CHAPTER VI
C.RAJAGOPALACHARI FORMULA AND GANDHI-JINNAH TALKS

Since most of the important Congress leaders including Gandhi were in jails, the task of finding a solution of the Hindu-Muslim problem was taken up by those nationalist leaders who had escaped the wrath of the British. C.Rajagopalachari, whom Diwakar called "a ruthlessly logical person and an instinct distilled hundred times"\(^1\), was one of the few Indian leaders who followed an independent course of thought and action. He believed that the key to the solution of the Indian problem lay in adopting a sympathetic attitude towards the demands of the Muslim League. He was convinced that the Muslims would not cooperate in the freedom struggle till they were assured of the right of self-determination. He introduced a resolution to this effect in the Madras Legislative Assembly on April 23, 1942\(^2\).

The resolution recommended to the All-India Congress Committee:

"... to acknowledge the Muslim League's claim for separation, should the same be persisted in when the time comes for framing the future constitution of India and to invite the Muslim League for consultation for the purpose of arriving at an agreement and securing the installation of a National Government to meet the present emergency."

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The resolution was rejected by the All-India Congress Committee as it acknowledged the claim of the Muslim League for Pakistan. He was vehemently criticised by the Congress for this move and had to resign from the membership of the organisation on that account. But it did not dishearten him from pursuing his goal of achieving the cooperation of the Muslim League. He was sure that if both the Muslim League and the Congress worked unitedly for the freedom of the country, the British Government would be left with no alternative but to concede their demands. Consequently, he put forward a set of proposals, popularly known as the 'C. Rajagopalachari Formula', which was published on July 10, 1944, after Gandhi was released from jail. People were surprised to learn that the formula had the approval of Gandhi, which Rajagopalachari had managed to secure during former's fast in March, 1943. Gandhi in his press statement on September 28, 1944, said,

"Rajaji had not burst on the scene as he did at Aga Khan Palace with a concrete proposition. When he presented the formula at the Aga Khan Palace, I did not take even five minutes and said 'Yes' because I saw in it a concrete shape."

The Bombay Chronicle dated October 31, 1942 carried the news that Gandhi had partially approved the formula even before that date.

The formula embodied the following clauses:

1) Subject to the terms set out below as regards the constitution for Free India, the Muslim League endorses the Indian demand for independence and will cooperate with the Congress in the formation of a provisional interim Government for the transitional period.

2) After the termination of the war, a commission shall be appointed for demarcating contiguous districts in the North-West and East of India, wherein the Muslim population is in absolute majority. In the areas thus demarcated, a plebiscite of all the inhabitants held on the basis of adult suffrage or other practicable franchise shall ultimately decide the issue of separation from Hindustan. If the majority decide in favour of forming a sovereign state separate from Hindustan, such decision shall be given effect to, without prejudice to the right of districts on the border to choose to join either state.

3) It will be open to all parties to advocate their points of view before the plebiscite is held.

4) In the event of separation, mutual agreement shall be entered into for safeguarding defence, and commerce and communications and for other essential purposes.

5) Any transfer of population shall only be on an absolutely voluntary basis.

6) These terms shall be binding only in case of transfer by Britain of full power and responsibility for the governance of India.

Rajagopalachari wrote to Jinnah on April 8, 1944 that the formula had been duly approved by Gandhi and expressed the hope that the League Leader would give his fullest thought to the proposal.

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For Jinnah, the formula was of substantial importance in his fight for Pakistan as it was based on the recognition of the principle of partition or the division of the country. He observed:

"... at last Mr. Gandhi has accepted the principle of Pakistan. What remains now is the question of how and when this has to be carried out."7

However, Jinnah was not fully satisfied with the various clauses of the formula. He said,

"... The formula casts unwarranted reflections on Muslim League by saying that Muslim League endorses the Indian demand for independence, and will cooperate with the Congress in the formation of Indian Government for the transitional period."8

For, it implied that the Muslims were against the independence of the people of India. This, he felt, was an uncalled for insinuation against the Muslim League.8 To him it meant:

"... arrogating to Congress superior or dominating position requiring the cooperation of the Muslims as a subordinate body with the leading organisation."9

Jinnah further observed:

"It is not clear who will appoint the commission? What will be its personnel and its powers? who will enforce its findings?"10

Moreover, he ridiculed the proposal of demarcating contiguous districts in the North-West and East of India as Lahore

8. Ibid.
9. Ibid. also July 23, 1944.
10. Ibid., July 31, 1944.
Resolution had mentioned 'geographical contiguous units' where the Muslims happened to be in majority.

Regarding the safeguarding of defence, commerce and communication in case of separation, Jinnah questioned, "safeguarding these matters from whom?" He also commented that there was no indication of form, character and personnel of provisional Government.

The League leader insisted on the settlement between the League and the Congress prior to joining hands with the Congress in their struggle against the British for independence. According to Khaliq-uz-Zaman, the real difficulty standing in the way of the Muslim League's acceptance of Rajagopalachari formula was the last clause of the formula as that could be interpreted to mean "all steps for partition would remain on paper pending transfer of power to the Congress by the British Government." Moreover, for several League leaders, independence did not only mean liberation from foreign yoke but from the Hindu Raj also.

Thus, Jinnah dismissed the Rajagopalachari formula as it offered "a shadow and a husk, a maimed, mutilated and moth eaten Pakistan" that 'torpedoed' the Muslim League Resolution of 1940.

11. Ibid. also Gandhi-Jinnah Talks, op.cit., p. 5.
He was equally critical of the hasty release of the correspondence to the press by Rajagopalachari. In his view, this was deliberately done to let him down in the eyes of the public in India and abroad. He wanted Gandhi to communicate the proposals to him directly so that he could place the same before the Muslim League Working Committee. He could not understand the objection to such a course. Besides, the League leader did not like the mode and procedure of conducting the negotiations on the basis of the formula as it would place them in the position of petitioner before the Congress High Command. Since Gandhi and Rajagopalachari had not discussed the proposals with him before hand, he interpreted them as pure and simple dictation without a sincere desire to negotiate. He asked whether Gandhi was associating with the proposals in his personal capacity or as dictator of the Congress.

