UNITY CONFERENCES

AND

CONSTITUTIONAL REMEDIES

The educated and politically oriented classes in both the communities generally took the position that the real cause of tension between the Hindus and the Muslims was political, that is, the share of the seats of each community in the elected bodies of the country. It was, therefore, argued by them that until and unless there was an agreement over this question, no communal settlement was possible in India. An important step in this direction was taken in 1916 under the Lucknow Pact which resulted in some kind of rapprochement between the Hindus and the Muslims for a short time. It set the tone and the pattern of the political demands and constitutional developments in the country. A large number of Muslim leaders clamoured for the extension of the principle underlying the Lucknow Settlement, for they discovered in it an expedient method of
sharing power. But the Hindus of all shades and opinion, and most of the Sikhs, wanted to scrap it on the ground that it thwarted the growth of nationalism, strong enough to face British imperialism. The Muslim leadership, therefore, demanded its revision. After the withdrawal of the Non-co-operation movement, a number of conferences were held so as to arrive at an agreement over this issue. Gandhi did not underrate the importance of such agreements but he felt that these would not succeed in the prevailing atmosphere of mutual distrust and fear. He, therefore, insisted on taking steps for the removal of this atmosphere. All the same, he did not cut himself off completely from all efforts of political elite to find a satisfactory formula for constitutional settlement. The deteriorating communal situation in the Punjab following from the political demands of its Hindus, Sikhs and Muslim educated classes led him to make an effort in this direction. The opportunity was provided by the Provincial Conference in the Punjab in December 1924, over which he was called upon to preside.

During this visit he was successful in persuading Hindu, Sikh and Muslim leaders of the Punjab to discuss the whole question in an informal meeting in his presence. He himself did not carry any specific formula for
constitutional settlement. Nor did he expect any immediate agreement as a result of this meeting. It, however, enabled him to understand the nature of the problem in the Punjab and political claims and fears of each community. Though the majority of the participants in this meeting were Punjabis, there were some important leaders from outside, too. Among Muslim outsiders, Hakim Ajmal Khan, the Ali Brothers and Dr. Ansari were present. From the side of Hindus, M.M. Malaviya took part in the deliberations. So far as Gandhi was concerned he did not participate as a Hindu leader. He was more or less working as an arbitrator. Among the important local Muslim leaders, Kitchlew and Zafar Ali Khan were present, though they had not attended the Political Conference over which Gandhi had presided.

The discussions, as observed by Gandhi, centred on the political causes of the tension, for they appeared to be the predominant, if not the only, causes of the tension. The leadership of the three communities took the following position regarding their political demands:—The Muslims of all shades and opinion held that their majority be not reduced to minority or brought down.

to the position of equality with the other communities in the provincial legislature, in the provinces where they had a majority of population. They must have an absolute majority over all other parties combined. Obviously this referred, in the first instance, to the Punjab and Bengal. In the Punjab the Lucknow Pact allowed Muslims 50% of elected Indian members against their population about 55.0%. In Bengal the seats between Muslims and non-Muslims were divided in the ratio of 40% and 60% of elected Indian members respectively. On the population basis, according to the census of 1921, Muslims were entitled to 55.3% in the Punjab and 54% in Bengal. It is reported that the Muslim leaders present at Lahore expressed their willingness to accept population as the basis of representation in the legislatures throughout India. They were confident of inducing their fellow religionists in other provinces to accept the principle in the whole of India. They insisted on the same principle being applied to the local bodies and public services. Though no express mention was made about central legislature, it was assumed that the same principle would be applied there also. As regards common or separate electorates, at first they insisted on the separate electorates.

Towards the end they declared that they had an open mind on the question. Some of them expressed themselves in favour of giving the choice to the minorities everywhere.

Among Hindus, Malaviya and the Punjab Hindu leaders declined to commit themselves to any decision about the proposals made by the Muslim leaders. They were all opposed to the principle of communal representation and most strongly to its extension to the local bodies and to the public services. 3 But their immediate ground for refusal to discuss the proposals of the other side were:

1. That the recent riots all over India and most particularly the events of Kohat, had produced an atmosphere of coercion and intimidation, and until that atmosphere was changed there could not be a proper settlement of these questions on their merits. The Muslim leaders, on the other hand, said that the dispute over these questions alone were responsible for the riots and, therefore, their settlement was necessary to bring about peace. The Hindus felt that to submit to any settlement of these questions under fear of further riots was inconsistent with dignity.

2. That the question having all India importance could not be settled without proper consultation with the Hindu leaders of other provinces and so on.

3. That the population basis of communal representation not being acceptable to Sikhs, the Punjab Hindus' consent to it was immaterial.

In Gandhi's view, the position taken by the Hindus was not fully crystallised. "The Punjabi Hindus", he added, "seemed to dread, at the back of the Mussalman demand, a sinister design on the part of the Mussalmans. In fact there is a vague fear in their minds that if the Mussalmans gain a decisive majority in the administration of the Punjab, the proximity of the warlike Mussalman tribes would constitute a most formidable menace to the Punjab in particular and to India in general."^4

These meetings did not yield any immediate solution. While the Government sources commented that these conferences did not lead to any "practical conclusion",^5 the Tribune noted some gains. It was pointed out that as a result of these meetings some of the leading Mussalmans of this province advanced to a new position favourable to unity on account of Gandhi's presence. This advance covered four points:

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5. Home (Pol.) Dept., Govt.of India, File No.25/1924.
1. Acceptance of the principle by the Muslim leaders that the basis of representation should be the same in all provinces.

2. Their preparedness to consider the question of the electorate being general and their agreement that separate electorates should be resorted to only at the instance of minorities.

3. Their readiness to make the proportionate representation of the communities on the services subject to the minimum requirements of efficiency.

4. Their recognition of the fact that any solution of the problem in order to be of value, must be an all-India solution.  

In view of the hardened attitude of the leaders of the three communities, Gandhi himself did not expect any immediate solution. He had noticed marked deterioration of relations between the Hindus and the Muslims of the Punjab since his visit to this province before the withdrawal of the Non-co-operation movement. The minority communities in the Punjab, especially the Hindus, appeared to have been upset by

6. The Tribune, 17 December 1924.
the attitude of the Mohammedans of the province and it was evident from the following banners, as reported by the Intelligence Bureau, exhibited on the route of Gandhi's procession:

(i) "Mahatmaji, do not sacrifice the Hindus for the sake of Congress. (riots)
(ii) 'Multan, Saharanpur and Kohat are the fruits of Hindu-Muslim Unity.'

