

UNIONIST PARTY AND PROVINCIAL MUSLIM LEAGUE IN COLONIAL PUNJAB: A STUDY OF COLLABORATION AND CONFRONTATION 1936-1947

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ABSTRACT

The dynamics between the Punjab Muslim League and the Punjab Unionist Party played a pivotal role in shaping the political landscape of colonial Punjab, particularly in the decade before independence. Understanding their collaboration and confrontation is essential to comprehending their power struggles. At the outset, the Unionist Party emerged as a staunch ally of the British, maintaining a significant presence in the Punjab legislature. Jinnah aimed to elevate the Punjab Muslim League's status during the 1937 elections, envisioning a coalition with the Unionists. The Unionists initially rebuffed this proposal. Yet, following their victory in the polls, they were open to allies. This partnership was dissolved by 1944, prompting the Punjab Muslim League to contest independently in the 1945 elections. Their triumph, securing most Muslim seats, marked a swift ascent from obscurity to preeminence in a decade. This article delves into the multifaceted factors that influenced the Unionist Party and the Punjab Muslim League's politics from 1936 to 1947.

Keywords: Colonial Punjab, British Government, Unionist Party, Punjab Muslim League, Collaboration and Confrontation

INTRODUCTION

The Unionist and the Punjab Muslim League (PML) relationship between 1936 and 1947 can be delineated into three distinct stages. Initially, the Unionist Party rebuffed any collaboration with the League, opting instead for confrontation. In the second stage, the Unionist Party accepted collaborating with the League. However, the Punjab Muslim League found itself constrained by the dominance of the Unionist Party, hindering its growth and advancement. The third stage witnessed clashes and confrontations between the

two parties, persisting until independence. Below is a comprehensive elucidation of these stages.

First phase: Unionists Confront League in the Punjab

The All-India Muslim League had become disorganized due to Jinnah's four years of absence from India. The League chapters in the district and lesser constituencies were in ruin.¹ When Muhammad Ali Jinnah eventually left his self-exile in 1935 to re-vitalize the League for the coming elections, the Punjab Muslim League needed immediate attention.

¹ M. Rafique Afzal, *A History of the All-India Muslim League 1906-1947* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 203.

Jinnah wanted the provincial Muslim parties to run on his party's program in the upcoming elections to have a unified Muslim attitude across India.² He reasoned that they would be fully allowed to negotiate with non-Muslim parties after the elections if they became part of the All India Muslim League. The League Council held its meeting on 30 December 1935 and gave Jinnah the go-ahead to choose the Unionist leader, Mian Fazl-i-Husain, to preside over the AIML's annual session in Bombay in April 1936.³ This was intended to negotiate with him for the collaboration. He, however, refused to join the Bombay session.

The Bombay session decided to run in the provincial elections despite having little or no organization at the provincial or district levels. Jinnah was given the authority to establish the electoral boards for the center and the provinces. The Central Board, consisting of 56, was announced on May 21st, 1936.⁴ On June 11, the Central Parliamentary Board released a manifesto in which the party vowed to protect Muslims' fundamental civil liberties.⁵

After an exhausting procedure, the provincial parliamentary boards were set up. To get the provincial leaders to put aside their personal and partisan differences and put the nation first was quite challenging. Jinnah's regular trips to Lahore during 1936 had little impact. He spoke with Fazl-i-Husain and made a formal effort to urge him to run for the elections via the League's all-India platform and establish a coalition with any Sikh or Hindu bloc in the

Punjab assembly following the election. Fazl-i-Husain, however, rejected his suggestion since he had decided to run in the election on the Unionist platform and feared that utilizing the League platform would be pernicious to the goals of the Punjabi Muslims. Fazl-i-Husain's rejection of Jinnah's request can be illustrated.