The Muslim opinion sympathetic to the League's demand reiterated Jinnah's fears and objections. Abdul Halim Gahaznavi, M.L.A. Central and President of Central National Mohammedan Association, said that Rajagopalachari and Gandhi proposals were the shrewdest stroke of policy to create an impression that they had conceded the Muslims what they wanted while the proposals differed materially from the Muslim League's demand and in effect proceeded to destroy the essentials of

15. Ibid. also M.H.Saiyid, op.cit., pp. 804-806.
17. Ibid.
the Muslim League's scheme.\textsuperscript{18}

Another Muslim critic, Jamil-ud-Din Ahmed, even doubted the motive of Gandhi and his colleagues for an honourable settlement with the Muslims. According to him, their motive was to put Jinnah in the wrong and find another pretext for starting a fresh blitz against Mussalmans in India and abroad with a view to bypass their national demand for Pakistan.\textsuperscript{19}

Other Muslim leaders thought that the real objective of Rajagopalachari and Gandhi was to neutralise the power of Jinnah over the Muslims who had rallied around him over the issue of Pakistan.\textsuperscript{20} According to Roshan Jaman Khan, President District Muslim League Gonda, the formula invited the Muslims to purchase slavery and subjugation through their cooperation with Congress.\textsuperscript{21}

The official League paper \textit{Dawn} characterised the formula as a 'Booby trap' as the idea was that the League should first be hoodwinked into an agreement on that basis and then after the British had been eliminated from the scene, the little that was offered to them (Muslims) would be still further truncated and hedged in with all sorts of conditions and limitations until nothing worth the Muslim's taking remained.\textsuperscript{22} It further

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\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Dawn}, August 1, 1944 also July 12 and July 13, 1944.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid.}, July 13, 1944.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Ibid.}, July 30, 1944.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Ibid.}, July 23, 1944.
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Ibid.}, July 9 and July 30, 1944. also \textit{Star of India} (Calcutta), July 11, 1944.
\end{flushleft}
"The formula does not go even so far as the Cripps proposals with regard to the acceptance of self-determination. He proposed a plebiscite province by province. In the present case plebiscite district by district is proposed."\(^{23}\)

Government Intelligence reported that Muslims were suspicious due to the shiftiness of Gandhi and to the fact that he always had a new interpretation for everything he said.\(^{24}\)

The *Spectator* commented:

"Mr. Jinnah perhaps did not find it very attractive as the whole formula rests on thin air as it talks of independence during war which will not be granted by the British."\(^{25}\)

Though the League leaders found the Rajagopalachari's proposals far short of their aspirations and demands, the Hindu Mahasabha and its sympathisers found in them surrender to the League's claim of vivisection of the country. Moonje, an eminent leader of Hindu Mahasabha, remarked that the proposal of division of India would certainly end in complete balkanization of the country.\(^{26}\) Jayakar said that the formula was contrary to all the principles which nationalism had held dear.\(^{27}\) George S. Arundale observed:

"To me, it is thin edge of the wedge of India's breaking into pieces, no less than the rejected Cripps offer and if one gives way to the extent of the formula, there is no knowing where shall we end?"\(^{28}\)

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23. *Dawn*, July 12 and July 30, 1944
28. Ibid., Cyclostyled letter from Arundale to Jayakar dated August 1, 1944, N.M.M.L., New Delhi.
K.M. Munshi remarked that the acceptance of the principle of Pakistan would enhance Jinnah's prestige.  

The moderate political leaders such as Sir Chiman Lal Setalvad, N.N. Sarkar, Sir P.S. Sivaswami, V.S. Srinivasa Sastry, Sir Homi Mehta and Sir Sultan Chanoy found fault with the formula and commented:

"The proposals to divide India into two or more sovereign states with no controlling central organisation to control subjects of vital interests to the whole country and having their own separate armed forces, is not only against the best interests of the country, but fraught with dire consequences for the future and will imperil the very independence of the country. Such partition will, instead of solving the problem of minorities, accentuate it and will not be in the interest of Muslims themselves."  

The Sikhs were equally opposed to the formula. In a resolution passed at Amritsar on August 20, 1944, they observed:

"The Panthic gathering emphatically condemns the Gandhi-Rajaji formula for communal settlement and rejects it because as a result of its enforcement, the Sikhs will be divided into two sections to be held in perpetual bondage."

Master Tara Singh, expressing similar views said,

"It would result in dividing the Punjab by putting 17 districts in Pakistan and 12 districts in Hindustan."

The Tribune, voicing the pro-Hindu nationalist opinion in the Punjab, observed that by rejecting Rajagopalachari's formula, "Mr. Jinnah has reinforced the belief that he

31. The Tribune, August 21, 1944.
is more concerned with the satisfaction of his ego than either the liberation of his country or even the establishment of Pakistan. The political paths he has been treading lead not to the heaven of peace and prosperity but to the jungles of civil strife and rancour."32

The British authorities, however, gave a different interpretation to the Rajagopalachari formula. Wavell felt that the formula had hardly any chance of acceptance by Jinnah or the League without modification. Commenting on Gandhi's aim in being associated with the formula, he said, "Formula is a try out" and probably Gandhi wanted "to assess the strength of Hindu feelings against Pakistan and he would adopt future policy after seeing the reaction."33 Amery termed the offer as a conditional and partial concession to Pakistan; conditional because it was subject to transfer of power by Great Britain and partial because it did not include the whole of Punjab, Bengal and Assam.34

Justifying Jinnah's rejection, Wavell wrote to Amery that one could hardly blame Jinnah for thinking twice before swallowing the whole as the formula did not suggest the communal composition of the provisional Government which was a matter of importance to the League. Moreover, central arrangements were kept very vague and the formula was binding only in case of actual transfer of power by His Majesty to an Indian Government.35 He even questioned Gandhi's motive, for he believed that Gandhi and Hindus wanted the humiliation of

32. Ibid., July 12, 1944.
34. Ibid., p. 1101
35. Ibid., pp. 1077-1078.
Jinnah and his removal from all-India politics.

Sir Francis Low, Editor of The Times of India, commented:

"The British Government had accepted Pakistan through Cripps and Congress had done it through Gandhi. Now it is only a question of working out details."

The acceptance of Rajagopalachari formula by Gandhi poses the questions: Did Gandhi compromise with his principles or how far his acceptance was in keeping with his basic philosophy? Did he yield to the League's pressure? What were the forces that made him change his stand?