The relation between the two communities had become so strained that even the Congress, which claimed to represent both the Hindus and the Muslims, could not command the allegiance of both the communities. This is evident from the fact that hardly any important local Mohammedan leader attended the Political Conference convened by the Congress on 7th and 8th December, at Lahore under the chairmanship of Mahatma Gandhi. The absence of Dr.Kitchlew and Zafar Ali Khan from the Conference was especially noted. Dr.Kitchlew, when approached by a correspondent of a vernacular Daily to explain the reason for his absence from the Political Conference, stated that since he had lost the confidence of the Hindus who even regarded him as a special traitor, it was not advisable for him to attend this Conference.

7. Home (Pol.) Dept., Govt.of India, File No.25/1924.
8. Ibid.
9. The Tribune, 12 December 1924.
The selection of venue for the Khilafat Conference this time was in marked contrast to the earlier practice. Formerly, it used to be held in the same town where Political Conference was held with a view to enable the leaders of both the communities to attend both the conferences. But this time it was convened at Amritsar at a time when Political Conference was being held at Lahore. Consequently, the proceedings of the Political Conference, as reported by the Punjab Intelligence, only "served to accentuate the differences ... between the Hindus and the Mohammedans."10 It was further pointed out that "great offence was given to the Mohammedans by the almost exclusion of them from the reception committee...."

The composition of the committee that deliberated over the communal question in the presence of Gandhi at Lahore, too, did not hold high prospects for the success of the deliberations. In the first place, the members did not represent any political party and so their decisions could not be held binding on the political parties. The Mohammedan participants conspicuously stated that they expressed only their individual views.12 Moreover, no decision could succeed without the consent of Fazal-i-Husain the Education

10. Home (Pol.) Dept., Govt. of India, File No. 25/1924.
11. Ibid.
and Local Bodies Minister, whose policies were quite popular among the educated Muslims, including Congress Muslims, though the Hindus of all shades and opinion were vehemently opposed to his policy of giving representation to the Muslims in the elected bodies and public services in proportion to their population. But he did not participate in this informal meeting, though Gandhi kept himself in touch with him realising former's predominant position in Punjab politics.

One merit of all these negotiations at Lahore was that it confirmed Gandhi's conviction that no piecemeal solution would be helpful. What the country needed was a national solution and this could be done at the all-India level. He, therefore, thought that the subject could be more gainfully taken up at the Belgaum Session of the Congress where there would be a more formal gathering of the representatives to consider the whole position and find "an acceptable and national solution of the thorny problem."\(^\text{13}\)

But, no concrete steps could be taken even at Belgaum. Gandhi, however, was in favour of a small committee consisting of representatives of various communities and parties, for the deliberations of such

\(^{13}\) C.W., Vol.XXV, p.419.
an intricate question. He, therefore, made a suggestion at the All-Parties Conference Committee at Delhi on 23 January 1925, to appoint a sub-committee to suggest lines of agreement among the Hindus and the Muslims and among all the political parties in order to draw up a scheme for Swaraj. As a result, a sub-committee consisting of over forty members, including, among others, Gandhi, Jinnah, Shaukat Ali, Chintamani, M.M. Malwiya, M.R. Jayakar and Lajpat Rai, was appointed. One of the objectives of this committee was "to frame such recommendations as would enable all the parties to join the Congress: (b) to frame a scheme for the representation of all the communities, races and sub-divisions on the legislative and other elective bodies under Swaraj and recommended the best method of securing just and proper representation of the communities in the services with due regard to efficiency.\(^{14}\)

In the first meeting both Gandhi and Jinnah laid emphasis on the importance of Hindu-Muslim unity for the realisation of their goal of freedom. The very first meeting, however, revealed the wide gulf between the leaders of the two communities over the question of representation. While Jinnah voiced the

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demands of Muslims, particularly of the Punjab, for the extension of the Lucknow Pact with a view to protecting their rights and claims, Lajpat Rai gave expression to the current Hindu opinion that the agreement arrived at Lucknow was a temporary one implying thereby that it was liable to modifications in the interest of the country as a whole.  

The Sub-Committee re-divided itself into two groups, one for drafting a skeleton Swaraj scheme and the other for framing a skeleton Hindu-Muslim unity scheme. The latter group adjourned its deliberations at its first meeting as no agreement could be reached and the members felt the need of an opportunity to confer with members who had not attended the meeting. The next meeting was scheduled to meet on 28 February, Lajpat Rai asked for the postponement of the next meeting to a date after 3 March as, besides himself, some Hindu leaders such as Jayakar, Iyengar and Jairamdas would not be able to attend on 28 February. The meeting could not be postponed by Gandhi alone as the issue of adjournment could be considered by the committee itself. When the Committee met on 28 February, the attendance was so meagre that hardly any discussion could be held.

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Moreover, the differences among some leaders were so great that no settlement could be arrived at in the near future. So the meeting was adjourned sine die. It appeared that some Hindu and Muslim leaders had taken extreme positions as was evident from the speeches delivered by Jinnah and Lajpat Rai in the first meeting. While some Muslim leaders wanted the extension of the principle of separate electorates as agreed upon under the Lucknow Pact, the Hindu leaders pressed for giving up this device as it had proved inimical to the national interest. Gandhi was in search of a middle course. He was certainly not in favour of separate electorates, especially when it was demanded by a majority community in any area such as by Muslims in the Punjab. He had come to realise that the working of separate electorates would mean "ruin of nationalism." But he was equally conscious of the fact that the Muslim minority had certain fears from Hindu majority. This, he thought, would be removed if the Hindus could yield to the principle of "surrendering out of strength to the Mussalman in every mundane matter," and "by showing that those who claim to be nationalists and are in an overwhelming majority should stand out in any unseemly competition for legislative or administrative control."
Underlying this suggestion, he had three considerations before him. In the first place, no proposal for Hindu-Muslim unity should depend upon the goodwill of the Government for its proper working, as he was fully convinced that any scheme of political reforms introduced under the aegis of the British Government would only increase the power of the British bureaucracy and thereby increase their "share in the exploitation of the dumb millions." Secondly, the religions of the representatives does not matter in democracy if the ultimate power remains with the people who have acquired the capacity to resist authority when abused. Thirdly, "undivided responsibility immediately puts a man on his mettle and his pride or god fearingness sobers him." Besides, he offered a plan which assured Muslims due share of political power without any dependence on separate electorates or on the Government. It was based on the belief that the Muslims do not want separate electorates for its own sake but only "want their own real representatives to be sent to the legislatures and other elective bodies." This, he thought, could be done by private arrangement.