Various historians have explained his refusal. His son Azim Husain believes that Fazl-i-Husain was content with provincial politics. He did not want an outside party to run in provincial elections because he thought strong provincial parties could best address each province's unique situations and issues.⁶

Imran Ali thinks Fazl-i-Husain followed the British non-communist policy when he refused Jinnah's offer.⁷ He supported the British government's initiative to prevent intercommunal strife in the area. Samina Bashir, Muhammad Iqbal Chawla and Syed Hasan Riaz highlight the Communal Award as a strong reason for his attitude. The implications of the Communal Award 1932 influenced Husain not to back a communal party. The Communal Award did not give Punjabi Muslims a majority in the legislative assembly.⁸ Although they made up 55% of the population, Muslims were not the majority in the Assembly.⁹ A coalition was necessary for this situation, but forming one would be challenging for a communal party. Syed Nur Ahmad believes that Fazl-i-Husain feared political instability in his province if he entered into a joint venture with the AIML. Fazl-i-Husain argued that the resulting political unrest would give the Governor

² Muhammad Khurshid, "Quaid-i-Azam and the Punjab Muslim Leadership A Comparative Study of Quaid-i-Azam M. A. Jinnah and Fazl-i Husain's Political Strategies: (1924-1936)," *Pakistan Journal of History & Culture* XIX, no. 2 (1998): 22.

³ Afzal, *A History of All-India Muslim League*, 203.

⁴ Ibid. 207.

⁵ Ibid. 210.

⁶ Azim Husain, *Fazl-i-Husain A Political Biography* (Bombay: Longmans, 1946), 310.

⁷ Imran Ali, "Relations between the Muslim League and the Panjab National Unionist Party 1935-47," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* Series 1, 6:1 (1976): 56.

⁸ Samina Bashir and Muhammad Iqbal Chawla, "The Communal Award Impact and Implication: Sikh prospective," *Journal of Historical Studies* Vol. VIII, no. I (2022): 247.

⁹ Syed Hasan Riaz, *Pakistan Naguzir Tha* (Karachi: Karachi University, 2010), 178.

unnecessary power to meddle. Additionally, Hindus and Sikhs would use the sectarian issue in their campaigning, which would widen the gap between the three communities.¹⁰

Raghuvendra Tanwar emphasizes the internal conflicts in the Unionist Party regarding Fazl-i-Husain's refusal.¹¹ Azim Husain,¹² Syed Nur Ahmad,¹³ Iftikhar H. Malik¹⁴ and Qalb-i-Abid¹⁵ also mention the inner rivalries among Muslim Unionists. Fazl-i-Husain was not so strong enough to risk bold decisions. There were two powerful Muslim factions, the Daultana and the Noon-Tiwana, in the Punjab Legislative Council.¹⁶ Their feud was over who held ministerial roles. There were ongoing intrigues, and an open clash was constantly on the horizon. Fazl-i-Husain was usually expected to find a middle ground and keep the two groups under his command.¹⁷ Nevertheless, by 1936, Husain's position was under threat from the Daultana faction, who sought to replace him with Sikander Hayat Khan.¹⁸ Sikander had only calmed down after receiving assurance of succession to Unionist command in the event of Husain's death and the expeditious deportation of his rival, Firoz Khan Noon, to England as High Commissioner.¹⁹ Even inside the Unionist Party, a threat of Muslim communalism by Noon and others was present. They were proponents of a wholly Muslim rather than a secular party.²⁰ Allying with the Muslim League meant to add fuel to the fire. It will be seen that in the 1940s Punjab, a split along these

lines effectively dictated the Muslim League's bright prospects.

Following the Unionist Party's refusal, Jinnah looked to other organizations such as the Ahrars and the Ittihad-e-Millat.²¹ They hesitated to join the Provincial Parliamentary Board unless the League stated that total independence was its goal and prohibited Ahmadis from joining the League.²² Both stayed on the board briefly but left when their differences could not be resolved, one in June 1936 and the other in September 1936.²³ The Board then confined itself to the Punjab Muslim League alone. Its membership was primarily confined to the cities to whom Fazl-i-Husain mocked as confused and frail city dwellers.²⁴

