; 229; .
goodness of man and power of persuasion for a just cause. The League leader, however, being an astute statesman with rock-like determination remained steadfast to the condition of acceptance of the principle of Pakistan as a pre-requisite to any offer for the communal settlement.

Jinnah had a strict control over the League and was its sole dictator and spokesman. On the other hand, Gandhi's hold over the Congress varied from time to time as all the Congress leaders did not have full faith in his principles of non-violence and truth and his technique of Satyagraha. Consequently, his position in the Congress, at times, was reduced to that of merely an adviser. It is true that sometimes he emerged as the strongest man in the organisation and appeared more or less as its dictator, particularly so, when the Congress leadership were placed in direct confrontation with the Government and needed him to start a mass movement. But when the British showed readiness to arrive at some settlement with the Congress in 1945, his influence over its leadership started sliding downhill with accelerated pace and consequently he moved to the periphery of the decision-making bodies of the Congress at the most crucial period of India's destiny when the issue of partition was to be decided once for all. It seems that he was left with no choice but to

18. Supra, pp. 188-189.
accept the *fait accompli*. Its rejection would have worsened the communal relations in India and might have forced the British to give a second thought to their decision of handing over power to the Indians.

Partition of the country, however, was not the end of journey for Gandhi. He still nurtured the hope of bringing the two communities closer which had become two nations on the withdrawal of the British from the Indian subcontinent. When the leaders of the two communities were rejoicing at the fulfilment of their cherished goals, Gandhi was engaged in healing the wounds caused by the partition of the country. He had before him a more arduous task of building bridges between the two communities as division of the country had raised more problems instead of solving the communal question. The presence of two antagonistic neighbours posed the problem of safeguarding the international border between the two countries for which they had to divert a substantial amount of their resources— an amount that could well be utilized for development purposes.

All this could have been avoided if the League had accepted division on the basis of Gandhi's formula envisaging division between two brothers which significantly differed from Jinnah's concept of division on the basis of two-nation theory. K.B. Sayeed has rightly pointed out:

"If one started from Gandhi's point of view that India was a sort of joint family, some of whose members were breaking away from the

20. Supra, p. 153; 181."
family, then one would think in terms of a confederal or federal arrangement under which the separated members would still come together by a treaty or some other arrangement to 'provide for the efficient and satisfactory administration of foreign affairs, defence, internal communications, customs, commerce and the like, which must necessarily continue to be the matter of common interest between the contracting parties'.”

Though partition was not inevitable, it had become unavoidable because of the acts of omission and commission of the leadership of the League and the Congress as well as of British statesmen and bureaucrats. We have already noted Jayaprakash Narain's view that had Patel been at the helm of affairs, he would have found some way to keep India united. It is, however, difficult to visualize at the moment as to how he would have accomplished the Himalayan task. But such a speculation does suggest that partition could possibly be avoided, had there been different sets of leaders.