23. Ibid., Vol.XXXIV, p.4.
rather than by 'legal imposition'. He preferred it because a private arrangement implies, "a domestic settlement of domestic quarrels and a solid wall of united opposition against a common enemy — the foreign rule." Besides, a private arrangement is more flexible.

Briefly, this plan sought to do away with separate electorates, but attempted to "secure the election of the desired and agreed number of Mussalman and other candidates in a given constituency under a joint ticket, Mussalman candidates to be nominated by previously known Mussalman associations." He did not enter into the question of weightage which, he thought, could be considered when this principle was accepted by all the persons concerned.

This scheme involves the principle of reservation of seats for the Muslim minority. However, Gandhi did not specify its working. He did not mention the procedure for the recognition of a Mussalman association that would be authorized to nominate a Muslim candidate. Further the allocation of candidates to each Muslim association was left undecided. Probably, he was thinking that the selection of the Muslim candidates would be decided through a preliminary ballot open only to the Muslim associations. Moreover,

26. Ibid.
nothing was said regarding the position of an association which would be formed after the acceptance of this kind of arrangement. These matters could, however, be worked out after the acceptance of this formula in principle by the major political parties in India.

The principle of reservation of seats for the Mohammedans and the election of their candidates on a joint ticket was not an unsound one as it ensured due representation to the Muslims without resorting to separate electorates. From the national point of view it had one great merit. It could work as an antidote to communal fanaticism, for under the joint electorates, only those Mohammedans would be elected who held the confidence of the Hindu voters in their constituency. This probably was the motive underlying Morley's suggestion of reservation of seats for Muslims under joint electorate system in his initial scheme of reforms.27

It is evident that the Muslim elite who pressed for separate electorates were more interested in ensuring power for a particular group of Muslims than for their community as a whole. Under Gandhi's plan the share of Muslim political power

27. Supra. Chapter I, pp.36-7.
could not be monopolised by one Muslim party. But his scheme had another drawback. It did not specify the position of Muslim political parties such as the Unionist Party of the Punjab, which though, predominantly Muslim, had a few non-Muslim members also who were maintaining non-communal posture. Moreover, his scheme could pose an embarrassment to a nationalist party such as the Indian National Congress as it claimed to represent all communities including the Muslims. However, all these shortcomings could be overcome if it had received due consideration both from Hindu and Muslim leaders, but they brushed it aside.

Though Gandhi could appreciate the reason underlying the demand of a minority for a special protection of its rights and claims, he could not understand the insistence of a majority for the separate electorates, as was done by most of the Muslim leaders in the Punjab. He, of course, conceded the Muslims claim for majority of seats in the Punjab and Bengal on the basis of population even to the annoyance of the Hindus in these provinces. 28

Despite all his efforts, Hindu-Muslim unity went on eluding him like will-o’-the-wisp, dampening his enthusiasm for it at least for a short time.

Consequently, on the occurrence of riots again, he showed his indifference to this question by making only a passing reference to it in a speech at a public meeting at Calcutta in April 1925, thinking that he could best serve this cause by his silence over it. In reply to a telegram to Ali Brothers, he defined himself as a spent-bullet, for, he was sure that in the absence of mutual goodwill, the compromise between the two communities would not be possible. As a result, the unanimous decision of the All-India Congress Committee at its meeting in Bombay on 15 and 16 May 1927, over this issue did not arouse his enthusiasm. He stuck to his old position that "any agreement between the component parts of the nation must be voluntary and must remain so for all time. It must not, if it is conceived in terms of Swaraj, depend for its final ratification or enforcement upon a legal enactment." "Ratification," he further added, "by our respective organisations must be held to be final and binding."

Similarly, writing to a Punjab Congress leader, he said, "By all means try to bridge the gulf that at the present moment seems to be widening between the two

31. Home (Pol.) Dept., Govt. of India, File No. 112/IV/1926.
32. C.W., Vol. XXXIV, p.3.
parties-Hindus and Mussalmans. But I adhere to my opinion that no real solution is to come at the present moment out of any effort. I see distrust everywhere. Some more fighting is unfortunately in store for us before a peaceful atmosphere is created. When each party expects to humble the other, peace is impossible. It is more over my firm conviction that this exaggerated importance we are giving to the Councils out of all proportion to their usefulness, if there every was any, is keeping us apart."

He, therefore, consistently held that real unity between the two communities would not be realised till each of them was willing to work for the good of the other and attempted to understand other's leadership.

Though he had taken the vow of silence only for a year, he continued showing his indifference to political development in the country till 1928 when Congress started making fresh attempts at communal unity in accordance with the Madras Congress resolution of 1927, in order to frame a constitution acceptable to all the communities in India which could also

34. C.W., Vol.XXXII, p.461.
meet the challenge thrown by Lord Birkenhead a few days later to all Indian political parties to frame this kind of constitution.\textsuperscript{36} Gandhi, too, impressed upon the nation through the columns of Young India on 5 January 1928, that the Hindu-Muslim unity was "the best and the most dignified answer to Lord Birkenhead's insolent flaunting on British might,"\textsuperscript{37} As a result, the Congress Working Committee convened a meeting of several political parties on 12 February 1928 in Delhi. This was followed by a meeting in Bombay on 19 May 1928, which appointed a sub-committee consisting of, among others, Subhas Chandra Bose, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Motilal Nehru (Chairman), Sir Ali Imam, Syt. Shuaib Qureshi, Aney and M.R. Jayakar.\textsuperscript{38} Though apparently Gandhi was not involved in these activities, he was making himself felt in carrying the deliberations of the Conference through his advice to the Congress leaders participating in it. If Shaukat Ali's version is correct, even the selection of the members of the committee was made in consultation with Gandhi.\textsuperscript{39}

\begin{enumerate}
\item C.W., Vol. XXXV, p. 437.
\item Report of All-Parties Conference, op. cit., p. 17.
\item Letter \textit{S. Ali to Gandhi} dated 23 October 1928, P.S. No. 13710, Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalya.
\end{enumerate}
This committee held several sittings during the ensuing three months before it submitted its report, popularly known as Nehru Report, to the All-Parties Conference held at Lucknow on August 28. Its decisions were endorsed unanimously at least formally and even Hindus and Muslims of the Punjab and Bengal, where communal problem defied any solution were prevailed upon to accept them. Gandhi commended the efforts of the All-Parties Conference for its unanimous recommendations even before the Conference met at Lucknow. He appealed to various parties and groups not to judge the decisions of the Report from their separate points of view but assess them from the national standpoint. In spite of his reservations over the question of franchise recommended by the All-Parties Conference, he deliberately refrained from commenting on the clauses of the Report in order to discourage all controversies about the decisions of the Conference. He accepted it not because it was a perfect document but because it was "a compromise the best attainable which representatives of most parties have endorsed." He, however, warned Motilal in a private letter that Hindu-Muslim question would still present difficulties.