Eventually, The Punjab Muslim League started its election campaign single-handedly, without any collaboration with the Unionist Party. The Punjab Muslim League Parliamentary Board was most able to field seven aspirants in the elections due to a lack of organization and workers.²⁵ Elections took place in December 1936 and January 1937.²⁶ In February 1937, the results of the elections were announced.²⁷ As expected, the Unionist Party received a substantial endorsement from Punjab's Muslims.²⁸ The Punjab Muslim League, on the contrary, received only two seats in the Punjab Assembly.²⁹ Raja Ghazanfar Ali Khan, one of the victorious candidates, left the PML immediately after the results were announced to become the

¹⁰ Syed Nur Ahmad, *From Martial Law to Martial Law*, trans. Mahmud Ali (Lahore: Vanguard, 1985), 136.

¹¹ Raghuvendra Tanwar, *Politics of Sharing Power: The Punjab Unionist Party 1923-1947* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 91.

¹² Husain, *Fazl-i-Husain*, 306.

¹³ Ahmad, *From Martial Law*, 51.

¹⁴ Iftikhar H. Malik, "Identity Formation and Muslim Party politics in the Punjab, 1897-1936: A Retrospective Analysis," *Modern Asian Studies* 29, no. 2 (1995): 314.

¹⁵ S. Qalb-i-Abid, *Muslim Politics in the Punjab 1921-47* (Lahore: Vanguard, 1992), 178.

¹⁶ Ahmad, *From Martial Law*, 51.

¹⁷ Malik, "Identity Formation," 314.

¹⁸ Ahmad, *From Martial Law*, 125.

¹⁹ Ibid. 128

²⁰ Husain, *Fazl-i-Husain*, 306.

²¹ Afzal, *A History of the All-India Muslim League*, 211.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid. 212.

²⁶ Kirpal C. Yadav, *Elections in Panjab, 1920-1947* (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1981), 84.

²⁷ Qalb-i-Abid, *Muslim Politics*, 189.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

Parliamentary Secretary of the winning party, leaving only one Muslim Leaguer in the Assembly, Malik Barkat Ali. Sikander Hayat Khan, who had already become the party leader after the demise of Fazl-i-Husain in July 1936, became the first Prime Minister of the Punjab, securing the support of 120 of the 175 Assembly members.³⁰

Second phase: Unionist-League pact and the stalling of the League

Jinnah again revived his efforts to make the new Premier of the Punjab realize the need for a single Muslim stance at the all-India level. Sikander Hayat Khan unexpectedly welcomed Jinnah's invitation in October 1937 and attended the All-India Muslim League's annual session in Lucknow.³¹ He signed a pact with Jinnah to bring his Muslim colleagues under the folds of the Muslim League. Although this pact of Jinnah-Sikander greatly enhanced the prestige and position of Jinnah and his party at the all-India level, at the Punjab level, Sikander was given the sole authority to control the provincial Muslim League. This agreement hurt the growth of the Muslim League at the provincial level.³² Sikander's intentions can be explained.

Qalb-i-Abid believes that Sikander was afraid of the Congress campaign to attract the Muslim masses in the Punjab, and he, therefore, made a pact with Jinnah.³³ He presents instances of Sikander's criticism of the Congress to justify his statement. But Ayesha Jalal assumes that Jinnah was wary of this Congress movement.³⁴ He made a pact with Sikander on compromised

terms to stop the Congress onslaught. On the other hand, the motive behind Sikander's pact was to curtail the communalistic Muslim League, at least in the Punjab, and not due to the consideration or fear of the Congress.³⁵

Ayesha Jalal and Imran Ali both believe that Sikander signed the pact to wipe out the Muslim League from the Punjab.³⁶ Sikander Hayat Khan was a staunch supporter of the British policy of non-communalism. He was very cautious about not relating himself to Muslim nationalism. It was a planned move to target the communalistic and nationalistic policy of the Muslim League. He planned to immobilize it in his province. He intended to keep the provincial League in his own hands. He was confident that the British administration would deal with Jinnah at the all-India level, and in the Punjab, he would do a good job serving his colonial masters. He was following the policy of collaboration with the British government. In return, the expectation was proper patronage from British rule.