No doubt, Gandhi did not support Rajagopalachari's move in 1942 for acknowledging League's claim for separation as he saw nothing but "seeds of further quarrel" in it but his mind was never at ease, even in jail, as the situation which had taken a turn for the worst not only widened the gulf between the Hindus and the Muslims but also enabled the third party to acquire a complete hold over the destiny of both the communities. Besides, the repression which followed the Quit India movement left the Congress in shambles. He was, therefore, seeking an opportunity to start a dialogue with the League leadership for the settlement of the dispute. This is evident from his letter to Jinnah dated May 4, 1943 wherein he had suggested to the latter to have a face-to-face meeting with him with a view to solve the communal problem. He

wrote:

"Why should not both you and I approach the great question of communal unity as men determined on finding a common solution and work together to make our solution acceptable to all who are concerned with it or interested in it." 38

In the changed circumstances, the Rajagopalachari formula appeared to him as a reasonable move. 39

It is sometimes suggested that Gandhi wanted to take the wind out of the sails of the League by giving blessings to Rajagopalachari's move. Probably the idea could be to remove the harmful effect of Jagat Narain Lal's resolution, as it was a hasty and inappropriate step on the basis of which Jinnah could influence the Muslim masses. Very likely, he wanted the Congress to acquire a central position in Indian politics which it had lost when its leaders were removed from political scene after the Quit India resolution.

It is difficult to rule out that as a result of Rajagopalachari's persuasion, Gandhi started believing that partition was merely a slogan. The real aim of Jinnah and the League leaders was to share political power which meant that once they were assured of that, their opposition to any move for reconciliation would end. In such a situation it was not unusual for Gandhi to make a move to accommodate the League leaders.

In acceding to the formula, there was hardly any shift in Gandhi's stand from his fundamental principles. He said that while giving consent to the Rajagopalachari formula, he

38. The Tribune, May 19, 1944 also Gandhi-Jinnah Talks, op.cit., p. 69.
had only agreed to the principle of 'self-determination'
which was approved by the Congress in its resolution on
April 2, 1942. He told K.M. Munshi that he himself was the
originator of that resolution and what he had agreed to was
not different from that. 41 This was endorsed by his Secretary
Pyare Lal in a letter to Ghanshyam Das Birla:

"... this principle is interpreted by Gandhi
as conceding the right of self-determination
to the minorities, consistent with the safety,
integrity and economic progress of the country
as a whole. What is ruled out, is freedom to
indulge in acts of mutual hostility. It is
that which Bapu has called a sin. Such
freedom cannot be had by 'agreement'. That
would be a contradiction in terms." 42

Defending the formula, Gandhi observed:

"In order to thrust himself on the British
he (C. Rajagopachari) gives the League the
right of self-determination which every single
individual has, whether the other recognises
it or not. Rajaji does not like partition
and hugs the belief that his superfluous
recognition of the inherent right will enable
him to avoid partition." 43

The approach was not opposed to his moral and religious
outlook. His concept of morality allowed all individuals and
groups the freedom to choose their institutions and their
political destiny. But any such decision must be based on the
will of all. Consequently, to deny a section of the inhabitan-
ts of a country the right of exercising their choice with
regard to their relationship with the rest of the country was,
from his point of view, a gross injustice. He, therefore,
insisted that the issue of separation be decided by the adult
population of the area.

41. K.M. Munshi, Pilgrimage to Freedom. op.cit., vol.I,
p. 440.
42. Quoted in Ghanshyam Das Birla, Bapu - A Unique Association
This equally followed from his concept of religion which extended cultural and religious freedom to the Muslims for their development. For him, people belonging to different religions could live together and work for the common good. It was the two-nation theory of Jinnah that hurt Gandhi. Rajagopalachari's formula offered him a solution which could accommodate his own religious, moral and political outlook while conceding the basic demand of the League. Gandhi's insistence on common links issued from his desire to keep the basic structure of the Indian nation intact. As a concession to the aspiration and fears of the League, he did not insist on the creation of a central government. He was content to have a board of representatives of both the states for this purpose. In the Rajagopalachari formula, according to Pyarelal,

"... there is a provision for the creation of a special machinery for the joint administration of matters of common concern to the two states. Only this won't form part of the federal constitution but will be brought into being by a treaty between the two states and be integrated with the charter for separation."

To Gandhi, this was a division between two brothers who part without disclaiming their relationship.

However, several Hindu leaders, including some of his associates interpreted Gandhi's move as marking a fundamental change in his attitude towards the League's demand. K.M. Munshi believed that Gandhi approved the Rajaji formula because he

was physically unwell. Absence of Nehru and Patel and the void created by the death of Kasturba and Mahadev Desai, he added, also contributed to this effect.\textsuperscript{45}

One cannot deny that Gandhi had gone a long way in his effort to arrive at a settlement with the League. He had realised that 1944 was not 1942. There was a change in his approach to the League because of the position that it had gained. But all this he did, to save his view of nationalism.

However, a sincere desire to settle the differences by means of 'give and take' was still missing. Most of the Hindu Congressmen doubted Jinnah's motive underlying his demand that Gandhi should negotiate with him directly and not through Rajagopalachari. One wonders, why did Gandhi not oblige Jinnah on this issue at that time? Very likely, the former was not sure of latter's mood, as he had not forgotten the League leader's derisive attitude towards his earlier invitation for bilateral talks. More precisely, it was mutual distrust that stood in the way of settlement.

The formula which had only six clauses was more of the nature of an outline and its details had yet to be worked out. All this needed a congenial atmosphere and a sincere desire on the part of all concerned to accommodate each other and to arrive at a mutually agreed solution. It is rather unfortunate that Rajagopalachari's and Gandhi's efforts to solve the Hindu-Muslim tangle were not understood in this

perspective not only by Jinnah and the Muslim League but also by the Hindu leaders of varied political affiliations.

The first clause of the formula mainly sought the cooperation of the Muslim League in the struggle for freedom. The provisional interim Government for the transitional period envisaged by the formula could provide a machinery for framing the new constitution in the light of the terms of the agreement. Apparently, there was nothing wrong with the clause but Jinnah misconstrued the whole issue and questioned even reference to the word 'constitution' by Rajagopalachari. The League leader felt offended at the clause seeking assurance from the League that it would endorse the Indian demand for independence as it was interpreted as casting aspersions on its aims and character.

Clause second of the formula, seeking decision on the issue of separation through plebiscite by all the inhabitants on the basis of adult franchise or other practicable franchise, though justifiable on democratic principle, proved to be a big hurdle in the way of arriving at an agreement with the League as Jinnah insisted on confining the plebiscite to Muslims only. The Congress leadership could not understand Jinnah's fears in this regard, for, he rightly apprehended that in areas where Muslims had only marginal majority, non-Muslims would mobilise all their strength in getting the demand for Pakistan rejected. This was quite possible in
the Punjab where the Unionist Party, which had been ruling over the province with the help of non-Muslims, could be prevailed upon to reject the partition.