42. Ibid, p.196.
43. Ibid., Vol. XXXVIII, p.137.
44. Ibid., Vol. XXXVII, p.194.
The All-India Congress Committee accepted these recommendations in its meeting on 4th and 5th November, though with a few amendments, but the Muslims were divided over the question of acceptance of the Nehru Report. Maulvi Shafi Daudi and Shaukat Ali group, though in minority, were opposed to it. 45

With a view to obtaining wider acceptance by the various parties, the All-Parties Convention again held its sessions from 22 December 1928 to 1 January 1929, at Calcutta. This time many more eminent leaders participated in its deliberations. Gandhi and Jinnah who had been absent from its meetings in the earlier phases were present at the various stages of the discussion though Gandhi would make us believe that he was dragged into the deliberations as a result of the urgent and somewhat pathetic appeal made by Motilal Nehru to help him in a difficult situation. 46 It took the following decisions about the communal representation in the legislatures:

1. There shall be joint mixed electorates throughout India for the House of Representatives and the provincial legislatures.

45. The Proceedings of the All-Parties National Convention (Allahabad: Secretary, All India Congress Committee, 1928), pp. 15, 130.

2. There shall be no reservation of seats for the House of Representatives except for Muslims in provinces where they are in a minority and non-Muslims in the N.W.F., Province. Such reservation will be in strict proportion to the Muslim population in every province where they are in a minority and in proportion to the non-Muslim population in N.W.F. Province. The Muslims or non-Muslims, where reservation is allowed to them, shall have the right to contest additional seats.

3. In the provinces:
   (a) There shall be no reservation of seats for any community in the Punjab and Bengal. It was provided further that the question of communal representation will be open for reconsideration, if so desired, by any community after working the recommended system for 10 years.
   (b) In provinces other than the Punjab and Bengal there will be reservation of seats for Muslim minorities on population basis with the right to contest additional seats.
   (c) In the N.W.F. Province there shall be similar reservation of seats for non-Muslims with the right to contest other seats.
4. Reservation of seats, where allowed, shall be for a fixed period of ten years. It was provided that the question will be open for reconsideration after the expiration of that period, if so desired by any community.

5. ... Sind shall be separated from Bombay and constituted into a separate province.47

The discussions continued for four days but Jinnah, on behalf of the Muslim League, raised on 27 December 1928, a number of points and demanded reconsideration and modification of the Report on the following basis:

1. That one-third of the elected representative of both the Houses of the Central Legislature should be Mussalmans....

2. That in the Punjab and Bengal, in the event of Adult Suffrage not being established, there should be reservation of seats for the Mussalmans on the population basis for ten years subject to a re-examination after that period, but they shall have no right to contest additional seats....

3. (a) That residuary powers should be left to the provinces and should not rest with the Central Legislature....

4. The separation of Sind should not be postponed till the new constitution comes into force.

5. That the constitution shall not be amended or altered unless the amendment or alteration is passed first by both the Houses of Parliament separately by a majority of four-fifths of those present and then by both the Houses in a joint sitting by a majority of four-fifths of those present....

Gandhi completely identified himself with the recommendations of this Report at the session of the All-India Congress at Calcutta by moving the following resolution.

"This congress, having considered the constitution recommended by the All-Parties Committee Report, welcomes it as a great contribution towards the solution of India's political and communal problems, and congratulates the Committee on the virtual unanimity of its recommendations, and, whilst adhering to the resolution relating to Complete Independence passed at the Madras Congress, approves of the constitution drawn up by the Committee as a great step in political advance, especially as it represents the largest measure of agreement attained among the important parties in the country.

48. The proceedings of the All-Parties National Convention, op. cit., pp. 76-77.
"Subject to the exigencies of the political situation this Congress will adopt the Constitution, if it is accepted in its entirety by the British Parliament on or before 31 December 1929, but in the event of its non-acceptance by that date or its earlier rejection, the Congress will organise a campaign of Non-violent Non-co-operation by advising the country to refuse taxation and in such other manner as may be decided upon." 49

Though Gandhi was able to prevail upon Congressmen to give their unstinted support to the Report, the communal question remained unresolved as the Muslim League under the leadership of Jinnah would not endorse it till their demands were conceded. In fact, differences over communal question raised their head as soon as the All-Parties Conference started its deliberations at Bombay in May 1928. Shaukat Ali would have us believe that there were sharp differences between him and Motilal over the question of reservation of Muslim seats since Motilal wanted the reservation to go to both in the case of majority and minority provinces and it was alleged that Gandhi was in agreement with Motilal on this issue. He even went to the extent of saying that effort was made to

nominate such persons on the committee as were known for their opposition to the reservation of seats, and even suspected Gandhi to be in league with other Congress leaders such as Motilal in attempting to keep Shuaib Quâreshi out of the committee on account of his views about the reservation of seats for Muslims. He gave his version of the story in a letter dated 23 October 1928, to Gandhi as follows, "...I did say then and say it now also that the original committee of the four as proposed by you — Ansari, Motilal, Jawaharlal and Aney — was composed of men who did not want Muslim reservation of seats, but at the open meeting of the All-Parties Conference, I was surprised that other names were added to the committee, i.e. Sir Ali Imam, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Mr.Jayakar, Mr.Joshi, Sardar Mangal Singh, so that Shuaib's alone and possibly Subhas Bose were the only members who could put forward the Muslim point of view, the views of others being against the reservation of seats." Gandhi in his characteristic way succinctly replied "We may not impute motives to those who differ from us" in the absence of clear evidence and "strong proof".  

Undoubtedly, several Muslim leaders, including Shaukat Ali, had sharp differences, with Hindu leaders —

50. Letter from Shaukat Ali to Gandhi dated 23 October 1928, P.S.No.13710, G.S.S.
both Congressmen and non-Congressmen — over the communal question and the sub-committee appointed by the All-Parties Conference at Bombay had to face rough weather during the course of three months of its deliberations. Gandhi's help was sought quite often to overcome the deadlock following from sharp differences of opinion among members. For instance Dr. Ansari reporting to Gandhi about the developments during the deliberations of the sub-committee in its meeting at Allahabad in June 1928, wrote, "When I reached Allahabad, there was a deadlock. The Sikhs would have no reservation of seats at all, anywhere, neither for the majority nor for the minority. The Mahasabha people would allow reservation for the minorities but none for the majorities. The Congress and Muslim proposal was for a reservation of seats both for the majorities and the minorities." He asked Gandhi to prevail upon Shuaib to relent his opposition. Similarly, Motilal kept him informed regarding the difficulties encountered by the Committee in arriving at decisions over several questions. There was, thus, hardly any ground for Shaukat Ali's accusation that Gandhi tried to keep Shuaib out of the Committee. Gandhi strongly denied it in a letter dated 24 September 1928, to Shaukat Ali.