Congress and Akali Dal Sikhs were the main opposition parties.³⁷ They termed the agreement as a pure communalistic pact and tried to make the non-Muslim allies and Unionist Party's members uneasy.³⁸ On the other hand, Sikander had already taken his non-Muslim colleagues and the British Governor in confidence. His statements are on record, and he dispelled any notion of surrendering to the League in Punjab.³⁹ He termed the pact as the victory of the Unionist Party's policy of secularism. He was hopeful that in the next election, there would be no League

³⁰ Ian Talbot, *Khizr Twana, The Punjab Unionist Party and the Partition of India*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 69.

³¹ Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman. Jinnah, the Muslim League and the demand for Pakistan*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 39.

³² Ibid.

³³ Qalb-i-Abid, *Muslim Politics*, 192.

³⁴ Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, 38.

³⁵ Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, 39.

³⁶ Ibid; Also see Ali, "Relations between the Muslim League," 56.

³⁷ Maqbool Ahmad Awan, "Comparative Study of the Party Politics in the British Punjab: A Discourse of the Major Political Parties (1885-1937)," *Pakistan Vision* Vol. 19, no. 2 (2018): 48.

³⁸ Ali, "Relations between the Muslim League," 56.

³⁹ Civil and Military Gazette, Lahore, 17 October 1937.

member in the legislature, although it contrasted with the wording of the Pact made with Jinnah.⁴⁰

However, the most substantial criticism came from the Punjab Muslim League. The provincial League leaders were agitated when they discovered Sikander's real motives. They constantly lambasted the Punjab Ministry over the Punjab Muslim League's humiliation.⁴¹ Allama Iqbal, the Punjab Muslim League's President, was highly critical of Sikander and asked Jinnah to take action against his anti-League stances, which Jinnah declined. Iqbal recognized Sikander's intention to marginalize the PML leadership and reduce the League's power in Punjab. According to Ayesha Jalal, Jinnah knew that to obtain Unionist support at the all-India level, he must sacrifice the PML structure in Punjab. Therefore, he displayed cold indifference toward the PML leadership's requests for help.⁴²

In March 1938, Jinnah replaced Iqbal due to his health issues with a staunch Unionist leader, Nawab Sir Shah Nawaz Khan Mamdot. He succeeded with Sikander's tacit approval.⁴³ The new PML president was a close associate of Sikander. Furthermore, after taking control of the PML from the top, Sikander moved further and pressured Jinnah to cancel the AIML session venue in Lahore in 1938.⁴⁴ Due to his insistence, it was shifted to Calcutta. He was also successful in changing the AIML policy towards the Shahidganj issue. The Muslim League was vocal about Muslim rights in that issue and criticized the British policy of favouring the Sikhs. But AIML reversed its policy and voted against the

non-cooperation movement launched by the Muslims in the Punjab. It expressed confidence in Sikander's policy of communal settlement at the April 1938 Calcutta meeting.⁴⁵

Raghuvendra Tanwar explains the highhanded acts of Sikander to tie up the PML.⁴⁶ Sikander targeted the lower strata of the PML to weaken the base of the PML. He received approval from the AIML Central Council to restructure the PML's branches. He installed his confidant colleagues in the district and lower branches, replacing the bourgeois with the landed figures. He threatened the AIML leadership not to interfere in provincial matters; otherwise, he would sever ties with the AIML. He refused to allow the previous PML leadership to create additional branches in the province. He even called them traitors if they didn't oblige to his orders. He used blackmail techniques to make his agenda straight.

Old stalwarts of PML, like Malik Barkat Ali, were helpless to use the provincial body of the Muslim League in these circumstances. They had to utilize other platforms like the Muslim Students Federation (MSF) and Pakistan Conferences to propagate the idea of Pakistan. Sikander did not favour the Pakistan scheme,⁴⁷ and he had already presented his scheme of autonomous Punjab on a non-communal basis in 1939, which was essentially anti-Pakistan.⁴⁸ If Sikander had still submitted it to Jinnah, it would have been done under the guise of keeping control of the provincial Muslim League, claims Ayesha

⁴⁰ Ali, "Relations between the Muslim League," 56.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, 39.