The clause three, extending freedom to propagate their points of view to all the parties before plebiscite, was in accordance with all norms of justice, fairplay and democracy and could not be challenged in normal circumstances.

Clause four of the formula envisaged mutual agreement for safeguarding defence, commerce and communication in the event of separation. It constituted the essence of the formula from the point of view of its author as it aimed at keeping the unity of the country through the maintenance of certain links between the main country and the seceding units. K.M. Munshi believed that it implied some sort of central authority with federal powers over the constituent states. But Jayakar felt that the formula implied the creation of independent sovereign states with treaty agreement. However, to Jinnah any agreement for joint management of such subjects of vital importance as defence, foreign affairs, communication would ultimately bring in Hindu domination over Muslims through the backdoor.

Clause five of the formula, contemplating the transfer of population entirely on voluntary basis, was equally in keeping with democratic and ethical norms.

All the five clauses of the formula were valid and would be binding only in case of transfer by Britain of full

47. Ibid.
power and responsibility for the governance of India. But the League wanted a settlement of communal problem before the British transferred power to Indian hands.

From the Congress point of view, this condition was justified as the formula could be implemented only after the transfer of power by Britain. But because of his distrust of the Hindu leadership, Jinnah looked upon it as a clever device to hoodwink the Muslims since it would leave the Muslims at the mercy of the Hindus who would throw overboard all their commitments and agreements as soon as the British left India. So they wanted the settlement under the aegis of the British as already referred to.

Another factor which might have weighed with Jinnah in rejecting the formula could be that Rajagopalachari had made an attempt to spell out in concrete terms the real nature of partition which Jinnah had been avoiding in order to shelve all controversies among the Muslims of all regions about the nature of their 'holy land' which he had been assuring them. Santhanam pointed out that Rajaji's formula explained the meaning of Pakistan to the Muslims and made them understand that the latter would get only a truncated Pakistan. The idea of partition involved the division of the Punjab and Bengal and if at all it was insisted on, it would not mean a blow to India.48

It was, therefore, in the interest of Jinnah to keep the demand of partition as a myth, an 'El Dorado' for all the Muslims of different regions of India. Any attempt to work out its detail would have raised controversies among the Muslims of different provinces as its impact could not be the same in all the provinces. Hindus of different provinces, too, had not been able to comprehend its working and effects. Their opposition to it was as much emotional as was League's demand. Rajagopalachari formula was the first attempt to test the strength of the Muslim demand on the hard crest of reality of the Indian situation.

Though Jinnah found fault with the formula, it continued raising hopes of settlement between the League and the Congress for sometime as both Gandhi and Jinnah needed each other to serve their respective ends.

Gandhi emerged out of prison on May 6, 1944, as a shattered and frustrated man. The economic breakdown in Bengal and other areas was equally disheartening. He was in search of an opportunity to break the political deadlock. He, therefore, tried to open up a dialogue with the Viceroy but the latter refused to meet him personally in spite of the fact that the Indian leader was not keeping up a rigid posture.

over the question of immediate withdrawal of the British from India. Gandhi told Stewart Gelder, a correspondent of the *News Chronicle*, that he would be satisfied with much less that day as compared to 1942, as the economic breakdown, the food situation and the suffering of the people had worsened the situation.\(^5\)

In a letter to the Viceroy dated July 27, 1944, he offered that if declaration of immediate Indian independence was made and a national responsible Government was formed, he would advise the Working Committee to renounce mass civil disobedience and to give full cooperation in the war effort.\(^5\)

But the Government was in no mood to oblige Gandhi. The Secretary of State for India, in the House of Commons, stated that Gandhi's proposals did not even form the starting point of a profitable discussion either with Lord Wavell or with the interned Congress leaders.\(^5\)

The doors having thus been closed by the Viceroy, Gandhi turned to Jinnah. An opportunity to open up a dialogue with the League leader had already been provided by the Rajagopalachari formula which was then under consideration and correspondence was going on between Rajagopalachari and Jinnah. The latter in a telegram to the former on July 2, 1944

\(^5\) V.P. Menon, *op.cit.*, pp. 159-160.
communicated, "If Mr. Gandhi even now sends me direct his proposals, I am willing (to) place it before the Muslim League Working Committee." In response to Jinnah's telegram to Rajagopalachari, Gandhi wrote to the former on July 17, 1944 in an affectionate and pleasing tone asking him to meet and solve the constitutional tangle. Thus one of the major objections of Jinnah to Rajagopalachari formula was met with as he wanted to enter into negotiations with Gandhi directly and not through Rajagopalachari whose hold over the Congress and Hindus was doubtful.

The Muslim League had not been able to establish a firm hold, especially in the Muslim majority provinces. Besides, Jinnah was sceptical of his own position as he had received a rebuff from Khizr Hayat Khan in the Punjab who refused to convert the Unionist ministry into a Muslim League coalition ministry. He was not pulling on well even with Fazl-ul-Huq in Bengal and Khan Brothers in the North-West Frontier Province. This drove him to make a move at the all-India level to keep himself head and shoulders above the provincial Muslim leaders.

54. Ibid., p. 76. also Hector Bolitho, op.cit., p. 146.
Jinnah's consent to enter into any negotiation with Gandhi was well-timed as it was sure to boost up his image among the Muslims all over India which in turn would raise the status of the League, especially in the Muslim majority provinces. In a way, he was trying to recover what he had lost at the provincial level. Sayeed, a Muslim historian, noted that Jinnah snatched 'a tactical and political victory' from these talks. For the first time it was clearly and publicly recognised that there were really two leaders in the country, viz., Gandhi, representing the Hindus and Jinnah, representing the Muslims.\(^{57}\)

Gandhi-Jinnah talks were held from September 9 to September 27, 1944. The two leaders met almost daily. In all, 14 interviews took place between them.\(^{58}\) Besides talks, they exchanged views through personal letters during this period. The talks initially moved on the basis of Rajagopalachari formula but later on efforts were made to explore new avenues for arriving at an amicable settlement.