52. Letter from Dr. M. A. Ansari to Gandhi dated 28 June 1928, P.S.No.14929, G.S.S.
53. Letter from Motilal to Gandhi dated 2 October 1928, P.S.No.14842,G.S.S.
He wrote, "... well, it is news to me that I tried to keep Shuaib out. I do not even remember what I said about him and others. All I know is that I never dreamt of keeping Shuaib out of anything. I have too much regard for his honesty and independence to wish to keep him out. And you ought to know my nature. I never even keep out opponents and if I want to, I say so what led you to think that I wanted to keep Shuaib out with a purpose?"\(^{54}\)

Nor does there appear to be any reason for us to believe that reservation of seats was the only issue which the Congress leaders including Gandhi kept in view while selecting members for the Committee. Even Gandhi's own formula that he offered in 1925 implied some kind of reservation of seats. A person who had been all the time asking the majority community to surrender voluntarily on the issue of seats to the elective bodies was not expected to attach so much importance to it as to annoy the Muslim leaders unnecessarily.

His role at the All-Parties Convention at Calcutta, as described by him was mostly advisory. He told the gathering there that he was attending it as a legal adviser to the President (Ansari) who met him earlier and requested him to be available there for his advice. He also moved the resolution for the adjournment of the convention sine die.\(^{55}\)

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55. Ibid., Vol.XXXVIII, p.314.
Technically the Report of the Committee was accepted unanimously. But there was definitely an undercurrent of dissatisfaction among some leaders. It was well known that Shuaib Qureshi did not yield over the demand for 1/3 seats for Muslims in the Central Legislature and his approval of the Report was subject to this demand. Similarly though Sardar Mangal Singh representing Sikhs, signed the Report, several other leaders of his community were deadly opposed to the recommendations of the Committee regarding representation in the Punjab and Gandhi had to face hard time to prevent them from drifting away from the Congress on this account.

While the hectic political activity of 1928 produced a constitution that had the consent of the leaders of many different groups and ..., the year 1929 witnessed the loss of all these gains resulting from the estrangement between the leaders of the Congress and Muslim League. The rejection of Jinnah's demands by the Calcutta Convention mortified him beyond measure and he started making efforts to unite Muslims against the Congress. As a result, all Muslim groups and parties opposed to the Congress joined hands with a view to improving their political status. The declaration of the British Government and repeated announcements by several Liberal and Congress
leaders including Gandhi that no political advancement was possible without the consent of the Muslims, raised their spirits. Gandhi, on his part, was exploring silently all possible avenues to communal settlement. With this end in view he went to Bombay on 12 August 1929, to have a fresh dialogue with Jinnah and Ali Brothers on the suggestion of Sarojini Naidu. However, nothing came out of the meeting, and he wrote to Motilal with great distress, "My mind is in a whirl in this matter. The atmosphere is too foggy for me to see clearly." Similarly he tried to assuage the feelings of the Sikhs, who had been shaken by the non-acceptance of their demands by the Nehru Committee, in order to keep them on the side of the Congress.

However, the Nehru Committee Report turned out to be a still-born child. With the lapse of the year 1929, the Report came to an end. The Congress also took steps to remove the grievances following from the Nehru Committee's recommendations of leaders of some minority communities with a view to keeping them with the main stream of the national struggle. Consequently, Gandhi moved the following resolution on 31 December, at the Lahore Congress in 1929, "In view of the lapse of the Nehru Constitution it is unnecessary to declare

57. Letter from Gandhi to Motilal dated 23 August 1929, Motilal Papers, N.M.M.L.
the policy of the Congress regarding communal questions, the Congress believing that in an Independent India the communal question can only be solved on a strictly national basis. But as the Sikhs in particular and the Muslims and other minorities in general had expressed dissatisfaction over the solution of communal questions proposed in the Nehru Report, this Congress assures the Sikhs, the Muslims and other minorities that no solution in any future constitution will be acceptable to the Congress that does not give full satisfaction to the parties concerned."

Although the resolution pacified most of the leaders of the Sikh Community, it did not create much effect on the Muslims. The Government felt that in spite of discarding the Nehru Report, the Congress "has failed substantially to relieve the communal situation, and the Congress remains essentially a Hindu association without being able to claim that it is truly representative of all shades of Hindu thought." It was further reported that the Nehru Report has been dropped partly because it advocated Dominion status, but mainly because it is hoped that its elimination will remove some of the communal difficulties which the policy of the Congress has hitherto involved.

60. Home (Pol.) Dept., Govt. of India, File No.98/1930.
61. Ibid.
It is true that during the Civil Disobedience movement of 1930, the Congress could not generate as much enthusiasm among the Muslims as it did during the Non-co-operation movement in 1921-22. Nevertheless it was not true to say that Congress had completely become a Hindu body. According to some accounts nearly 12,000 Muslims went to Jail out of the total of one hundred thousand who courted arrest. 62

However, the first phase of the movement came to end with the signing of Gandhi Irwin Pact on 5 March 1931, whereby the movement was suspended and the Congress agreed to attend the Round Table Conference in London. The Pact was endorsed without much ado by the Karachi Session of the Congress held on 29 March 1931, that marked the triumph for Gandhi. The new Working Committee meeting on April 1st and 2nd, appointed Gandhi as the sole delegate representing the Congress to the Second Round Table Conference. 63

However, he was quite sceptical about the prospects of his participation in the Round Table Conference in the absence of some agreement between Hindus and Muslims on communal issue. So, as soon as

the session was over, he started taking steps to bring about a settlement between the two communities over the constitutional issue. While to Hindus he appealed to leave to Muslims as big a share of spoils as they wanted,\(^6^4\) he assured the Muslim leaders that if they could present a united demand it would be quite easy for him to accept it. In compliance with the resolution passed on 27 March 1931, of the Working Committee asking Gandhi, Patel and Jamāna Lal Bajaj to contact the Muslim leaders for a communal settlement,\(^6^5\) he went to Delhi on 1st April, where All-India Muslim Conference was in session. But there was hardly any scope for settlement, since, according to an observer, their main plank was opposition to the Congress.\(^6^6\) It is during these deliberations that the Muslim leaders presented their demands which later on came to be known as Jinnah's Fourteen Points. But, as reported by S.C. Bose, the Nationalist Muslim leaders such as Dr. Ansari and Sherwani had positively told Gandhi that if any time he yielded to the demand of separate electorates put up by the Muslim Conference, they would oppose it strongly.\(^6^7\) A.M. Khwaja told