⁴³ Q. Abid and M. Abid, "Unionist-Muslim League Relations and the Punjab Administration," *J.R.S.P.* 45, no. 2 (2008): 92.

⁴⁴ Ashiq Hussain Batalvi, *Iqbal ke Akhiri Do Sal* (Karachi: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1969), 634-641.

⁴⁵ Ali, "Relations between the Muslim League," 58.

⁴⁶ Tanwar, *Politics of Sharing Power*, 141.

⁴⁷ Penderel Moon, *Divide and Quit* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), 29. Also see Maqbool Ahmad Awan, "The Sikh Community in the 'United Punjab': Sikandar's Premiership and his Reconciliatory Policy," *Pakistan Vision* Vol. 18, no. 1 (June 2017): 106.

⁴⁸ Jeanne M. Sheehan, "Pakistan's Forgotten Fathers: A Case Study of Sikander Hyat-Khan," *South Asia Research* Vol. 39, no.1 (2019): 101.

Jalal.⁴⁹ Sikander obeyed Jinnah's commands only to solidify his position in the Punjab and avoid an open confrontation on issues like National Defence Council membership.⁵⁰

Third phase: Open Confrontation between League and the Unionists 1944-47

With the declaration of the Pakistan resolution, the political balance was tipped in favour of the Punjab Muslim League. Historians have explored the reasons for this political change. Hamza Alavi emphasizes social factors rather than Pakistan, favoring the Punjab Muslim League.⁵¹ Nonetheless, most historians underscore the importance of the Pakistani idea as a practical ideology. Mohammad Abdus Sattar Kheiri,⁵² Chaudhri Muhammad Ali,⁵³ Sharif al Mujahid⁵⁴ and K.K. Aziz⁵⁵ believe that the provinces with a Muslim majority imagined Pakistan as a country without Hindu control and interference.

Meanwhile, Britain also signalled a relinquishment of its authority in India. According to Ayesha Jalal⁵⁶ and David Gilmartin⁵⁷ the indigenous governing elite in the Punjab was not oblivious to the signs of shifting power at the central level. The Muslim Unionist's landed elite was wise enough to understand the public sentiments and was minutely assessing the political situation in India.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 68, 83.

⁵⁰ Sir Sikander Hayat Khan had to resign in August 1942 on the orders of the All-India Muslim League's President from the National Defence Council membership.

⁵¹ Hamza Alavi, "Social Forces and Ideology in the Making of Pakistan," *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 37, no. 51 (Dec. 21-27, 2002): 5123.

⁵² Mohammad Abdus Sattar Kheiri, "National states and national minorities," in *The Case for Pakistan*, ed. M. Rafique Afzal (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1988), 16.

⁵³ Chaudhri Muhammad Ali, *Emergence of Pakistan*, (Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, 1973), 33.

⁵⁴ Sharif al Mujahid, *Qaid-i-Azam Hayat o Khidmaat*, trans. Khwaja Razi Haider (Karachi: Qaid-i-Azam Academy, 1986), 97.

Several developments at the national level alerted them about future political scenarios. The winning of the pro-home rule Labour Party in the UK in 1940, the Cripps Mission's promise of full self-government to India in 1942, and its offer to Jinnah the right to pull out of the future Indian Federation were ample reasons to believe that the colonial Raj had decided to leave India and to place it in the hands of the Indians.

In 1943 and 1944, the Muslim League formed ministries in Sindh, Bengal, and NWFP.⁵⁸ That was a substantial morale-boosting external factor that enhanced the prestige and position of the AIML. It became the sole representative of the Muslims of India, and it would be the successor of the British Raj along with the Indian National Congress. According to Ian Talbot, "After the Simla Conference of June 1945, it was clear that the Muslim League, rather than the Unionist Party, offered the Punjabi landowners the most reliable access to patronage and power."⁵⁹ They have assessed that the idea of Pakistan has the potential to become a reality.