Jinnah, in his letter dated September 10, 1944 wrote to Gandhi,

"I understand from you that you had come to discuss the Hindu-Muslim settlement with me in your individual capacity and not in any representative character or capacity on behalf of the Hindus or the Congress; nor had you any authority to do so. I naturally pointed out to you that there must be some one on the other side with authority, holding representative status, with whom I can negotiate and if possible come to a settlement."\(^{59}\)

\(^{57}\) K.B. Sayeed, op.cit., p. 126.
\(^{58}\) Gandhi-Jinnah Talks, op.cit., p. 3.
\(^{59}\) Ibid. also Indian Annual Register, 1944, vol. II, p. 135.
But the question arises, why did the League leader enter into negotiations with Gandhi if he was doubtful about the representative character of the latter. Gandhi had never minced matter in this regard and had assured him that though he had approached him as an individual, he was pledged to use all the influence he had with the Congress for the ratification of his agreement with the League leader.\footnote{Gandhi-Jinnah Talks, op.cit., p. 5.}

Reiterating this, he wrote:

"My life mission has been Hindu-Muslim unity which I want for its own sake, but which is not to be achieved without the foreign ruling power being ousted. Hence the first condition of the exercise of the right of self-determination is achieving independence by the joint action of all parties and groups comprising India."\footnote{Ibid.}

Gandhi refused to accept the two-nation theory and carving out of a separate homeland for the Muslims on that basis. Jinnah in his discussion with Gandhi on September 13, 1944, raised his often repeated argument:

"India contained two-nations i.e. Hindu and Muslims and that the latter have their homeland in India as the former have theirs."\footnote{Ibid., Letter from Gandhi to Jinnah dated September 15, 1944, pp. 12-13.}

Gandhi's reply to this claim equally followed on earlier lines:

"I find no parallel in history for a body of converts and their descendants claiming to be a nation apart from the parent stock. If India was one nation before the advent of Islam, it must remain one in spite of the change of faith of a very large body of her children."
He posed a question, if the whole of India had accepted Islam, would the two nations become one? Gandhi felt that the League leader had put forward an entirely new criterion of nationhood, which if accepted, would compel him to subscribe "to many more claims and face an insoluble problem". He said, "The only real though lawful test of our nationhood arises out of our common political subjection." Both of them adhered rigidly to their respective claims and could not agree on the question of nationhood.

Further, Jinnah could not accept Rajagopalachari's formula as the basis of negotiation because, according to him, it was distortion of the Lahore Resolution. He questioned the claim of Gandhi that Rajaji had taken from it its substance and given it a shape. He felt that the letter had rather put it out of shape and mutilated it.

Gandhi's readiness to abandon Rajagopalachari's formula in order to find a solution in the framework of the Lahore Resolution, too, did not carry him nearer Jinnah, mainly because the principle of self-determination that he offered in place of Rajagopalachari's formula was subjected to different interpretations by the two leaders. In support of his claim, Jinnah argued:

"Ours is a case of division and carving out sovereign states by way of settlement between

63. Ibid. also Indian Annual Register, op.cit., 1944, vol. II, p. 140.
two major nations, Hindus and Muslims and not of severance or secession from any existing Union which is non-existent in India."65

Gandhi could hardly accept it.

The League leader also rejected Gandhi's proposal of resolving the dispute through an arbitration of a third party on the ground that the latter was not the accredited representative of any organisation.66

However, this did not dishearten Gandhi. He moved a step further towards the Lahore Resolution, without surrendering his fundamental position, and offered another formula to accommodate the League's point of view. He said, "Differing from you on the general basis, I can yet recommend to the Congress and the country the acceptance of the claim for separation contained in the Muslim League's Lahore Resolution of 1940, on my basis and on the following terms":

The areas should be demarcated by a Commission approved by the Congress and the League. The wishes of the inhabitants of the areas demarcated should be ascertained through the votes of the adult population of the areas or through some equivalent method.

If the vote is in favour of separation it shall be agreed that these areas shall form a separate State as soon as possible after India is free from foreign domination and can therefore be constituted into two sovereign independent States.

65. Ibid. Letter from Jinnah to Gandhi dated September 21, 1944, p. 21.

66. Ibid. Letter from Jinnah to Gandhi dated September 25, 1944, p. 31.
There shall be a treaty of separation which should also provide for the efficient and satisfactory administration of foreign affairs, defence, internal communications, customs, commerce and the like, which must necessarily continue to be matters of common interest between the contracting parties.

The treaty shall also contain terms for safeguarding the rights of minorities in the two States.

Immediately on the acceptance of this agreement by the Congress and the League, the two shall decide upon a common course of action for the attainment of independence of India.

The League will, however, be free to remain out of any direct action to which the Congress may resort and in which the League may not be willing to participate.

Jinnah, however, did not find any difference between the two formulas as several clauses of it, according to him, resembled Rajagopalachari's formula and so his objections to it followed on the old lines. Concluding his arguments against it, he said,

"You will, therefore, see that the entire basis of your new proposals is fundamentally opposed to the Lahore Resolution. It is very difficult for me to entertain counter proposals and negotiate and reach any agreement or settlement with you as an individual unless they come from you in your representative capacity."

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Later, in a press conference, he compared the two formulae with 'Siamese Twins' which according to him were calculated to give an eternal burial to Pakistan. He said, "It is impossible to maintain that either of them satisfies any of the essentials embodied in the Lahore Resolution ... These terms are a veritable trap and a slough of death." In an interview with a foreign correspondent he described Gandhi's offer as "an insult to intelligence." Gandhi was pained to resolve Jinnah's reply and appealed to him to consider his new proposals more earnestly. He wrote, "My proposal of yesterday is an earnest effort to meet the essential requirements of Lahore Resolution."

He requested Jinnah to think fifty times before discarding his offer and urged him to refer the matter to League Council rather than taking the responsibility of rejecting the offer on his own shoulders. He even appealed for an opportunity to address the League Council and proposed that the matter be put before the open session of the League if the Council was against its acceptance.

Gandhi perhaps suggested it under the impression that it might appeal to a number of leaders of the League since the provision for a central authority envisaged in his formula had found place in one form or the other in the formulae offered by some of them such as Sikander Hayat Khan.

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70. Ibid., October 7, 1944. also Hector Bolitho, *op.cit.*, p. 151
and Feroz Khan Noon, though the structure and powers of the central authority varied in their schemes. In Sikander's scheme, a central federal authority consisting of the representatives of the units had very limited powers. Similarly, in Noon's scheme which contemplated the division of India into five Dominions, completely independent like New Zealand and Australia, the subjects like defence, foreign affairs and currency were to be administered by a central authority comprising delegates nominated by several Dominion Governments.\(^{72}\) Gandhi, too, did not specify clearly the structure of the central authority in his formula, and even avoided the use of the term central government. He only suggested a board composed of representatives of both the states for the administration of subjects of common interest. It was to be an arbitration board with administrative powers.\(^{73}\) In this way he had moved closer to Sikander's and Noon's formulae so far as the structure of the central authority was concerned.