64. C.W., Vol.XLV, p.271.
Gandhi in a letter dated 21 March 1931, that acceptance of the demand of separate electorates would be tantamount to the betrayal of the Muslims adding that it was only the demand of the Muslims from the minority provinces like U.P. and Bihar, whose main concern was to safeguard the weightage enjoyed by them.\textsuperscript{68} It was mostly because of the opposition of the Nationalist Muslims to the demand of the League for separate electorates that the Muslim Round Table Conference that met on 18 April 1931 at Simla to formulate unanimous demands of Muslims, could not make any headway.\textsuperscript{69} Such pressures restrained Gandhi from considering Jinnah's demands sympathetically. Defending his action he stated on 6 April that the demand "... which was given to the Congress deputation at the Muslim Parties' meeting on the 4th instant was not a unanimous minimum. For one thing I had the warning of the Nationalist Muslims not to accept anything that did not proceed on the principle of joint electorates based on adult suffrage ... they tell me that separate electorates are bad for Mussalmans, I must listen to them. They further claim that the Mussalman masses do not want separate electorates."\textsuperscript{70} Further, he argued that he could not identify himself "with any situation which is frankly based on communalism and yet has not what may be called unanimous support of the community.

\textsuperscript{68} Letter from A.M.Khwaja to Gandhi dated 21 March 1931, A.M.Khwaja Papers, N.M.M.L.
\textsuperscript{70} C.W., Vol.XLV, p.394.
In the 2nd Week of July 1931, Congress Working Committee met at Bombay and offered another scheme of communal settlement which was hammered into shape by a sub-committee of the Congress Working Committee consisting of M.M. Malaviya, Dr. Ansari and Sardar Sardul Singh. Its recommendations were:

1. (a) Joint electorates shall form the basis of representation in the future Constitution of India.
   (b) For the Hindus in Sind, the Muslims in Assam and the Sikhs in Punjab and the North-West Frontier Province, and for Hindus and Muslims in any province where they are less than 25 per cent of the population, seats shall be reserved on the Federal and Provincial Legislatures on the basis of population with the right to contest additional seats.

2. Appointments shall be made by non-party Public Service Commissions which will prescribe the minimum qualifications, and which shall have due regard to efficiency of the public service as well as to the principle of equal opportunity to all communities for a fair share in the public services of the country.

3. In the formation of Federal and Provincial Cabinets, the interests of minority communities shall be recognised by convention.

4. The North-West Frontier Province and Baluchistan shall have the same form of government and administration as other provinces.

5. Sind shall be constituted into a separate province, provided that the people of Sind are prepared to bear the financial burden of the separated province.

6. The future constitution of the country shall be federal. The residuary powers shall vest in the federating units, unless, on further examination, it is found to be against the best interests of India. However, while recommending the scheme the following explanation was given:

"The Working Committee has adopted the foregoing scheme as a compromise between the proposals based on undiluted communalism and undiluted nationalism. Whilst on the one hand the Working Committee hopes that the whole Nation will endorse the scheme, on the other it assures those who take extreme views and cannot adopt it that the Committee will gladly, as it is bound to, by the Lahore Resolution,"
accept without reservation any other scheme if it commands the acceptance of all the parties."\textsuperscript{72}

The resolution of the Working Committee was tantamount to the acceptance of the 14 points of Jinnah with the exception of two, namely reservation of $33\frac{1}{3}$ per cent to the Muslims in the Federal Legislature and demand for separate electorates.

Gandhi, while endorsing this formula did not hesitate to admit that it was not completely based on the principles of nationalism to which they were committed. "Judged by that standard," he said, "the scheme is a fall". "But", he added, "we are fallen .... And so the Congress has offered a compromise."\textsuperscript{73} He, therefore, asked the Hindus, the Muslims and the Sikhs to accept the scheme as the best in the prevailing circumstances.\textsuperscript{74}

Similarly when asked by a correspondent before leaving for London on 29 May 1931, whether in the absence of a communal solution not acceptable to a section of the Muslims, he would accept a compromise for the sake of presenting a united front at the Conference, he replied that the resolution of the Congress had left him no room for accepting any compromise not acceptable to the parties concerned.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{72} Jayakar Papers, File No.356, S.No.27, N.A.I.; Pattabhi Sitaramayya, op.cit., p.481.
\textsuperscript{73} C.W., Vol.XLVII, p.139.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.,p.381.
At Round Table Conference which took place from 7 September to 1 December 1931, Gandhi realised that it was difficult to win over other delegates as most of them were the nominees of the Government that had selected them to keep itself in strong position at the Round Table Conference. But that did not prevent him from making more efforts. In pursuance of this he asked on 1 October 1931, for the adjournment of the proceedings of the Minorities Committee of the Round Table Conference for a week to enable them to arrive at some settlement through informal and unofficial negotiation. The unofficial Minorities Conference began its sitting on 5 October 1931. Gandhi took a stand against communal and separate representation. He made it clear that "The Congress would never agree to communal representation and would be unworthy of its name if it allowed separate representation." However, he did not rule out an agreement if some other scheme not based on separate electorates was found out. He appreciated the efforts of Geoffery Corbett who offered a scheme that aimed at removing obstacles to communal settlement by his proposal of the redistribution of the Punjab. Such schemes, he added, were worth studying, though immediately they were not acceptable to one party or the other.

77. Ibid., p.114.
78. Ibid., p.117.
also referred to the schemes given by the Sikhs and Sir Hubert Carr. Carr's scheme appeared to him as an ingenious and novel proposal which suggested two legislatures for the Punjab, "the lower to satisfy the Muslim claim and the upper nearly satisfying the Sikhs claims". He was drawn towards it in spite of his opposition to bicameral legislature. Finally, he offered the latest Congress Scheme, passed by its Working Committee in July 1931, as a basis for further talks. But he assured the members that it did not prevent him "from endorsing any other reasonable scheme of private arbitration," and that "the problem can be put before a Judicial Tribunal but it should not take precedence over making the Constitution." In addition to it, he even offered a 'blank cheque' to the Muslims regarding their demands, of course, with a proviso that similar assurance would be offered to all other communities including the Sikhs.