According to Ayesha Jalal⁶⁰ and Hamza Alavi,⁶¹ economic concerns were the main factors behind the All-India Muslim League's popularity. World War II had a significant impact on the economy of Punjab. During the war, the British government requisitioned ample food supplies from the sub-continent to feed its soldiers and

⁵⁵ K.K. Aziz, *The Making of Pakistan A Study in Nationalism*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1967), 164.

⁵⁶ Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, 143.

⁵⁷ David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1988), 180.

⁵⁸ Ali, "Relations between the Muslim League," 60.

⁵⁹ Ian Talbot, "The Unionist Party and Punjabi Politics, 1937-1947," in *The Political Inheritance of Pakistan*, ed. D.A. Low (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 97.

⁶⁰ Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, 87.

⁶¹ Hamza Alavi, "Pakistan and Islam: Ethnicity and Ideology," in *State and Ideology in the Middle East and Pakistan*, eds. Fred Halliday and Hamza Alavi (London: Macmillan Education, 1988), 67.

civilians. This led to widespread food shortages and inflation. Punjab, which has a reputation for being the breadbasket of India, was severely affected by this order. The shortage of food and rising prices impacted the local population's purchasing power, resulting in a declining standard of living. This situation went against the reputation of the Unionist government. Although the war boosted Punjab's war-related industrial sector, the trickle-down effect didn't happen. The marginalized people left their homes to join the British Indian Army or to work in other provinces of India or abroad. This migration significantly impacted the social and economic fabric of Punjab, raising the unpopularity of the Unionist ministry.

After the death of Prime Minister Sikander Hayat Khan in December 1942, the political scenario drastically changed in the Punjab. The new premier, Khizr, was not of the same calibre to resist the popularity of the Muslim League or to subside the internal strife within the party. Craig Baxter⁶² and Ayesha Jalal⁶³ hold the view that his weak personality gave Jinnah the strength to intervene in the Punjab affairs. However, Ian Talbot maintains that Jinnah viewed the Punjab Muslim League as having gained enough popularity to come to the front.⁶⁴

In early 1943, there heralded an intense tussle between the two parties. Khizr was admonished at the All-India Muslim League Council meeting in Delhi in March 1943 for not making a serious effort to bring the provincial Muslim League on a solid footing. The Unionists and the Punjab League established a schism in the same month over the issue of strengthening the Jat association, expressing aggressive and

opposing viewpoints.⁶⁵ Jinnah was on the side of the new leadership of the Punjab League. Jinnah snubbed it when the Lahore Muslim League attempted to form a parallel Punjab Muslim League. He relied more on Nawab Iftikhar Husain Khan Mamdot's leadership than the urbanites.⁶⁶

The new leadership of the Punjab Muslim League, namely Nawab Iftikhar Husain Khan Mamdot, Mian Mumtaz Daultana, and Shaukat Hayat Khan, were the ex-Unionist leaders until recently and had a political grudge against Khizr. Elite Muslim Unionists began to distance themselves from the Unionist Party and turn towards the PML. The anti-Khizr faction of the Unionist Party consolidated its positions within the Punjab Muslim League. Jinnah and the PML decided to start an open war for the office of the Punjab government.

Jinnah visited Lahore in 1943 and early 1944 and negotiated with Khizr to subdue the Unionists. Khizr was ready to surrender if the ministry remained the Unionist Coalition.⁶⁷ But Jinnah realized that Khizer still did not accept the communalistic stance of the League, and secondly, he was pro-United India. The Punjab Muslim League leadership was also adamant not to have any ties with the Unionists. They advised Jinnah that even if they could not get to the treasury benches, it was better to propagate Pakistan from the opposition benches than to remain allied with the anti-Pakistan ministry.⁶⁸ Resultantly, a complete breakdown occurred between the two parties. Jinnah reacted by denouncing the Jinnah-Sikander Pact in May 1944. Khizer was expelled from the AIML on 27 May 1944.⁶⁹ The PML, with its 20 members, went

⁶² Craig Baxter, "Union or Partition: Some Aspects of Politics in the Punjab, 1936-45," in *Pakistan: The Long View*, eds. Lawrence Ziring, Ralph Braibanti, and W. Howard Wriggins (Durham: Duke University Press, 1977), 55.