But Jinnah did not agree to this\(^{74}\) as he feared divisions in the ranks of the League, in case Gandhi was permitted to address the League Council or the open session of the League since his proposal contained suggestions which were not unfamiliar to certain important League leaders.

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72. The Tribune, August 26, 1942.
Moreover, Jinnah was conscious of the fact that there were several other Muslim organisations which were opposed to the move of Pakistan and were prepared for a reasonable settlement with the Congress.

Though the failure of the talks, can be attributed to a number of factors, it was mainly due to the vast difference between the positions taken by the two leaders and lack of faith in each other's motives and moves.

Gandhi was quite doubtful about the success of his talks right from the very beginning as he was aware of the sea of difference between him and the League leader. He wrote to Sapru,

"I am going in hope but without expectation, so if I return empty handed, I shall not be disappointed." 75

Both sides blamed each other for the failure of the talks. To Gandhi, Jinnah's argument that he could not discuss with the former any details of the settlement on the ground that he (Gandhi) lacked the representative character was inconsistent with his several other moves. For instance, he was ready to discuss with him anything provided he first accepted the principle of Pakistan of Jinnah's concept.

Similarly, he found Jinnah's insistence on keeping the plebiscite open only to Muslims, equally unreasonable since it ignored the rights and claims of non-Muslims

minorities in any area, in deciding their fate on the issue of partition. He repeated this objection in his letter to Sapru as well as in his interview with Gelder, a correspondent of News Chronicle.

Liberal leader Sapru justified the stand taken by Gandhi over the communal question and said that he had gone as far as anybody could go for the sake of peace and settlement. He communicated to Munshi:

"I do not mind the provinces becoming sovereign if Jinnah simultaneously agrees to a centre, however, restricted it may be."

Rajagopalachari felt that with the failure of the talks, the Muslims had lost an opportunity of life time to secure Pakistan. He argued that if any time the proposal of Pakistan could have any chance of success, it was when Gandhi had agreed to it. Dr. Kitchlew also expressed identical views. B.L. Mitter, Advocate General of India, placed the blame for failure of talks on Jinnah. He said,

"Jinnah played the part of Hitler and demanded acceptance of Lahore Resolution with no interpretation of it."

77. Gandhi-Jinnah Talks, op. cit., p. 47.
79. Dawn, October 21, 1944.
80. The Tribune, October 2, 1944.
Jayakar wrote to Gandhi,

"Muslim League leader had gained more from you than he has lost to you. Though you have resisted the ridiculous theory of two-nation yet not withstanding of it, you have given him a formula which practically concedes the substance of Lahore Resolution, viz., a vivisection of India into two sovereign communal states without a controlling centre ... to a practical politician it makes no difference whether this division takes place as between two 'loving brothers' or between two 'sworn enemies'." 82

The Hindu Mahasabha leader, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, was equally critical of Gandhi's offer to Jinnah as it strengthened the League leader's position. 83

The Sikhs were dissatisfied with the talks. To Giani Kartar Singh, Gandhi's offer was worse than Rajagopalachari's formula because the latter had fixed district as the boundary whereas Gandhi authorised the Congress and the League to appoint a commission for demarcating territories. It meant that the representatives of his own community would not be consulted for appointing the commission under the scheme and the future of minorities would be decided by Hindus and Muslims without their (Sikhs) consent. He considered Gandhi's offer to Jinnah as a sword of Damocles hanging over their head. 84

Even Gandhi's own colleagues were not happy with him for initiating the talks. Humayun Kabir looked upon this move as a Himalayan blunder. 85 Azad considered it as a

82. Ibid., File No. 826, Ser. No. 27, Letter from Jayakar to Gandhi dated September 29, 1944, N.A.I., New Delhi.
83. Dawn, October 2, 1944.
84. The Tribune, October 2, 1944.
political blunder and said, "... it gave a new and added importance to Mr. Jinnah which he later exploited to the full ... "

86 In the opinion of V.P. Menon, who was later on associated with the transfer of power, "... the offer to discuss the partition of India with Jinnah was to say the least of it, inapportune." 87

However, the failure of the talks received a mixed reaction from the press. 88 Yugantar justified the stand taken by Gandhi against the complete severance of all ties. It observed:

"If the whole of North-West part of India, including Punjab, Sind, North-West Frontier Province, and Baluchistan became completely independent, is there any guarantee that this new Indian Pakistan will not seek treaties with Afghanistan, Iran and Arab States and thus prove a danger to Hindustan? ... we cannot solely agree to such a complete separation."

Amrit Bazar Patrika was rather critical of the constantly increasing demand of the Muslims. The paper maintained the view:

"Mr. Jinnah's going beyond the Lahore Resolution is quite consistent with the policy of the League in accelerating the tempo of its forward push. As the Congress, in its anxiety for Indian independence, accepted one demand after another, the League moved on from precedent to precedent till one finds that even the League Resolution has been left behind."

87. V.P. Menon, op.cit., p. 163.
88 Home Poll. 18/10/1944, Press Reports, N.A.I., New Delhi.
The Free Press argued:

"The letters are frank and revealing. On the part of Gandhi there is one continuing untiring effort to meet Mr. Jinnah and his point of view. On the part of Mr. Jinnah, there is an equally determined relentless effort to frustrate every effort of Gandhi to reach an agreement. It is an old game of Mr. Jinnah to lead the national leaders to make concession after concession, to extravagate Muslim demands and to hawk Muslim support to Britain for a price."

The Tribune, in its editorial, commented that the Times of India held both Gandhi and Jinnah responsible for the failure of the talks as both of them approached the problem completely from different angles and proved completely intransigent. The Bombay Chronicle observed:

"The attitude which Mr. Jinnah is presumed to have adopted is not the attitude one would have expected of a great leader of a great community, of a statesman conscious of the tremendous responsibility of his talks and inspired by a genuine spirit of compromise but that of an advocate mechanically pleading from his brief."

The editorial further observed that it was clear from Jinnah's utterences that talks could succeed only if Gandhi was prepared to make complete surrender to Jinnah and "to swallow the scheme of Pakistan itself entirely and unreservedly."

89. The Tribune, September 30, 1944.
The League leaders, on the other hand, invariably held Gandhi responsible for the failure of the talks. Jinnah complained that Gandhi agreed to the principle of division in one breath and destroyed the very basis on which division was claimed in the next. On the one hand Gandhi wanted League-Congress agreement, on the other, he denied the representative character and authority of the Muslim League to speak on behalf of the Muslims. Referring to Gandhi's claim that he, by his offer, had satisfied the Lahore Resolution, Jinnah said,

"It would be difficult to conceive a more disingenuous, torturous and crooked assertion which he (Gandhi) keeps out repeating naively."