Apart from delivering speeches in Minorities Committee he also made efforts to solve this problem through bilateral talks. But, as expected, all these deliberations did not make any progress towards the communal settlement. In the opinion of Gandhi the talks failed because of the fact that the Indian participants

80. Ibid., p.119.
81. Ibid., p.162.
82. Ibid., p.98.
at the Round Table Conference were not the elected members of their communities, parties or groups. They were mostly nominees of the Government. 83

But Gandhi's opponents at the Round Table Conference put the blame on him for the failure of the talks. According to Aga Khan the deliberations at the Round Table Conference did not bear any fruit because of unsympathetic, unrealistic and dogmatic approach of Gandhi. In support of it he referred to his meeting with the latter at Ritz Hotel in his sitting room where he implored him to show "a fatherly attitude to Indian Muslims so that they may respond to him to the utmost of their ability...." 84 To this, it was stated the latter replied that he could not indulge in any form of sentiment but was ready to discuss it if the matter was taken up on grounds of "political necessity." 85

To Aga Khan, this appeared to be a "cold douche at the outset", the chilly effect of which remained the rest of their conversation. 86 and "this unfortunate misunderstanding over words", he added, "had more than a passing effect. For it left the impression, which

85. Ibid.
86. Ibid.
persisted not only that night but throughout the Round Table Conference...."87 Later on so many meetings were held but always the talks failed because of their basic differences with the attitude of the Congress which appeared to Aga Khan and his colleagues as "doctrinaire and unrealistic".88

Giving another instance of Gandhi's unreasonable attitude towards Muslim leaders, he related that "The Mahatma sought to impose a first and fundamental condition that the Muslims should, before they asked for any guarantees for themselves, accept Congress interpretation of "Swaraj-self-government-as their goal".89 This was objected to by Jinnah on the ground that "since the Mahatma was not imposing this condition on the other Hindu members of the various delegations attending the Round Table Conference why should he impose it on the Muslims?"90

However, he admitted that Gandhi fully recognised the importance of having them in his camps and perhaps he might have seen his way to accept their viewpoint but he failed to do so on account of the pressure exerted by Malaviya and Hindu Mahasabha leadership against Aga Khan and his colleagues.91

88. Ibid.
89. Ibid., p. 229.
90. Ibid.,
91. Ibid.
Similar impression is given by the Muslim League leader Khaliquzzaman. According to him, Gandhi was so much under the influence of Hindu communalists such as M.M. Malaviya and Jayakar that he expressed "his inability to go against the expressed desire of the mass of Hindu and Sikh opinion." 92

On the other hand the liberals put the blame on Gandhi on another ground. Thus, Srinivasa Sastri wrote to D.V. Gundappa on 22 September 1931, that according to Birla, Gandhi was there to break the Conference. 93 Similarly he wrote to T.R. Venkatarama Sastri on 2 October 1931, "The omens are black. Gandhi is a harrassed man but also a victim of his own greatness. He can not get away from shibboleths and accept compromises .... Mussalmans have treated him badly. His interviews have been prolonged and deliberate tortures, he says! But his idea is to put the blame of all this on the British and break away. He explained this plan to a few of us who met him at dinner last night at Sapru's rooms." 94

Kanji Dwarkadas is also of the opinion that at Round Table Conference, Gandhi "unnecessarily and unjustifiably insulted and tried to humiliate the Muslim leaders, Dr. Ambedkar and all other Indian delegates including Sapru, Sastri, Setalvad and Jayakar"

94. Ibid. p.219.
by saying that he "alone represented the Muslims and the Depressed Classes and that all the other Indian delegates represented no vital interest in India."95

Undoubtedly Gandhi was confronted with an uphill task at the Second Round Table Conference. Most of the participants were representing their sectional interests and none was ready to yield any ground either for the sake of a compromise or for a greater gain in the future. In this situation, if Gandhi made attempts to offer anything to any section or community, the other side would turn against him and the chances of unity would recede further. In a way he was really a much harrassed man, as Hindus charged him with appeasement of Muslims and the latter suspected him as under the influence of Hindu communalists. Besides, there were many unseen hands, too, that were pulling the wires to foil all attempts at unity.96

Anyhow, Mr. Ramsay Macdonald, the Prime Minister made an announcement in December 1931, unfolding the policy of His Majesty's Government regarding the communal question. The important principles of this policy were:

1. His Majesty's Government intend to decide the communal question if a voluntary agreement is not arrived at by the communities by an early date.

96. Infra. Chapter VII, pp. 219, 221.
2. The Government intend to include in the Indian Constitution the guarantee of natural rights of minorities on an agreed basis.

3. The N.W.F.P. will be immediately converted into a Governor's Province on the basis and within the limits of the present Government of India Act with due regards for special needs of that Province.

4. Sind will be created into a separate province, provided the financial problem can be solved and an attempt will be made to solve that problem.\(^\text{97}\)

The Congress circles were further shocked when the Prime Minister declared in the course of his speech that besides promising an Award on communal representation, His Majesty's Government would also make provision to protect the minorities "from an unrestricted and tyrannical use of the democratic principle expressing itself solely through the majority power."\(^\text{98}\)

Even before the Second Round Table Conference was wound up Congress-Government detente in India had virtually ended and consequently as soon as Gandhi set his foot on Indian soil, Civil Disobedience was resumed and he along with other Congress leaders was arrested on 4 January 1932.

\(^{98}\) Ibid., p.446.
Meanwhile, as the tide of Congress movement started receding, the Prime Minister gave his Communal Award on 17 August 1932 which, while offering satisfactory arrangement from the Muslim point of view, showed lack of consideration to the interest of the Hindus who had been showing greater enthusiasm for the programmes of the Congress. It extended the principle of separate electorates to all minorities and also allotted to every community other than the Hindu, a number of seats far excess of its numerical strength. In Bengal the Hindus were in the minority of 44.8% of the total population. They were given only 80 out of 250 seats, that is 32% of the total. The Mussalmans who were 54.8% of the population were given 119 seats, that is 47.6% of the total. It will thus appear that the Mussalmans who were in a majority were reduced to a minority in the representation and the Hindus who were in a minority were deprived even of their due proportion. What is noteworthy is that although the representation of both Muslims and Hindus was reduced, the cut was greater in the Hindu representation. In the Punjab also Hindus, though in minority and entitled to weightage, were required to give up a portion of their representation in order to give weightage to Sikhs. Having created conditions which made inimical to any communal settlement, the Government promised willingly to accept any alternative settlement which the Communities could reach amongst themselves.
Gandhi on hearing the Award in the prison, reacted sharply to the decision of extending separate electorates to the Depressed Classes. He decided to go on fast unto death commencing from 20 September 1932, if the provision was not replaced till then. For him this did not signify merely inroads on the solidarity of the Hindu community. Rather it was sure to complicate the Hindu-Muslim problem. He once confided in Patel in the Yeravada prison that the grant of separate electorates to the untouchables would result in untouchable hooligans joining hands with the Muslim hooligans to beat the Hindus. Moreover, the whole problem of untouchability in the Hindu society, he observed, could be traced to the fundamental concept of high and low. Once this was banished, he argued, not only untouchability would go, but Hindu-Muslim problem would, too, be solved which also has "its roots in the feeling of high and low."  