⁶³ Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, 84.

⁶⁴ Talbot, *Khizr Tiwana*, 87.

⁶⁵ Talbot, *Khizr Tiwana*, 94.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 91.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 118.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 119.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 122.

to the opposition benches.⁷⁰ Ayesha Jalal, however, believes that Nawab Iftikhar Husain Khan Mamdot instigated Jinnah to take action against Khizr. He miscalculated his strength in the Legislative Assembly and resultantly misguided Jinnah. Ayesha Jalal calls Nawab Iftikhar Husain Khan Mamdot a loser, "The factional struggles of the Punjab had forced a reluctant Jinnah to back a loser."⁷¹

After his expulsion from the League, Khizr started a grassroots campaign for a secular Zamindara League at the Punjab level. He countered the All-India Muslim League at the national level by demanding that the Viceroy's Executive Council include one non-League Punjabi member.⁷² Nonetheless, the Muslim League's rising popularity among the general public was making headways. The success of the All-India Muslim League's stance in the Simla Conference in 1945 greatly affected the political scenario in favour of the Punjab Muslim League. The League was accepted as a significant Muslim stakeholder. Ian Talbot observes the Unionist Party's quick fall during 1945.⁷³ The Punjab Muslim League managed the backing of a third of the Unionist Party's legislative representatives by the end of 1945. The majority of wealthy landowners and pirs,⁷⁴ who had previously supported the Unionist Party had now joined the Punjab League. The PML had become a strong contender for the provincial government. Governor General Wavell announced the 1945-46 elections, giving the PML the opportunity to form a government.

⁷⁰ Ahmad, *From Martial Law*, 169.

⁷¹ Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, 94.

⁷² Muhammad Iqbal Chawla, "Punjab Politics and the Wavell Plan: A Note of Critical Reappraisal," *Journal of Punjab Studies* Vol. 14, no. 1 (2007): 78.

⁷³ Talbot, "The Unionist Party and Punjabi Politics," 98.

⁷⁴ A Muslim saint or holy man who has a large following.

⁷⁵ Zahid Chaudhry, *Muslim Punjab Ka Siyasi Irtiqa* (Lahore: Idara Mutalia Tareekh, 2013), 391.

⁷⁶ Muslim Students Federation created by the Muslim League.

After the Unionist Party and the Muslim League separated, the PML prioritized rehabilitating and reorganizing its organizational structure in the Punjab.⁷⁵ The League also employed the MSF,⁷⁶ the Muslim League National Guards,⁷⁷ and the Jamiat-u-Ulema-i-Islam⁷⁸ for its agenda propagation. The negotiations for the alliances between the various parties were almost finalized when the dates of the next elections were announced in September 1945. The threat of success of the Punjab Muslim League had pushed the Akali Sikhs and the Congress to gather around the Unionist Party.⁷⁹ PML's idea of Pakistan was unacceptable to all of them.⁸⁰ The League and the Unionists fought for all the constituencies. The League won 73 Muslim seats, while the Unionist Party received just 13.⁸¹

David Gilmartin and Imran Ali believe that the hegemony of the landed elite was not broken. The old class structure remained evident in the new assembly. Though PML was the winner this time, the winning seats again belonged to the landed class.⁸²

After the declaration of the results of the provincial elections, there were hectic activities to form the government by the parties. Congress and the Akalis were ready to compromise and cooperate with the Unionists but allergic to becoming the League's allies.⁸³ They knew they had to become a subordinate party if they joined the biggest party in the Assembly but had a strong presence if they accepted Khizr as their premier. Therefore, on 7th March 1946, a Congress-

⁷⁷ A quasi-military organization created by the Muslim League.