He claimed that he tried to convince Gandhi for three weeks but his ailment was so long standing and chronic that it was beyond the reach of a physician. He was not sorry for the luckless parleys. He said to Durga Das, joint editor of the Hindustan Times.

"You see, Gandhi has defined Pakistan for me. Gandhi asked me whether it would be a state whose policy on defence and external affairs could be in conflict with India's. I had only to answer, yes."

Jinnah's biographer, Saiyed observed:

"The stiff attitude of Gandhi and his circuitous argumentation shifting from Rajaji formula to Lahore Resolution of the League and then back again and then over again to the League's Lahore Resolution, punctuating

90. Dawn, October 5, 1944.
the discussion by his own suggestion and those of others whom he did not claim to represent, had made the breakdown of these talks inevitable."92

To Liaquat Ali Khan, the whole attempt of Gandhi and Rajagopalachari was "a fraud, calculated to thwart and frustrate the Muslim demand of Pakistan."93 Haider Imam, M.L.A. Central, held that so long as Mr. Gandhi refused to face realities and persisted in roving about in a confused mental state, the chances of Hindu-Muslim compromise appeared rather bleak.94 Chaudhri Ghulam Abbas, President Muslim Conference of Kashmir, charged Gandhi with carrying on negotiations in the spirit of Savarkar as he was afraid of the Mahasabha.95

It is possible that Jinnah's weak hold over the Muslim majority provinces played a role in hardening his attitude towards Gandhi's proposals. The position of the League in the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province and Bengal was not sufficiently strong. Sir H. Dow, Governor of Sind, reported to the Viceroy that League ministries in Bengal and North-West Frontier Province were rather shaky.96 Even the Muslims in Sind were divided over the acceptance of Rajagopalachari formula. Sind Premier, Sir

93. Dawn, October 31, 1944.
94. Ibid., October 7, 1944.
95. Ibid.
Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah, revealed that Jinnah was much perturbed to find that the majority of Muslim Leaguers were strongly in favour of coming to an accommodation with the Congress on the basis of Gandhi's latest formula. In Sayeed's view:

"What must have made Jinnah reluctant to come to any definite and clear understanding with Gandhi at that time, was his own position as a leader of the Muslims. In September, 1944, Jinnah was not sure whether he could produce overwhelming support for his demand among the Muslims if a plebiscite were to be held."

Under these circumstances he could not assess how Muslim masses would react to his acceptance of any offer which directly concerned them. This consideration might have prevailed upon him to keep the pot of communalism boiling.

Moreover, in case of an agreement with the Congress, Jinnah would have been left with no slogan to offer to the Muslims and rally them around the League. It was more a question of political survival for Jinnah rather than the righteousness of the proposals that clinched the whole issue. Besides, an acceptance of what he called "maimed and mutilated Pakistan" would have strengthened his opposition among the Muslims. He was also aware of the fact that certain districts in the Muslim majority areas did not have absolute Muslim majority. In case of acceptance of plebiscite on Gandhi's terms, the Pakistan would have been deprived of eleven districts in Punjab and twelve districts in Bengal.

97. Ibid.
98. K.B. Sayeed, op. cit., p. 125.
including Amritsar and Calcutta besides some other areas in the eastern region. Under these conditions, the escape for Jinnah lay in avoiding the proposed plebiscite which could be done only by rejecting the formula.

Thus, the non-acceptance of any compromise formula was the only course left with him for maintaining his hold over the Muslims. Had he agreed to any offer, howsoever genuine, he would have joined the mainstream of Indian politics and his own personality or position would have merged with that of other leaders whom Gandhi was leading.

The British ascribed the failure of the talks to the fundamental differences between Gandhi and Jinnah. Wavell commented:

"... the negotiations dropped down because Gandhi and Jinnah differed completely as to the nature and scope of Pakistan and as to the order in which they placed the events necessary to Indian independence."\(^{100}\)

He even doubted the sincerity of Gandhi in seeking any settlement with Jinnah. According to the Viceroy, he(Gandhi) initiated the talks to bring Jinnah to his fold and thereby secure the release of the members of the Congress Working Committee and All-India Congress Committee.\(^{101}\) Glancy, the Governor of Punjab, said that the real motive of Gandhi was to expose the hollowness of the League's claim for Pakistan as it was not a viable proposition after extracting the

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definition of Pakistan from the League leader. Sir H. Twynam, the Governor of Central Provinces and Berar, commented that the talks were designed to trap Jinnah into an exhibition of unreasonableness which would be beneficial to the Hindu case in the eyes of the world. Some modern historians believe that the talks failed because the two leaders made demands on each other that they knew were totally unacceptable. They were poles apart.

Possibility of a bait from the British to Jinnah that hardened his attitude in the course of the talks is not ruled out. It was believed in several quarters at the time of failure of talks that the League leader was initially earnest about the settlement but an important message through Feroz Khan Noon that Amery, the Secretary of State, was thinking of granting 40 per cent representation to the Hindus, 40 per cent to the Muslims and the rest 20 per cent to the other communities at the Centre, proved to be a turning point and made Jinnah reconsider his approach to the settlement.

Gandhi was completely dedicated to the cause of independence which led him to make an earnest attempt for a settlement between the League and the Congress but the

102. Ibid., vol. IV, p. 1223.
103. Ibid., vol. V, p. 94.
105. The Tribune, September 30, 1944.
ideological and political compulsions, that he had, prevented him from yielding to every demand of the League leader. On the breakdown of the talks, he wrote to Jinnah,

"I cannot accept the Lahore Resolution as you want me to, especially when it seeks to introduce in its interpretation theories and claims which I cannot even hope to induce India to accept."106

Besides, he could not ignore the points of view and interests of Hindus, Sikhs and non-League Muslims who were watching the talks with great anxiety and concern.