Azad initiated a move to bring about an agreement among the three communities to avoid enforcement of the Macdonald Award. Shaukat Ali tried to obtain the release of Gandhi so that he could assist in bringing about the settlement. But the Viceroy not only refused

101.M.R. Jaykar to Natarajan, 10 October 1932, Jayakar Papers, Chronological Correspondence File No.355, No.3.
this request; he even turned down his appeal to see Gandhi in prison.\textsuperscript{102} Anyhow as a result of the efforts of Azad, Malaviya and Shaukat Ali a Unity Conference met at Allahabad from 3 November to 17 November 1932, which was attended by 11 Sikhs, 39 Muslims and 63 Hindus. In this Conference Muslims accepted 32\% representation in the Central Legislature instead of $33\frac{1}{3}$\% which they had been demanding and 51\% of the seats of Muslims to be filled by joint electorates thereby yielding 1\% which they were bound to get through Communal Award. But these efforts were strongly opposed by Iqbal, the president of the All-India Muslim Conference, a party which was recently reconstructed by Fazal-i-Husain and a number of noteworthy Muslims who signed a statement which declared; "We feel that it will be highly inopportune to reopen the question of separate versus joint electorates as we are convinced that our community is not prepared to give up this safeguard at the present juncture."\textsuperscript{103}

It is to be noted that the representation of the British Indian communities in the Central Legislature was deferred by the Government for the time being on the ground that it involved the question of the representation of the Indian states which needed further discussion.


\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., p.284.
But before the agreement arrived at by the Indian leaders could receive any publicity, Sir Samuel Hoare, forestalling it, made an announcement allotting $33\frac{1}{3}$% of British Indian seats in the Central Legislature to the Muslims, and agreeing to constitute Sind into a separate province with an assurance to provide it with adequate finances as subvention from the Central Government, and thereby destroying all the labour of the Unity Conference. All these moves were made to placate the Muslims mostly on the insistence of the Viceroy. Lord Willingdon.104

Most of the Muslim leaders welcomed the Award while the Hindus especially of the Punjab and Bengal resisted it on the ground that it marked a fresh dose of concessions to the Muslims. The Congress leadership was caught on the horns of a dilemma, for if they opposed the Award, they would alienate the Muslims and if they accepted it, they would annoy the Hindus. So they decided

104. In a letter to Hoare, Willingdon wrote on 10 July 1932, "We are dealing with people emotional, suspicious, apprehensive of their future and apt to be hasty in opinion and violent in action. If the Muslims are now carried away into opposition we shall be faced with a situation in the country which almost certainly will demand measures more drastic than we have yet taken we should have the whole forces of the country against us, Hindus and Muslims. The Hindu liberals feel themselves affronted by decision not to continue Round Table Conference. We cannot afford to be wholly without friends. I would, therefore, very earnestly beg you not to reject the proposals which I have made for the Muslims in Bengal or in the Punjab." (Templewood Collection, quoted in Uma Kaura, Muslims and Indian Nationalists (New Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1977), p. 85.)
to remain neutral. Consequently the Congress Working Committee in its meeting at Bombay on 17 and 18 June 1934, resolved that in view of the division of opinion on this issue, the Congress could neither accept nor reject the Communal Award.\textsuperscript{105} At a time when it was preparing for the forthcoming election to Central Assembly, this appeared to the Congress leadership as the only course open to them.

Endorsing the Congress resolution, Gandhi treated this decision "as the wisest."\textsuperscript{106} In reply to a letter to Ghanshyamdas Birla who had asked his opinion about the difficulties created by the Award,\textsuperscript{107} he admitted that the "Award problem is very tough indeed. Something is possible," he added, "if the Mussalmans accept the way I have shown. Even if they do not, the path is quite straight. But I am afraid the Swarajists will not approve of it. I do not find an atmosphere conducive to the achieving of Hindu-Muslim-Sikh unity."\textsuperscript{108}

Whatever reasons may be advanced in justification for the non-committal attitude of the Congress towards the Award, one fact, of course, becomes very clear that, the British Government had an edge over any Indian political

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{105} Pattabhi Sitaramayya, op.cit., p. 575.
\item \textsuperscript{106} C.W., Vol. LVIII, p. 150.
\item \textsuperscript{107} G.D. Birla, \textit{In the Shadow of the Mahatma} (Calcutta: Orient Longmans Ltd., 1953), pp. 136-7.
\item \textsuperscript{108} C.W., Vol. LVII, p. 413.
\end{itemize}
party in the matters relating to constitutional settlement. It has the competence to upset any settlement arrived at through any process of give and take. No party or group could excel the British in offering concessions to any community in the atmosphere of mutual distrust between Hindus and Muslims. Moreover, they alone had the final authority of implementing any voluntary agreement reached by the Indian parties.

In this light it is futile to argue that if the Nehru Committee had not brushed aside Jinnah's demand of one-third representation in the Central Legislature, the agreement between the two communities would have been reached before the end of the year 1928. Nothing prevented the Government from winning over other sections of Muslims by offering greater concessions. It is to avoid this kind of competition with the Government that Gandhi played down the importance of the strength of a community in the legislature. It is in this context his offer of a 'Blank Cheque' to the Muslims at Round Table Conference may be read. But such offers created numerous misgivings especially among Hindu and Sikh leadership in the Punjab that tarnished his image in this province. Few cared to see that this offer was hedged round by several conditions that had to be fulfilled before
it could be accepted. First, the Muslims were required to identify themselves with the Congress goal of Complete Independence. Secondly, the Muslim leadership must come forward with a united demand which it was very difficult to arrive at in the face of contemporary Muslim politics. Thirdly, the demand must not involve any injustice to any other minority in India. Consequently no Muslim leader showed any enthusiasm for this offer.