⁷⁸ A religious political party established in 1945, was in favour of Pakistan.

⁷⁹ Ali, "Relations between the Muslim League," 63.

⁸⁰ Ishtiaq Hussain Qureshi, *The Struggle for Pakistan* (Karachi: University of Karachi, 2017), 185.

⁸¹ Riaz, *Pakistan Naguzir Tha*, 382.

⁸² Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*, 226. Also see Ali, "Relations between the Muslim League," 63.

⁸³ Qureshi, *The Struggle for Pakistan*, 204.

Unionist-Akali coalition government was formed in the Punjab.⁸⁴ The PML initially decided to use the legislative assembly for agitation. It didn't initiate a solid political agitation on the streets. Conversely, the government did not allow the PML to register their protests in the assembly. Resultantly, the agitation spilled over to the streets.⁸⁵

The coalition government, anticipating the protest, was preparing to take a challenging posture toward the opposition. It enacted special orders to stop the PML from holding demonstrations and public meetings. In early 1947, the government decreed the Muslim League National Guards illegal and arrested some of the League leaders in Lahore. The PML started its protest on the road on 24 January 1947, which lasted one month.⁸⁶ It was so intense and sporadic that it quickly spread to the entire province.⁸⁷ Khizr could not handle the political unrest and the stress of the agitation, so he resigned from the premiership.⁸⁸ Congress and the Akalis were determined not to help the PML in any way. Therefore, they didn't try to join the PML to form a ministry in the Punjab.⁸⁹ Governor Evan Jenkins was also not in favour of installing the government of the Muslim League.⁹⁰ He didn't try to mediate a compromise between Congress and the Muslim League. Traditionally, governors had a significant impact on mending rifts between rival adversaries. Instead of establishing a representative government, he decided to install Governor Raj.

Conclusion

The Muslim League and the Unionist Party were holding differing ideologies. The League advocated for religion as the primary

political identity of the Muslims, whereas the Unionist Party prioritized inter-communal harmony. These conflicting perspectives led to a stalemate, with neither party willing to compromise. Once the Unionist Party consolidated its power in Punjab in 1937, it sought to contain the influence of the Muslim League in the name of a deal. The Unionist Party, through this pact, accepted the League's authority at the central level but took sole control of the provincial League. That collaboration suited Jinnah's ambitions to gain strength, at least at the national level. Jinnah successfully managed the pact to his advantage, although initially, he was criticized a lot by the 'old guards.' Through the Pakistan demand, the League made inroads in the Punjab. A new state for Muslims was also suited to the Muslim elites, as they could establish their hold more rigorously in the region. While Khizr failed to recognize Britain's inclination towards granting the All-India Muslim League its due share in India, most of his colleagues acknowledged the changing political landscape. The economic crunch due to the Second World War greatly impacted the masses. The general public was not happy with the Khizr's financial policies. For these reasons, the Unionists jumped on the bandwagon of the Punjab Muslim League. Jinnah eagerly embraced these new entrants into the provincial league. In the internal rifts within the Punjab Muslim League, Jinnah aligned with the landed elite, recognizing their electoral viability over the old urban leadership who lacked rural connections. The social fabric of Punjab necessitated politicians capable of securing the trust of rural voters to win elections. After the 1945-46 elections, non-Muslim parties refused to acknowledge the Muslim League's majority status, primarily due to its Muslim identity. This reluctance and hate resulted in the formation of the Unionist-Congress-Akali coalition government, followed by the Governor Rule, which prevented the Muslim League from gaining power in the undivided Punjab.

⁸⁴ Abid and Abid, "Unionist-Muslim League Relations," 107.

⁸⁵ Ali, "Relations between the Muslim League," 64.

⁸⁶ Ahmad, *From Martial Law*, 224.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 225.

⁸⁸ Resigned on 2 March 1947; Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, 238.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Qalb-i-Abid, *Muslim Politics*, 322.