In so far as the impact of the talks is concerned, Jinnah, definitely had acquired an edge over the forces opposed to the League. The Unionists in the Punjab and the opponents of the League in Bengal who were making efforts to stand up to Jinnah lost some ground. It was said that Gandhi gave to Jinnah a fresh lease of life in the Punjab when the latter's influence had started declining as a result of the determined opposition of the Unionists under the leadership of Khizr Hayat Khan. Similarly in Bengal, Gandhi-Jinnah talks and Gandhi's recognition of Jinnah's leadership caused disarray amongst the nationalist Muslims.107

Gandhi's recognition of the claims of Jinnah resulted in latter's emergence, as the most important leader of the Muslims of India, and the League as the most important political organisation of the Muslims. The fact that Gandhi chose to enter into negotiations with Jinnah and not with

106. Gandhi-Jinnah Talks, op.cit., Letter from Gandhi to Jinnah dated September 26, 1944, p. 34.
any other non-League Muslim leader for a settlement with the Congress raised the image of the latter in the eyes of all the Muslims who started looking to Jinnah for the realisation of all their aspirations. Consequently, all those who were earlier vacillating in their loyalty, later started supporting Jinnah firmly under the impression that Jinnah's firmness would promote their cause. The talks, in Brecher's view, placed Jinnah on a footing of virtual equality with Gandhi. 108

Gandhi who was so much against the vivisection of the country now agreed to have a talk with the leader of the League whose political goal was the creation of a separate homeland for the Muslims. This was a feather in Jinnah's cap. It could be argued by the opponents of Gandhi that though he was able to resist the two-nation theory successfully yet his formula based on the right of self-determination was practically an admission of the substance of the Lahore Resolution, viz., vivisection of India into two sovereign independent states.

Whatever it may be, it was definitely a landmark in the history of the subcontinent. Nanda observed:

"... viewed in the long term strategy of the campaign for Pakistan, the Gandhi-Jinnah talks were another milestone marking further progress from the offer of Lord Linlithgow in August, 1940 and the Cripps Mission in March, 1942."109

Nevertheless, it is not correct to say that Gandhi had accepted Pakistan of Jinnah's concept. Gandhi's proposals, while accepting the division of the country, were fundamentally different from those suggested by Cripps. Cripps proposals were unacceptable to him for the simple reason that "... they contemplated almost perpetual vivisection of India and would have created an effective barrier against Indian Independence."\textsuperscript{110}

During Gandhi-Jinnah talks, he accepted the suggestion of division of India as between members of the same family wherein things of common interest could be reserved for partnership.\textsuperscript{111} Moreover, Cripps offer accepted the Muslim right of self-determination on the basis of separate nation whereas Gandhi neither believed nor accepted the two-nation theory.

In the Cripps proposals not only the Muslim majority provinces but also the States were given the right to secede from the Indian Union which would have resulted in complete balkanization of the country. Gandhi was emphatically against the disintegration of the country. He said,

"I shall never be a party to the sale of the rights of the people of the States for the sake of the freedom of the people of British India."\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{110} The Tribune, July 14, 1944, Gandhi's interview to the Press on July 13, 1944 at Panchghani. also D.G.Tendulkar, op.cit., vol. 6, p. 259.
\textsuperscript{112} The Tribune, July 14, 1944.
Further, Gandhi abhorred the idea of a settlement between the Hindus and the Muslims through the intervention of third party i.e. the British. This explains his policy of giving more and more concessions to the Muslims to win their confidence.

His offers were based on the principle of self-determination which he believed was not antithetical to the principle of unity of the nation. For, it neither involved acceptance of the two-nation theory nor hostility to the creation of a central authority to administer common subjects for the mutual benefit of all political units. This was not an unusual approach. Even the concept of self-determination of the prominent League leaders such as Noon and Sikander, as already discussed, did not rule out the need of a central authority to administer certain common subjects. A division, if it must come, should not be done in a manner that it left no room for cooperation in future. It must not turn the parties into permanent enemies. This was his idea of a division between two brothers. That way, Gandhi was trying to salvage to the maximum the bonds of unity out of the wreckage of the ship of Indian politics that has foundered on the rock of power politics appearing in the guise of communal conflicts. For him, it was still the question of share of power and he was ready to offer to the

Muslims their fair share in order to save the unity of the nation. He was trying to build bridges over the stormy rivers.

However, it cannot be denied that the demand for partition which had been viewed both by Hindu and Muslim leaderships as a slogan or even a bargain counter started appearing as a stark reality. It is from this angle that the talks served the ends of the League leader. But such risks one has to take if one is making an effort to break the deadlock. It was essentially so because direct negotiations between the parties to the dispute, was an integral part of Gandhi's technique of resolving social conflicts. For him, these always served a useful purpose, although apparently they might not yield the desired result. At best, they offer an opportunity for understanding each other better.

Gandhi did not express any sense of utter disappointment or dispondency over the failure of the talks. His faith in the inherent goodness of human nature kept his pursuit alive. He did not give up his mission of bringing round the Muslim leadership to his point of view and continued the quest for settlement through other leaders including Tej Bahadur Sapru and Bhulabhai Desai.

He wrote to Sapru, the Liberal leader, to take the lead and hold a representative conference to discuss the causes of the failure of his talks with Jinnah and suggest
an independent solution, if any. Sapru, who was confident in his heart that if there was anyone among four hundred million people of India, who was genuinely and sincerely anxious for a settlement, it was Gandhi, decided to hold a Non-Party conference to resolve the impasse. It met in Delhi on November 19, 1944 and appointed a Non-Party Conciliation Committee to go through the various aspects of the problem of division of the country. The recommendations of the Committee, though passed after much deliberations, could not find favourable response from all sections. Jinnah refused to co-operate and the Muslim press came out with a scathing criticism. Nevertheless, its report came closer to Gandhi's thinking and favoured a single union of India.

Another attempt to resolve the deadlock was made by Bhulabhai Desai, the leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party in the Central Assembly. He entered into negotiations with Liaquat Ali Khan, the leader of Muslim League Parliamentary Party in the Central Assembly, for forming a coalition


national government at the Centre. Initially the move seemed to have the blessings of both Gandhi and the Viceroy, though for different reasons.

But the pre-mature publication of the proposals sparked off a spate of controversies. Jinnah's public denunciation of the pact made Liaquat comment that the story of agreement was a 'cock and bull story' and the agreement was never concluded and they had simply discussed certain proposals. A copy of the proposals found in Desai papers, however, reveal that Liaquat and Desai had agreed on certain proposals and reduced them to writing.

The hostility of most of the members of the Congress Working Committee towards the proposals made Gandhi lukewarm in his support and that left Desai high and dry. Nevertheless the proposals laid the basis for Wavell's offer and Simla Conference was held on the pre-liminaries suggested in the Desai-Liaquat Pact.

119. Bhulabhai Desai papers, File No. 6, Letter from Syed Mahmud to Desai dated November 18, 1944, See also manuscript of N.B.Khare's Autobiography, p. 118, N.A.I., New Delhi.


